Planning for our convention and future

By James Spinoso
ILWU International President

The ILWU will hold its 32nd International Convention this year in San Francisco from April 28-May 2. The delegates you have elected from your locals will be entrusted with setting the direction our union will take in the next three years. This is an awesome responsibility. The lives of all ILWU members will be affected by the decisions we will make about how to defend our gains and extend our influence and decisions about how we will use those responsibilities and finance those programs we decide on.

This is a daunting task, especially because we have just one short week of meetings to complete it. Given the challenges we have been facing recently from our employers and the government and the challenges we can already see ahead of us and the rest of the labor movement, the International officers will be bringing some proposals to the Convention. Among these will be proposals to increase the ILWU’s political and legislative activities.

When the Longshore Division was under attack last year by the combined forces of the employers and the Bush administration, workers and our friends in Congress, our Washington D.C. office and our rank-and-file Legislative Action Committee moved quickly to rally our friends in Congress and in state governments to come to our defense. Those timely actions helped blunt the most extreme moves against us.

The Bush administration was forced to drop its plans to send the military to seize West Coast docks and to publicly deny it even threatened or planned to do so. The legislation to take away the ILWU’s rights to collective bargaining and to strike or to break up our coastwise contract never made it to the floor.

The only weapon Bush had left to use against us was the Taft-Hartley injunction. But when the employers tried to use the injunction’s prohibition against slowdowns to break the union, our friends in state and local governments raised and legitimized our realistic safety concerns, helping us dodge that bullet.

While we emerged from this struggle intact and with a good contract, our enemies are not done with us. They still see us—rightfully—as the most democratic, progressive and militant unions in the country.

We need to be the victims of political power. Unions can have influence far beyond our numbers if we stay active.

That’s because the employers’ creativity—and wealth—has no end. As Bush amasses his forces to separate Saddam from his oil, the bombs are already dropping all around us. To satisfy the needs of a country at war—albeit half of all Americans and most of the rest of the world are not covered by war and necessary or appropriate—many of the freedoms we are supposedly protecting are becoming casualties of Homeland Security. All kinds of civil liberties and workers’ rights were sacrificed at the ballot box or by stealth. Such actions are becoming casualties and un-American. After Sept. 11 everything’s changed, no? So stop whining about your precious rights.

At least that seems to be the mood in Washington, D.C. these days. With Republicans running the White House, running Congress, and the Supreme Court, workers and their unions appear to be vying with Saddam for the top spot on the most wanted (dead or alive) list. Last year’s attack on the ILWU was highly visible, but other landmines House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-TX) recently sent out a fundraising letter for the Right To Work Foundation, a rabidly right-wing anti-union organization, declaring, “Union bosses’ selfish drive to use the national emergencies we face today to grab more power presents a clear-and-present danger to the security of the United States at home and the safety of our Armed Forces overseas.” As ILWU Legislative Director Lindsay McLaughlin points out in this magazine’s Washington Report, DeLay singles out the firefighters, the machinists and the ILWU.

Workers are getting whacked in the pocket as well, with employers using bankruptcy to get off the hook for pensions and retiree health benefits bargained in union contracts. As Dispatch Assistant Editor Tom Price reports on page 10, steel companies are leading the way in this tactic, with the airline companies not far behind. Hundreds of thousands of workers who toiled their whole lives with promises of secure retirement are being abandoned and the costs shifted to the federal government—that is, taxpayers. Under Bush, that’s other workers.

Seafarers could soon become the newest victims of the venom that’s been spewing at immigrants since 9-11. Proposed changes in State Dept. regulations could keep them chained to their ships, unable to come ashore for so much as a phone call, as Price reports on page 13.

And in an interesting free market twist on the old “think globally, act locally” slogan, a European water company wants to buy and privatize Stockton, Calif.’s municipal water district. As Price reports on page 9, as part of the WTO free trade arrangements, European companies have been challenged to reduce their farm tariffs to benefit American agriculture, but if the U.S. will let their companies buy public utilities and privatize people’s most basic needs. Free trade can get pretty expensive.

There’s seems to be no end to the employers’ creativity—and wealth—has no end. Read ‘em and don’t weep—organize!

Steve Stalonne
Editor

ILWU Titled Officers
JAMES SPINOSA
President

BOB MCELLRATH
Vice President

WESLEY FURTADO
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Secretary-Treasurer

www.ilwu.org

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Inside Line

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Federation opposes ‘unilateral action’ vs. Iraq

By Mark Gruenberg

HOLLYWOOD, FL (PAD)—In an unprecedented first the AFL-CIO has taken a position against a U.S. president's call to war. A resolution passed unanimously Feb. 27, the last day of the federation's Executive Council meeting in Hollywood, Fla., didn’t totally oppose a war to disarm Iraq of its chemical, biological and nuclear weapons. Instead, it said any campaign—by war or other means—should not be taken unilaterally, but must be done with “a broad international coalition of allies and with the sanction of the United Nations.” But given the unlikely chance that the U.S. Senate’s Executive Council will endorse a U.S. invasion, the statement puts the American union movement on record in opposition to war.

President George W. Bush has threatened to open a war on Iraq with or without U.N. sanction, and with or without allies. Bush has already sent approximately 200,000 members of the armed forces—including many unionists—who are reservists—to the Persian Gulf region in preparation for military action.

His major ally, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, sent 42,000 troops so far. Further action may come in March, after another U.N. Security Council session on the results of arms inspections in Iraq.

“Ameri can workers’ families and their unions fully support the U.S. decision to disarm Saddam Hussein. This is best achieved in concert with a broad international coalition of allies and with the sanction of the United Nations,” the federation’s resolution read. “We believe there may be times when we must stand alone and act unilaterally in defense of our national security. But, in the context of the global war on terrorism, the threat posed by Saddam Hussein deserves multilateral resolve, not unilateral action.”

