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**OUT OF FOCUS**

A camera lens is a powerful tool. But, like a tragic hero, its strengths are also its weaknesses. The camera lens can focus closely and sharply on the object of study, highlighting its importance and accentuating its details, but at the same time the framed focus draws boundaries on vision, limits horizons and narrows context.

Through the lens the U.S. corporate media portrays Iraq as a proxy of Iran, and above all you see are the bombings and the ambush attacks on U.S. soldiers. But what is the real life like for regular Iraqis who get up every morning and try to find a way to feed their families? Not long ago they lived in the most developed and advanced country in the Arab World. Now they've engulfed in the chaos of war and insurgency. How do they tread this mined path and view the latest invasion as an American reporter asks those questions?

Incredibly renowned labor journalist and photographer David Bacon took his wide-angle lens to Iraq to bring the struggle through the eyes of Iraqi workers. In the past Bacon has traveled to cover the privatization of the Mexican portion and the destruction of Mexican longshore unions for The Dispatcher, as well as the labor struggles in the maquiladoras and the banana workers' union organizing efforts in the jungles of the Philippines. (See page 14 for information on his new book about the maquiladoras, *"The Children of NAFTA."*) Here again he exposes the perspective no one else dares to or cares to.

Through his words and photos Bacon tells the story of the wounded but resilient working people of Iraq. Enduring many years of Saddam Hussein's brutal rule, taking the brunt of the US-imposed sanctions after the first Gulf War, surviving the shock and awe of the latest invasion and the social disruption and disintegration that continues under the U.S. occupation, Iraqi workers remain defiant and continue organizing for their survival and independence.

And while it is obvious that the Bush administration "misplanned" the war and the occupation, the underlying plan—the looting of the Iraqi national wealth, the privatization of its industries and the suppression of its people—is proceeding apace.

Under the military occupation, Bacon reports, the unemployment rate stands at 70 percent. Iraqis who do have jobs get the same pay as under Saddam Hussein, but lack access to housing and health subsidies they used to receive. While the U.S. removed the image of Saddam Hussein from the Iraqi currency, the occupying forces still enforce Hussein's law banning its use. But the most important looting—of the Iraqi people—goes on apace.

Bacon also tells us of workers' first steps towards collective actions, their union organizing and their resistance to the occupation. But the odds—and more importantly, the weapons—are stacked against them. They need the help of workers in the outside world.

But in that outside world their voices are drowned out by the chatter of military officials and government spokespersons, their images crowded out by spectacular explosions. Bacon's lens focuses outside that easy, narrow picture and gives us a rare chance to hear and glimpse the daily struggles of regular people caught in the crossfire of war. See pages 11-13.

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**GROCERY WORKERS NEED SOLIDARITY**

By James Spinosa
ILWU International President

When the ILWU Longshore Division was bargaining its 2002 contract, we spent nearly the first four months talking about nothing but our health care benefits. The employers wanted deep cuts and we refused to settle for anything less than maintaining the package we had. Our resolve was firm not just because we were fighting for our families' right to quality medical coverage. We knew that if we lost, other employers would be emboldened to cut the benefits of other American union workers.

That high profile role of protecting health care benefits for themselves and other workers has, in 2003, fallen upon the grocery workers of Southern California. The strike at Safeway/Vons, and the resulting lockout at Albertson's and Ralph's/Kroger is all about health care and the employers' demand to virtually eliminate it. And the fact that it is economically unnecessary—the companies are hugely profitable—exposes the incredibly nasty and heartless attitude of these employers.

The companies callously calculated their proposals. They know that it costs around $5.00 per hour worked by each employee into the health care fund. They propose only a five percent per year increase. Since the workers will get only the benefits that pooled money will buy and we know health care costs will continue to rise, that alone is a significant cutback. But it gets worse—way worse.

The employers are proposing a two-tier system. They will contribute only $1.35 per hour to the benefit fund for newly hired people and that money will go into a separate fund. Obviously that level of funding cannot buy any meaningful benefits now, let alone over the three-year life of the contract.