The union leaders reminded Bush that “those who fight for the United States are, as they always have been, the men and women of America’s working families,” and said it is proud to represent them and to support them. But “the process by which we, as members of the family of nations, decide how to deal with such international threats is critical to our future,” the federation warned.

“The threat of terrorism with a global reach is real. We have experienced the terrible destruction it can wreak,” it added, referring to the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks that destroyed the World Trade Center, damaged the Pentagon and killed 3,000 people, including 635 unionists. “To respond to that threat, America will need the support of our friends and allies to defend the major nations of the world. Our country and our families will be more secure if America is the respected leader of a broad coalition against terrorism, rather than isolated as a lone enforcer.”

The resolution also sharply criticizes Bush for his go-it-alone policy that “squandered much of that goodwill” that came to the U.S. after the attack. Bush also “managed to insult many of our strong allies and divided the world at a time when it should speak as one,” the resolution said. The president has not fulfilled his responsibility to make a compelling and coherent explanation to the American people and the world about the need for necessary action against Iraq at this time. America has never been a peace-loving nation, slow to take up arms and resolve in pursuit of diplomatic resolution to crises. This administration’s actions are sadly eroding the reputation and the respect it accords us,” the resolution said. When asked to call upon the administration to pursue a broad global consensus to apply the maximum pressure on Iraq, ensuring that war, if it comes, will truly be a last resort,” the leaders concluded.

National and International unions, locals after the attack, councils representing nearly five million workers across the country have already taken union actions, including ILWU Locals 5, 6, 8, 10, 23, 63 and the IBU Puget Sound Region.

Secretary of Labor Chao angers union leaders

By Mark Gruenberg

HOLLYWOOD, FL—Labor Secretary Elaine Chao thought she had an open and honest session with the White House, she said. Her spokeswoman, Kathleen Harrington, followed her turn to the press conference podium and called the session “an open and honest exchange.”

That was one of Sweeney’s milder comments. And he wasn’t alone.

Even Teamsters President James P. Hoffa was critical, though he has been wooed by Chao’s boss, President Bush, even being invited into the first lady’s box during a State of the Union address.

“We’re disappointed frankly that Secretary Chao came to the White House,” he said. “There are a lot of issues that impact union leaders and labor people, like Mike Mathis, the Teamsters political director told The New York Times. “The way the secretary presented herself today was great,” he said. “But it’s think it’s important that the labor movement strengthen its resolve as we go into 2004 to elect a president who understands working people.”

“Chao was a Secretary of Labor who sounded like a Secretary of Commerce,” Sweeney said. “What we saw from her was a secretary who was contentuous...angry and insulting at points.”

“In all my years in the labor movement, I have never seen a Secretary of Labor who was so anti-labor,” he told reporters.

Chao’s attitudes and her manner reflect Bush’s anti-union stands, he said. “Union leaders came away more committed than ever to change in the White House,” he said.

Chao, of course, saw it differently. “I want to work with organized labor,” she said. Her spokeswoman, Kathleen Harrington, followed her boss to the podium and called Chao’s session with the council “an open and honest exchange.”

That’s diplomatic Washington speak for sharp disagreement.

Chao came to the meeting advocating a new Bush administration proposal to force more than 5,000 local unions, plus all national unions, to spend millions of dollars and thousands of hours each year filling out forms disclosing every bit of spending—for at least $2,000 or $5,000—on everything from pencils on up. Chao claimed such disclosure would give more “transparency.”

Corporations do not have to file such detailed disclosures, AFL-CIO associate general counsel Damon Silvers noted.

When Machinists President Thomas Buffenbarger challenged Chao on the contrasting disclosure requirements, she flourish ed a list that she claimed had the names of seven local IAM officials indicted, convicted or served prison time for financially hurting their members. Chao had similar lists for each union. That got everyone mad.

Buffenbarger was particularly furious because in all seven cases Chao cited the union had uncovered the misuse of funds and cleaned its own house, investigating the officers involved, barring them permanently from represent ing any IAM member again and then turning the matter over to the Dept. of Labor.

Chao also advanced other positions that organized labor did not like including:

• Forgoing an immediate hike in the federal minimum wage law, which would set off yet another eco nomic race to the bottom.

• Advocating Bush’s economic plan, including his proposed 8674 bil lion 10-year tax cut for the rich, by claiming it’s paid for in part by a recession that started in mid-2000 under Democratic President Bill Clinton.

• The National Commission on Security Research, a non-partisan group that measures recessions, said it started in March 2001. The AFL-CIO says it’s still rising.

At a time when unions are facing enormous problems with rising health care costs, layoffs and people losing retirement benefits, the fact that Chao came into their house obviously prepared with documents to denounce the labor movement angered everyone.

“Secretary Chao’s appearance before us this week was the view that I—and numerous other members of the Council—have previ ously expressed: the administration is the most anti-union admin istration we have ever experienced,” Sweeney said.
Right to work for less—coming to a state near you

By Lindsey McLaughlin
ILWU Legislative Director

When I volunteered to work with ILWU members to help get the union vote for a pro-labor Senate candidate in Colorado, we found the Colorado labor community was just as hard to elect pro-labor state senate candidates. The National Right to Work Committee was working overtime to convince members of their state legislature to pass so-called "right-to-work" legislation. Colorado was about two votes away from becoming another victim of the national right-to-work movement. Last year, the voters of Oklahoma passed a referendum making Oklahoma a right-to-work state. This year, the National Right to Work Committee is pushing the lawmakers in the state of New Hampshire to pass right-to-work legislation. The New Hampshire legislature is overwhelmingly Republican and the state has a Republican governor who has promised to sign the anti-worker legislation. The labor community in New Hampshire is furiously lobbying, calling and writing their legislators to try to keep union protections in that state. As soon as the political winds shift their way, the National Right to Work Committee will attack the states on the West Coast, trying to take away your union security lowering standards for workers in your state.

States gained the power to enact right-to-work laws as part of the Taft Hartley Act Congress passed in 1947 to roll back the rights American workers and their unions had during the 1930s. Right-to-work laws prohibit unions and employers from negotiating a "union security" clause into their contracts. Union security requires all workers who receive the benefits of a collective bargaining agreement to share the costs of union representation, contract administration and other services provided by the union. Without such a clause, workers in facilities with a union contract can get all the economic benefits and services of union membership but do not have to pay any dues for them. Right-to-work laws encourage workers to be "free riders" and burdens pro-union workers with all the costs of the union. Over time, many unions are unable to protect their members in right-to-work states, because so many workers decide to become free riders and financially cripple the union. This law is designed to undermine worker solidarity.

Since 1947, 22 states have adopted right-to-work laws. Between 1997 and 2002, those states with union security provisions had 60% higher union density than free bargaining states. Union density in right-to-work states is currently 72% compared to 87% in other states.

Unions have a 17 percent higher poverty rate than those in free bargaining states. States with right-to-work laws spend $1,669 less per pupil on education. Unemployed workers in right-to-work states receive average unemployment benefits of $171 per week compared with $200 per week in free bargaining states. Injured workers in right-to-work states earn on average 20 percent less in maximum weekly benefits for temporary disability than injured workers in free bargaining states and the rate of workplace death is 51 percent higher. Right-to-work states have a 17 percent higher poverty rate than free bargaining states.

A weak and small labor movement that union leaders were "shamelessly attempting to expand their power at the expense of homeland security and troops overseas." DeLay adds, "Bosoms of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union exploited America's urgent economic and national security needs to increase their power last fall by forcing a crippling shutdown of ALL West Coast shipping ports." In the same letter, the majority leader declared the nation's firefighters, policemen, paramedics, government workers and machinists. DeLay's ridiculous letter did not go unanswered by the ILWU. International President Spinosa wrote a strongly worded letter denouncing his vilification of union members. In particular, and demanding an apology. To date, DeLay has not had the courtesy to respond. Ironically, two weeks after the ILWU sent DeLay a letter, low-level staffers for DeLay, trying to raise money for the National Republican Congressional Campaign Committee, attempted to give ILWU President Spinosa a national award, provided the ILWU fork over some real money to help elect anti-labor Republicans in Congress.

DeLay has a long anti-union and anti-worker record in Congress. He has aggressively pushed legislation that attacks laws that govern the 40-hour work week and overtime. He has sought to force unions to spend huge resources on new paperwork and red tape regulations and has fought for a national "paycheck deception" law to make it difficult for unions to raise money for political activities, thereby shutting working people and their unions out of the political debate.

DeLay vigorously supported legislation to gut OSHA and other workplace safety standards and lessened the charge for the Bush administration's tax cuts for big corporations and the wealthy.

With their win in Oklahoma and their massive attack against the workers of New Hampshire, they are stepping up their efforts to destroy the labor movement in America. The West Coast must stand as a bulwark against this massive anti-labor agenda. The ILWU should not stand alone in this battle in favor of right-to-work laws. It doesn't matter what an individual member of Congress claims he has done for working people; a supporter of right-to-work-for-less states and build their political base to push such sweeping national legislation.

Oregon Republicans to Congress.

In 1947 then-President Harry Truman vetoed the Taft-Hartley legislation, but the overwhelmingly anti-labor Congress overrode the veto. At the time Truman said, "You will find some people saying that they are for the Taft-Hartley bill, but they also believe in unions. This is absurd—"it's like saying you are for motherhood but against children." Truman went on to invoke the Taft-Hartley bill as a "right-too-work" bill rather than any president since, including against the ILWU in its 1948 strike. The Taft-Hartley bill was designed to simply asking politicians to oppose right-to-work. We must get our elected representatives to stand up and build a movement to repeal it, including the 40-hour work-for-less provision. The ILWU has seen firsthand the powerful Taft-Hartley bill used in California to undermine the IAM from the power of this union. It's time for this law to go.
"Medicine not to forget"

Black History and Labor program dazzles, inspires

Story and photos by Steve Stallone

February 2003

"We had centuries of peace and brotherhood, and then the white men came," Crumlin quipped.

He also addressed the impending war on Iraq and told the audience that just the week before he had marched along with 350,000 Australians in Sydney to stop it.

"There is no third choice," he said, adding that Bush is "a harbinger of American fascism with a not-so-friendly face."

Robeson noted that 94 percent of African Americans did not vote for Bush, and urged the audience to work to vote Bush out of office in 2004.

"This will bring about a desperately needed regime change much closer to home," he said.

Yolanda King started her talk saying, "I am a card-carrying, dyed-in-the-wool believer in The Dream, capital T, capital D. I am the child of the dream." The Dream, she said, is freedom, freedom from poverty, from violence, from exploitation and from prejudice.

While urging her audience to get involved in the civil rights struggles, Robeson noted that one percent of African Americans never voted for a socialist. But he could not avoid the pressing issue of war.

Rev. Al Sharpton called Bush's opposition to the war a "cry of the left," and Sharpton's own strategy to find and focus on his influence on other Black poets, musicians, actors and artists, on how the rhythm and beat of his language influences modern-day spoken word and rap.

The filmweavesHughe's poetry into that of modern Black poets and rappers like a call and response, underscoring that lineage. But the film gives you little feel for Hughe's personal life and allusions to other writers like Ossian and Shakespeare, and any mention that he was gay, and so had yet another social prejudice to overcome to be the influential artist he was.