With employers not contributing to the current health care fund for new hires, that fund and the benefits it can buy will continue to shrink as older employees retire. It is estimated that by the third year of the contract grocery workers will either see benefits cut by about 50 percent or have co-pays of $95 or more per week to maintain the current level of benefits.

Considering that the average grocery store worker makes about $12.50 per hour and works 30 hours a week—an annual salary of below $20,000—it could cost them about one-third of their take-home pay to keep their health coverage. It is preposterously unconscionable is the fact that all three of these companies are Fortune 50 corporations. Over the past five years they have made $130 million over three years to maintain current benefits—a mere four percent of just last year's profits. Yet he has shown real determination to ruin the lives of tens of thousands of his workers for that. This is corporate greed out of control.

These companies are arguing that they must cut costs because of competition from Wal-Mart, which pays its workers barely above minimum wage and offers benefits with such high co-pays hardly any of its employees can afford them. But even when Wal-Mart builds and opens all the "superstores" it has planned for Southern California, it will only gain one percent of the grocery market in the region. Combined, Safeway, Albertson's and Ralph's currently control 60 percent of the market there.

The grocery stores in Southern California are not the first to be hit with cutbacks from these companies, but they are the biggest bargaining unit in the biggest market in the country. If the workers lose this one, the companies plan to take this attack nationwide as contracts expire. And as more and more manufacturers' jobs are moved out of the U.S., the jobs that remain are more and more in services and sales. Making this sector and its union—the United Food and Commercial Workers, the UFCW—more and more important to the American labor movement. If three of the country's top 50 corporations can get away with eliminating health benefits for their workers, what chance do other workers, union and non-union, have of maintaining a decent standard of living? What kind of society are we becoming when honest, hard-working people are abandoned?

Our ILWU members in Southern California have been doing great solidarity work, marching at rallies and picket lines and helping the families out of work to survive. Our members in Northern California have also been participating in demonstrations and pickets at Safeway stores there and many of our people have made donations to the cause. But I also want to urge all ILWU members to contribute all you can afford to the union's strike fund. The companies are ready and able to take big losses. The grocery workers' only hope is other workers.

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ILWU Local 5 walks the line

By Marcy Rein

October 2003

More than 200 members of ILWU Local 5 jammed into the local's small office Nov. 11. Packed shoulder to shoulder, elbows to elbows, for two hours without pause, they debated calling an unfair labor practice strike the next day.

"People were getting in each other's faces, raising their voices and yelling at each other. It was an intense expression of direct democracy," said shop steward Ron Solomon, who works in Internet sales. "We worked out a lot of internal issues, and in the end we voted by a landslide to walk off.

More than 95 percent of Local 5's members backed up the talk by walking off Nov. 12. Though theythreat to protest Powell's harassment of union leaders and activists, they say these illegal acts typify management's attitude toward the entire negotiation process.

"We saw the same disregard for labor law during the negotiations three years ago. Instead of bringing real proposals to the table they come after our union officers and activists, trying to intimidate us into accepting unreasonable proposals," said Local 5 President Steve Feiring.

The first contract between Powell's and the 405 members of Local 5's bargaining unit, 21 years ago, had started in July, and plodded along until management presented its economic proposal. Then they hit the wall. Michael Powell, once known as an enlightened employer, invoked escalating health care costs and the slamming economy as he demanded concessions on benefits and wages. Local 5 members say he's making healthy profits and could afford more.

"I don't see any reason we should pay a ton more money for health care when we aren't making that kind of money," said Robert Lovato, a used book buyer at Powell's Hawthorne store.

By Marcy Rein

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Bargaining for the Local 5 workers will take a 4.5 percent pay cut. People with chronic health issues will take an even bigger cut. Ron Solomon, paying for his wife and son's asthma medications, would face a 9.5 percent cut, Corning said.

"They circle me at the information desk, they come to see what I'm working on, they literally hide behind bookcases to watch me," said Kristi Lovato, who works in Powell's Sidelines department at Powell's main store on W. Burnside Street.

"All over the store we're seeing an increase in carbapil tunnel and tendonitis. I work with people who take Ibuprofen three times a day every day," she said.