The movie is beautifully filmed, with a luxurious soundtrack. Like Hughes' own strategy to find and reflect the voices of his community, you must listen to the rhythm and cadence of the film to get the full effect. Much of the story is told through interviews of people who knew him and collaborated with him, like Ozzie Davis and Ruby Dee. The movie was screened in Portland Feb. 22 and in Seattle Feb. 23, drawing officers and members of ILWU locals in the area.
TENTATIVE AGREEMENT REACHED FOR CANADA LONGSHORE

ILWU Canada's Longshore Contract Executive Board bargaining subnet agreed on April 27 on a new five-month contract with their employers. The union had been at the table with the British Columbia Maritime Employers' Assn. for six months of negotiations with little success. "But we held fast to our objectives and are pleased with the results," their report to the members said.

"We have been able to achieve substantial progress to improve the quality and M&M package and also have been able to get a healthy increase in funding for our Health and Welfare Plan," the report said. "This will allow our Trustees to do their job and begin to undo the damage done to workers by the Liberals in Victoria with all their cut and downloading. It would have been too good enough just to undo the damage, but we have been able to secure adequate funding to improve the quality of life of our members.

"The 1982 M&M agreement between the union and employers gives a lump sum of $58,000 upon retirement to compensate for work-related injuries. This $58,000 has been raised to $1,600, and possibly $2,400 in future, to improve some of the benefits."

Mr. McMullen, President, ILWU Canada - Wide stop work meetings and vote on the report said. "This will allow our Members to have a reasonable, and a better retirement package."

"Our actions to assist our members have not been prepared to negotiate in a business-as-usual basis. We wanted and just wanted to get it done," said the ILWU warehouse Local 5 Business Rep. Ryan Takas, who helped with the talks.

Like most campuses, Evergreen's 50 -plus food service contractors extorted bribes for hiring workers, and got only scanty rations. Labor contractors extorted bribes for hiring them and blood-money prices for supplies and extra food at the job sites. "The original members of Local 57 were seasonal, migratory workers who canned and froze salmon at five Wards Cove plants. The mostly Filipino cannery workers in Alaska canneries worked destination, and a union contract.

"We're looking at the end of an era," said IBU Region 37 manager, the union can take it to the regional level," she said.

"But the ink had barely dried on the deal when the workers got the chance to test the grievance process. Bon Appetit suspended two people with no investigation, no notification, no posting of policy—John Wisniewski, a shop steward, and his friend, Yoshikawa. They both fired them nine days later.

John finished earlier than his friend, checked out, and then saw Adam was a bit behind in his work. He reached his bands and pitched in, flipping patties.

What were they really disciplined for? People do it all the time. We frequently make their own meals, and John wasn't even doing that. He was too busy to help out," Smart said. "So the union immediately filed a grievance and rallied the community. Since sending "ILWU workers demand Just Cause, not Just Replacement" to the community, and people began using the food service's "comment cards" to bug the union about its labor relations as well as its food.

At press time, management had not yet agreed to meet on the grievance.

CANCER CLOSURE ENDS AN ERA

It was too soon to call it a done deal, but December 12, 2002, throwing more than 550 ILWU members out of work—and opening a debate in the Alaska canneries workers' epic fight for decent treatment and a union contract.

"We're looking at the end of an era," said IBU Region 37 director Bob Ashton. Region 9 (formerly Local 37) represented about 500 of the workers who could not stop the salmon at five Wards Cove plants. ILWU Alaska Local 200 represented them at the table with the company, she said. "It's a sixth plant, and as many as 200 when the salmon season peaked in summer.

The mostly Filipino cannery workers in Alaska faced exploitation, assassinations and deprivations as they tried to build and keep their union. Before they organized in the 1930s, they put in 16-hour shifts, slept in filthy, crowded bunkhouses and got only scanty rations. Labor contractors extorted bribes for hiring them and blood-money prices for supplies and extra food at the job sites.

"The original members of Local 37 were seasonal, migratory workers who combined fishing and working conditions, totally subject to the will of their employers," read a 1981 Dispatch article.

The local saw its first two officers assassinated by the son of a labor con-
Local 54 joins movement against water privatization

Stockton's elite gathered in a warehouse on the docks Feb. 19 to hear the mayor push privatizing the city's municipal water district at his State of the City speech. Then, from the waterside, a boat boat [picture above] appeared in the gathering drizzle. The banner on the boat's side reads—if water privatization. Dezaray Bagalayos of the Concerned Citizens' Coalition stood on the boat's deck. "Good morning, Mr. Mayor! Let us vote!" she shouted through the bullhorn. The picket boat, skippered by longshore Local 54's Maurice Applegate, cruised off Koyukon Cove in Ketchikan, Alaska. As Mayor Gary Pedoesto told his crowd that privatizing Stockton's water would be good for everyone. The pickets demanded he let the citizens' March 4 vote in a special election be the deciding factor. Measure F in that election would require a public vote on any water privatization contracts worth more than $5 million. The mayor wanted a City Council vote on the 20-year, $400-600 million privatization deal with OMI/Thames Water at the Feb. 19 council meeting. That council vote would effectively nullify the citizens' votes before they cast them, as Measure F would only apply to contracts signed after March 4.

On the afternoon of Feb. 19 nearly 200 people rallied at City Hall, demanding the council put off its vote on selling the control of water facilities to OMI/Thames and让她们决定与WHU F. Unions from Operating Engineers Local 3 and SEIU Locals 250 and 790 attended. Local 3's turnout included a large number of their water dept. members who were opposing the sale of their jobs. They have been trying to get a contract out of the city after months of negotiation. About ten Local 54 members participated, with the local's banner. "It's not okay to sign a 20-year contract when you don't know what's happening in three years," Local 54 Secretary-Treasurer Gene Davenport told the crowd and city water workers. "Gary Pedoesto has a track record of being anti-labor. I don't think he will sign a 20-year contract with you. We've got to stop this here."

Local 54 donated $2,000 to the campaign and opened the hall for activists' meetings. Members also handed out leaflets and helped get the town's signatures. It took to get Measure F in the March 4 ballot. Later that evening the council voted four to three in favor of privatization. Protestors vowed to get 15,000 more signatures to overturn the council's decision by direct ballot. They began the collection after the meeting.

Stockton's citizens are on the front lines against huge multinational corporations that want to get in on the ground floor in the process of turning water into private property. These companies could make themselves the Enrons or PG&E's of the 21st Century. With global warming drastically reducing the snow pack that stores water, and a massive 50 percent population growth expected in the next 20 years, water might well become California's Achilles heel.

The likely game plan will be a repeat of what happened to energy and timber a century ago. Corporations stripped resources from formerly public lands for private profit, and the public ended up paying for its own oil, timber, coal and natural gas. That was such a great racket that corporations now want to do it with water, something no one can live without. The smart money will get in now, the way OMI/Thames is doing in Stockton. Then, as water becomes scarcer, they will have their hands on the faucet. In the last century public regulation of utilities provided some oversight and transparency, but since the "free market" Reagan years there's little regulation beyond the invisible hand of the market, and that hand is attached to the long arm of multinational capital.

Consumers should expect the same level of service the fragmented, unaccountable cable and phone companies have been supplying since deregulation. Thames, the British portion of the OMI/Thames Water partnership, grew big thanks to Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's privatization deals of the 1980s. Since then it has earned the distinction of being Britain's worst polluter. According to Public Citizen, Thames had 24 convictions for pollution between 1999 and 2002. Thames owner, the heavily indebted German company RWE, is snapping up every water facility it can find.

The results of the March 4 election came in as The Dispatcher went to press. Despite a $10,000 contribution from Thames against Measure F, it won by 58.9 percent of the vote. That's encouraging news to Bagalayos, who says she's "fed up to collect more signatures."

"Workers in the seafood industry do some of the hardest work a person can do for some of the least money," he said. "The need for organizing is here. The IBU and the ILWU need to prioritize use of our resources in this area. This is a good wake-up call."

For more information on the Peer Program for Displaced Workers, call Rich Gurtiza at 1-800-IBU-ILWU (428-4580) ext. 18.
Introduction by Harvey Schwartz

This is the first of a new three-part series featuring important leaders in the ILWU's history. To honor Black History Month, the February article focuses on Bill Chester (1914-1985), the union's first Black International officer.

In 1938 Chester became a member of ILWU Bargemen's Local 22, a Northern California organization that later merged with San Francisco Bay Area ILWU Longshore Local 10. Bill Chester was associated with the struggle for human rights throughout his career. He was especially active in Local 10 during the post-World War II years. Chester was appointed Northern California Regional Director in 1951. He was elected International Vice President in 1969 and retired from that office eight years later.

As Regional Director, the Dispatcher observed in a 1985 memorial, “Chester was a chief spokesman, organizer, strategist, and ambassador from the ILWU to the rest of the community in Northern California.” The oral history material here, collected just weeks after Chester took office as International vice president, reinforces that assertion.

Among his many accomplishments, Chester helped organize Black and Mexican American cotton congress workers in California's Central Valley into the ILWU during the 1930s. He also served on the Bridges Defense Committee when the government attempted to deport the ILWU President. In the 1960s he played an instrumental role when Local 10 hosted Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and major teachers' strike at San Francisco State University in 1969, which accounts for Chester's use of the archaic term “Negro” to refer to African Americans throughout the text. By then, Chester had national stature as a civil rights organizer and speaker. This interview is now part of the Ralph Bunch ILWU History Collection at Howard's Moorland-Spingarn Research Center. We are greatly indebted to the Center for releasing the interview for use on the basis of this article. Special thanks for their help to Center Curator Joel Elbashir and to Mrs. Ethel Chester.

Bill Chester

Edited by Harvey Schwartz, Curator, ILWU Oral History Collection

I am the son of a railroad worker. I was born in Shreveport, Louisiana, in 1914. My early school days were spent in Kansas City, Missouri. After high school I went to Western College in Kansas City for two years. My father died when I was 11 years old. I had no sisters or brothers, but my mother and I were like pals in the early ages coming through the depression of the 1930s.

Because of the depression I had to interrupt my education. I enlisted in the 25th Infantry Regiment of the U.S. Army and was stationed for three years at Fort Huachuca, Arizona. We were an all-Negro unit. This was before integration took place in the army. There were only two Negroes in official capacity at that time, the chaplain and a warrant officer. I was dissatisfied that there were no Negro line officers. It was at that point I started thinking about the social evils of our country. That was the very beginning of my thinking about civil rights.

Some people who were visiting the fort told me about San Francisco. I had read a little about it and my company commander, who was from that city, was something that struck me about the way they spoke about the town. When I was discharged—I was a warrant officer—I was discharged. I decided to travel to California to take a look. When I arrived in San Francisco I had the names and addresses of a couple of friends who were shipping out in the old Marine Cooks and Stewards Association (MCS). When I got to San Francisco they were at sea, so I took a room at the YMCA. It happened that about a block away, on the Embarcadero, was the hiring hall of the longshoremen's union. Being out of a job, I was told they hired there. So I went up, stood in line, and got work. That was the start of my employment in the maritime industry.

The first entered the labor movement on the San Francisco waterfront there were only 75 Blacks in the longshore local. They weren't very active. Most of the longshore union members were White workers who had already been brought out by the Luckenbach Steamship Company for the purpose of strike-breaking. But the International maritime union, who had a new president at that time, Harry Bridges, told me he would hire and talk with these workers and persuaded them to join the 1940s strike and come into the union. As a result of these workers were well-meaning men who made a contribu-
President Bill Chester.