Business appears to be booming for Powell's. Last fall the company shelled out $2.25 million to buy a new warehouse in Northwest Portland to house its Internet sales department. The 60,330-square-foot space is six times larger than the warehouse Powell's used by Internet sales. The Portland Business Journal (Aug. 19, 2003) reported that Powell's is one of the few bookellers turning a profit on Internet sales, posting a 22 percent increase in on-line sales between October 2001 and October 2002.

"If Powell's were buying group insurance, they would get a lot less coverage for a lot more money," Local 5 Secretary-Treasurer Jim Cowing said.

"Better than leaving a picket sign on the sidewalk? ILWU Local 5 members saw to it their message would last even after the busy sidewalk in front of the City of Books during the Oct. 12 rally.

E-mail at Powell's functions like an electronic bulletin board. Workers post everything from notices of upcoming concerts to requests for rides home. But after Local 5 President Mary Winzig put out the negotiations schedule, management suddenly forbade the use of e-mail for union communications.

This selective enforcement clearly aimed to keep people from exercising their union rights," Local 5 Union Rep. Ryan Van Winkle said. Only a handful of people crossed the lines at the main store. No Local 5 members crossed at the Hawthorne or suburban Beaverton stores. Nothing went in or out of shipping. Even the parking lot was shut down.

Ira Bock, a worker from other area ILWU locals joined the line, including many members of Longshore Locals 8 and 4, members of the ILWU, and a few of the newly organized MERG guards from Local 28. Some 60 MERC guards from Local 28. Some 60 MERC guards from Local 28. Some 60 MERC guards from Local 28.

"They set up a meeting in the morning and then kept them waiting all day on the following day before putting off the next session until Nov. 22. If no agreement is reached that day, Local 5 plans a second ULP action for the day after Thanksgiving—the busiest day of the retail year, known around Powell's as "Black Friday." Management is keeping the pressure up with smaller visibility actions, like the "Solitary Lunches" in which a whole department clocks out together. "We can only work at this point," Winzig said. "We can only get what we deserve by working together.

To support Local 5's fight for a fair contract with Powell's, call or e-mail the store's top manager. Write to Mary Winzig, President; (503) 228-4651 ext. 227 or michael.powell@powells.com; Ann Smith, CIO operations, (503) 224-4651 ext. 226 or ann.smith@powells.com; and Sylvia Wolfe, Human Resources Manager; (503) 228-4651 ext. 269 or sylvie.horne@powells.com.

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Bush fast tracks expansion of NAFTA

By Lindsay McLaughlin

ILWU Legislative Director

WASHINGTON -- The Bush administration is hell-bent on sending hundreds of thousands of American workers to the unemployment lines.

At issue are two free trade agreements currently negotiating in hopes of sending Congress for an up or down vote. (Since a spineless Congress ceded its constitutional authority to negotiate these trade deals, it has no right to amend any agreement that the president signs. The Bush administration is pushing a Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA) to be signed with the Central American countries beginning next year. The CAFTA will, according to the administration, be similar to the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) now in place. It will perpetuate NAFTA's weak labor and environmental standards and will undermine the rights of workers in the maquila sector. CAFTA will allow multi-national corporations to move workers to emerging countries without the right to bargain collectively. This model would be similar to the maquila sector in Mexico where most maquila workers are women, not one is unionized, and the ILWU will certainly lose about 1,000 jobs in the sugar sector in Hawai’i. But Bush doesn’t care—he's administration is hell-bent on sending hundreds of thousands of American workers to the unemployment lines.

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El Dorado Stone boasts on its Web site of making "the most beautiful concrete stone on the world" and claims to be the world's second-largest producer of this fake stone, saying that it "builds for its customers, it treats workers as tools to be used and discarded. When the workers at El Dorado's plant in Carnation, Washington tried to organize last spring, they discovered the company treats labor with equally disregard. Then they turned to the law for protection, and found its promise hollow too."

The 80 workers at the Carnation plant complained that the management was short on scheduled breaks. They could no longer take a 30-minute break every two hours. They worked in forms with liquid latex, then putting them in dryers to harden. The dryers ran at 140°F. The process dried the workers out. They had no air conditioning and they couldn't mass outside and watch the vote. They were checking us off as they worked. The Labor Board's top lawyer devised it to help obscure rule allowing "meritorious labor practice charges if the conduct involved only broke the law in minor or technical ways, did not last long, and did not involve large numbers of people. It dates from 1995, when the board's lawyer devised it to help the cash- and staff-strapped agency handle its workload—but its use in an organized drive clearly threatens the fragile protections labor law provides to workers.