In the move for full equality, change filtered through-
ILWU Local 10 Dir Team led the labor contingent up Market Street in San Francisco’s anti-war demonstration of more than 200,000 people Feb. 16.

end his support of the war. ILWU longshore Local 10 sent its Business Agent, Jack Heyman, to address the rally where he was one of two speakers coming from the stage—the other being Jesse Jackson.

In Italy, where unions organized a two-week general strike by nearly three million workers in the streets of Rome over the weekend (the largest demonstration since the end of World War II), the left-wing General Confederation of Italian Workers (CGIL) made a similar threat. On Feb. 18 the union’s executive council declared its intention of continuing the strike in the event of hostilities.

Italy’s unions are locked in bitter conflict with the rightwing government of media magnate Silvio Berlusconi, who has strongly supported the Bush war policy. Enzo Bernardo, director of CGIL’s International Department, explained Feb. 19 that the “big majority of Italians, not just workers, are against the Bush administration’s war in our country,” he added, “and this war has nothing to do with resolving it. Our government does not speak for Italy's people.

Pakistan’s trade union leader Rubina Jamil, President of the All-Pakistan Trade Union Federation, and a member of the executive council of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), among others, addressed workers on Feb. 19. Her federation represents more than five million Pakistani workers who, she emphasized, are already familiar with the cost of U.S. military action in Afghanistan, which they oppose.

“This war is only for oil,” she declared, and threatened that her federation would organize mass demonstrations, including hunger strikes, in front of the U.S. embassy and consulates when any invasion begins.

In Pakistan the U.S. depends on the increasingly unpopular regime of President Pervez Musharraf to support its continuing hunt for Taliban and Al-Qaeda militants, and mass labor demonstrations against an Iraq war would create huge political problems for Musharraf. His government is suffering from the economic crisis and mass protests in the wake of the Bush administration’s war.

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DIVERS ARE DOWN WITH THE IBU

They ply an unusual trade, diving for an odd shellfish with a funny name—geoducks, pronounced "go-duck." The work, when members of the Geoduck Harvesters' Assn. in the Pacific Northwest area affiliated with the Inlandboatmen's Union, they had an unusual goal. Instead of seeking power through a collective bargaining agreement, they looked to the IBU's political savvy to help them get legislation changing the rules that govern their work.

"We needed someone who could deal with the state, and the only people that better than the IBU," said geoduck diver Sam Swanson.

Geoducks, whose long necks protrude from an undersize shell, can reach 10 feet in length and their 14-knot set is two to three pounds. They're the world's largest burrowing clams, living as long as 140 years through a 300-foot umbilical air hose. The bags they carry can hold up to 1000 pounds on a good day, har- vesters can make around $40,000 per year. That's some day to be proud of, said negotiating committee member Mike Aiken. He backed off, the union dropped the charges and a final agreement was reached in late December.

"I'm glad our management was more reasonable than ours, and I'm glad Orcas settled, because theirs went on forever," Herschel said. "I'm sure we helped get pressure for that."
MUA fighters to retain jurisdiction
Australian seafarers’ retake their ships

By Tom Price

Australian seafarers once took pride in their national shipping line. But with the election of right-wing Prime Minister John Howard in 1996, the fleet began sinking to the bottom of the shipping industry. Howard’s government privatized the Australian National Line (ANL), selling it in December 1998 to the shipping company over the ships. But the sailors, who are members of the Maritime Union of Australia, are fighting hard to keep their jobs and maintain their country as a seafaring nation.

The Australian public once owned the container ships of the national line. It was a union ship with a crew sailing under Australian laws and inspections. But in July, however, it looked as if this last Australian-flagged container ship would get foreign workers. Articles of WarFerry, and Chinese soldiers waited for the ship to arrive in Taiwan. A new crew of Filipinos and Sri Lankans would fly in to unfurl the Bahamian flag and sail the ship.

The new owner had to do was get by the MUA, the union that signs to the seafarers, and raising “flags of convenience” as a seafaring nation.

By Tom Price

Australian sailors raised the gangway and sat there, preventing the ship from approaching. It took a couple of hours before the ship was able to dock.

The MUA convinced the Commission that the shipping companies and government had not proposed any legislation. Shortly after the sinking, the ITF joined with the World Federation of Trade Unions to publicize the loss of seafarer jobs. Sailors sat in on the ferry system and ensured that flag states meet their responsibilities, the Nov. 25 letter states.

Most recently, the formerly Australian-flagged ANL Indonesia rammed the Singapore naval vessel Convoy, killing four naval crewmen. That accident is still under investigation.

As for the OOC Australia, the crew re-boarded the ship in triumph Nov. 1, with six-months-going against re-employing with foreign sailors. The MUA convinced the Commission that the shipping companies and government had not proposed any legislation. Shortly after the sinking, the ITF joined with the World Federation of Trade Unions to publicize the loss of seafarer jobs. Sailors sat in on the ferry system and ensured that flag states meet their responsibilities, the Nov. 25 letter states.

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ITF pushes for seafarer rights
Caught between sweatshop ships and port security

By Tom Price

The bulk carrier Jupiter was a very troubled ship when it sailed into San Francisco Bay on Feb. 2, 2003. The Jupiter's next destination was San Juan, Puerto Rico. But on Dec. 2, The Immigration and Naturalization Service had gotten word that the Jupiter's next destination was going to be Vietnam. The crew had wage claims going back many months, but INS regulations prohibited them from ever going ashore to eat or work for wages. The crew, therefore, was forced to continue their torturous voyage and face the risk of persecution and violence in Vietnam. The crew asked for a visa to go ashore in San Juan, Puerto Rico, but the INS refused to grant it. They were told that they had to continue their voyage to Vietnam. The crew did not know what to do, but they were determined to stand up for their rights. They finally bought a plane ticket to San Juan and landed in the city. They were met by a group of INS agents who arrested them and forced them off the plane. The crew was then sent to a detention center in San Francisco.

The crew's situation is just one of the many instances of human rights violations that occur in the global shipping industry. The ITF has been working to protect the rights of seafarers for many years. In 1997, the ITF signed a memorandum of understanding with the International Maritime Organization (IMO). The MOU established a process for resolving disputes between seafarers and shipowners. The ITF has also been involved in several legal cases that have helped to protect the rights of seafarers. In 2000, the ITF won a landmark case in the European Court of Human Rights. The court ruled that the UK government had violated the rights of seafarers by failing to provide them with adequate leave.

The ITF's work has not been without opposition. In 2003, the ITF was targeted by a group of conservative politicians who were opposed to the ITF's efforts to protect the rights of seafarers. The ITF was accused of being a socialist organization and of being anti-capitalist. The ITF was also accused of being a front for the International Labour Organization (ILO). The ITF denied these accusations and continued to work to protect the rights of seafarers. In 2004, the ITF signed a new MOU with the IMO. The MOU expanded the ITF's role in resolving disputes between seafarers and shipowners.

The ITF's work has been recognized by the International Labour Organization (ILO). In 2006, the ITF was awarded the ILO's highest honor, the ILO Prize. The prize was awarded to the ITF for its work in protecting the rights of seafarers.

The ITF's work is far from over. The ITF continues to work to protect the rights of seafarers around the world. The ITF is fighting to ensure that seafarers have access to decent work, leave, and protection from exploitation. The ITF is also working to ensure that seafarers have access to justice. The ITF is working to ensure that seafarers have the right to a fair and just wage, and to be protected from violence and persecution.

The ITF is fighting for seafarers' rights. The ITF is fighting for a fair and just world. The ITF is fighting for the rights of all seafarers. The ITF is fighting for a better world.

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Local 10 honors columnists

Longshore Local 10 Secretary-Treasurer John Castanho presented San Francisco Chronicle writer Stephanie Salter with a plaque recognizing her journalistic integrity. Local 10 President Henry Graham then swore her in as an honorary member at the local's meeting Feb. 20.

Salter, a reporter for the San Francisco Examiner since 1976 and a columnist for the Examiner and the San Francisco Chronicle for 16 years, wrote a piece published last Aug. 18, headlined "The ILWU shoves back." In the column Salter expressed her delight at seeing the union kick Bush and his attempts to intimidate and break it.

Salter went on to list Bush's threats—from military intervention to legislation to action to destroy the union—and how the union went public with it, lining up Congressional support, making a media stink about it and demonstrating at ports all over the West Coast.

"As a result of being outed, the Bush administration has backed off—at least publicly," she wrote. "The ILWU's members may make their living primarily through manual labor, but their brains work just fine."

Salter went on to criticize the Congressional port security plans to do background checks on longshore workers, pointing out that unregulated and uninspected cargo comes into U.S. ports every day on ships that fly national flags (flags of convenience) meant to hide ownership and responsibility. She called it "a problem that Tom Ridge's boss [George Bush] might solve if he weren't so busy trying to hobble one of the toughest, most successful labor unions in U.S."

Graham told his members how surprised and happy he was, as one of the union's negotiators, to read Salter's column that morning, when most of the press had been bashing the ILWU for so long.

Salter told the truth," Graham said. "She told the longshore side of the story. The members gave her a standing ovation."

Shortly after Salter's story ran, the Chronicle took her column from her and reassigned her to another department. The move was widely perceived as the least we can do is allow the entire crew a visa to go ashore. The ITF strongly protested this proposal in a Jan. 7 letter to the State Dept. The changes would require the crew to apply individually at a U.S. Consulate and undergo a background check. This shifts the cost and hassle from the union to the seafarers.

"Shore leave is undoubtedly one of the most vital elements of the seafarers' well-being in terms of living and working conditions," the ITF's letter reads. "It is, therefore, essential to decent work at sea."

The letter goes on to remind the State Dept. that the U.S.'s International Labor Organization and the International Maritime Organization have both been recognized shore leave as a fundamental right. ILO Convention 108, in fact, states that seafarers should be required to have a visa. But, as with a number of other internationally recognized labor agreements, the U.S. has not signed on to that one.

ILWU International President James Spinosa joined the fray Feb. 11 with a letter to the U.S. State Dept. condemning the proposed denial of visas.

"Our union's longshore division works with women who are seafarers every day, and to see them denied their basic right to shore leave offends our sense of fair play," Spinosa's letter said. "It seems the least we can do is allow them access to shore leave to contact their families, attend religious services, buy necessary gear or stretch their legs on land."

The State Dept. entertained public comments, but it is almost certain to do just that.

"It has always been the right of seafarers, after risking their lives at sea, to come ashore," San Francisco Bay. "This isn't just a token, this is an obligation that the ship owner, the company and governments. In many cases these guys only want to go onto the dock to make their one call. They don't even walk 50 feet from the gangway to the payphone!"
IMPORTANT NOTICE ON ILWU POLITICAL ACTION FUND

Delegates to the 30th Triennial Convention of the ILWU, meeting in Honolulu, Hawaii, April 7-11, 1997, amended Article X of the International Constitution to read:

"SECTION 2. The International shall establish a Political Action Fund which shall consist only of voluntary contributions. The union will not favor or disadvantage any member because of the amount of his/her contribution or the decision not to contribute. In no case will a member be required to pay more than his/her pro rata share of the union's collective bargaining expenses. Reports on the status of the fund and the uses to which the voluntary contributions of the members are put will be made to the International Executive Board.

The voluntary contributions to the Political Action Fund shall be collected as follows:

1. Up to One Dollar Fifty Cents ($1.50) of each March and July's per capita payment to the International Union shall be diverted to the Political Action Fund where it will be used in connection with federal, state and local elections. These deductions are suggested only, and individual members are free to contribute more or less than that guideline suggests. The diverted funds will be contributed only on behalf of those members who voluntarily permit that portion of their per capita payment to be used for that purpose. The Titled Officers may suspend either or both diversions if, in their judgement, the financial condition of the International warrants suspension.

2. More than $1.50—1 wish to contribute more than the minimum voluntary contribution ($1.50) prior to March 1, 2003. A portion of the proceeds from the poster of the Harry Bridges Project is doing this with documentaries, plays and television film. A portion of the proceeds from the poster can be used in connection with federal, state and local elections. These deductions are suggested only, and individual members are free to contribute more or less than that guideline suggests. The diverted funds will be contributed only on behalf of those members who voluntarily permit that portion of their per capita payment to be used for that purpose. The Titled Officers may suspend either or both diversions if, in their judgement, the financial condition of the International warrants suspension.

Those members who do not wish to have any portion of their per capita payment diverted to the Political Action Fund, but wish to make political contributions directly to either the Political Action Fund or their local union, may do so in any amounts whenever they wish."

Note: I do not wish to contribute to the ILWU Political Action Fund. I understand that the International will send me a check for the entire amount of the Political Action Fund contribution ($1.50) prior to March 1, 2003.

More than $1.50—I wish to contribute more than the minimum voluntary contribution ($1.50) to the ILWU Political Committee. Enclosed please find my check for $ ________.

RETURN TO: ILWU, 1186 Franklin Street • San Francisco, CA 94109

These contributions are not deductible as charitable contributions.

Local 27 Golf tournament

ILWU Local 27 will be having their nineteenth annual golf tournament at Dungeness Golf Course April 17, 2003. Entry fee will be $70 for your golf, dinner, and a chance at many prizes. Extra dinner tickets will be $20. Dinner and awards will be at the Seven Cedars Casino, following the tournament. The next day, on April 18, we will be having our annual Dennis Standley Memorial Scramble at Peninsula Golf Course for an additional $50 fee. Fraternally, Alistair Bell and the Local 27 Sports Committee.
N
Eniko “Nikki” Sawayda Bridges Flynn, former ILAULU President and Harry Bridges’ wife for the last 31 years of his life, died Feb. 7 at age 79 from complications of a chron-
ic illness. But Nikki was much more than the spouse of a legendary labor leader—she was a civil rights activist and poet in her own right, an orator with a quick wit and a sharp tongue.

Nikki was born in 1923 in Garden City, Calif., the daughter of Japanese immigrant farm workers. When President Roosevelt ordered the internment of all Japanese Americans on the West Coast into “relocation camps” in 1942, Nikki and her family were sent to live in Posten, Arizona for three years. The concentration camp was built on a poverty-ridden Indian reservation. Nikki and her parents were assigned to share a 25-by-25-foot unheated structure with what she described as “a small family in each room.” The room required four people in each shelter.

When the war was over and the internments released, the camp’s officer warned them that once outside, they could not congregate in groups of more than four. But even the family’s less formal gatherings at home were fraught with risk. When they would invite their friends to stay for a few days, the clerk told them there was a state law forbidding a Caucasian from marrying a non-American Indian. Nikki, a self-described “red-blooded American,” responded, “What’s so sinister about a person of color seeking to marry a colorless individual?”

But this couple was not to be deterred. They filed a suit against the law and it was eventually overturned.

An IBU ferryboat brought his family, friends and colleagues out of the San Francisco Bay past the Golden Gate Bridge to a place where his ashes were scattered.

At the memorial, in her typical manner, Nikki retained her connection to the successful campaign to get the Japanese-American Citizens League.

Later that year her husband died. An IBU ferryboat brought his family, friends and colleagues out of the San Francisco Bay past the Golden Gate Bridge to a place where his ashes were scattered.

At the memorial, in her typical witty and frank ways, Nikki told the assembled mourners, “I have been no honor to my heritage. My identity as an American and a woman of Japanese ancestry. Nikki later printed the poem and donated the proceeds to the Salas (Ruth), Coatie Jackson (Edna), Jerry Spray, Felix Meraz Sr., William Chestnut, June Radcliff; Local 23—May S. L. Stanley, Donald J. MacSween. At the memorial, in her typical manner, Nikki retained her connection to the successful campaign to get the Japanese-American Citizens League.

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BOOKS:
The ILWU Story: unrolls the history of the union from its origins to the present, complete with recollections from the men and women who built the union, in their own words, and dozens of rare photos of the union in action. $7.00
The Big Strike By Mike Quin: the classic partisan account of the 1934 strike. $6.50
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The Union Makes Us Strong: Radical Unionism on the San Francisco Waterfront By David Weiman: the important new study of longshore in the ILWU. $15.00 (paperback)
A Terrible Anger: The 1934 Waterfront and General Strike in San Francisco By David Sevin: the newest and best single narrative history about the San Francisco events of 1934. $16.50
The March Inland: Origins of the ILWU Warehouse Division 1934-1938 By Harvey Schwartz: new edition of the only comprehensive account of the union’s organizing campaign in the northern California warehouse and distribution industry. $9.00

VIDEOS:
We Are the ILWU A 30-minute color video introducing the principles and traditions of the ILWU. Features active and retired members talking about what the union meant in their lives and what it needs to survive and thrive, along with film clips, historical photos and an original musical score. $5.00
Life on the Beam: A Memorial to Harry Bridges A 17-minute VHS video production by California Working Group, Inc., memorializes Harry Bridges through still photographs, recorded interviews, and reminiscences. Originally produced for the 1990 memorial service in San Francisco. $28.00

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