A handful of El Dorado Stone workers wearing "ILWU: Union Si! T-shirts attended a support rally outside the plant gates. Managers suspended most of the pro-union workers away by forcing them to attend an anti-union "captive audience" meeting on their lunch break.

"They're saying, if you don't like it, you can leave. But we have a whole stack of applications in the office," organizer Marcy Rein said.

The ILWU, along with other union organizers, gave the El Dorado workers as much support as they could. About 75 people turned out for a rally at the plant gates a week before the election, including former Washington Governor Mike Lowery. Longshore Local 19 took up a collection at a stop-work meeting and also picked a fight and suspended workers. Still, the workers lost the May 30 vote 36 to 44. Immediately after the election, El Dorado restored the raises, rolled back the rule that tied people to their workstations, and laid off about 15 people, most of whom union supporters. One was Ochoa's mother. The union filed charges with the National Labor Relations Board challenging the legality of these layoffs as well as the suspensions, harassments, surveillance and unilateral changes in working conditions before the election. The director of NLRB's Region 19 dismissed the charges, dusting off an obscure rule allowing "meritorious dismissals." This policy permits regional directors to dismiss unfair labor practice charges if the conduct involved only broke the law in minor or technical ways, did not last long, and did not involve large numbers of people. It dates from 1995, when the Board's lawyer devised it to help the cash- and staff-strapped agency handle its workload—but its use in an organizing drive clearly threatens the fragile protections labor law provides to workers.

"The violations during an organizing campaign will be of limited duration—that's the point," said Robert Remar of Leonard, Carder, LLP, the ILWU's attorney on the case. "I have never seen such a ruling in my 20 years of practicing labor law." To the workers involved, the ruling seemed simply unfair.

"They didn't even consider all the time the NLBR agent spent doing the investigation. They didn't consider anything we had to say," said Ochoa. "It's like they thought we were lying or something."

Interestingly, El Dorado continues to harass union supporters. It suspended three for trivial offenses and then fired one—Ochoa's husband. But they continued to speak up. Temblador, who was suspended for half a day for yawning too loudly, went back to work wearing a union T-shirt. He and Ochoa will address a Jobs With Justice Workers' Rights Board hearing in December. And the company may finally have gone too far.

"When Temblador showed up in his union shirt, a manager made him take it off, clearly violating his rights. The union filed ULP charges over that incident as well as the latest suspensions and firing. If the Board upholds those charges, it will reconsider the merit dismissal as well. "We won't give up, because we know we're right," Temblador said. "We know the union won't give up either, but we need changes in the law so we have the right to organize." -Mary Rein

A Labor Party member from El Dorado Stone, whose name was withheld for fear of retribution, said: "They treated us worse than dogs," his co-worker Victor Temblador said.

"The only way to do the job is to lift wrong," he said.

"There are little cables, little shelves, little tubes, little rooms, and breathing problems from the fumes."

For this they're paid $10 an hour, with a 20- or 50-cent raise after a year. The high cost and year-long wait for health insurance put it out of most workers' reach. If anyone complained, it brought in four union-busters from the company. They would not listen to the workers, and then they turned to threats, lying, and untruths. They threatened discipline and firing. If the Board upholds those charges, it will reconsider the merit dismissal as well. "We won't give up, because we know we're right," Temblador said. "We know the union won't give up either, but we need changes in the law so we have the right to organize." -Mary Rein

ALASKA TAKES UP RUNAWAY LONGSHORE WORK

After one of the smoothest organizing drives imaginable, the Alaska Longshore Division recouped a bit of work lost a few years ago. The line handlers who tie up the Alaska State Ferry in Cordova, about 150 miles from Anchorage, won their first contract in 1999. But they were not certified, and the contract expired in October 2003. Wendt joined the ILWU organizing staff just four months after Vanessa Vossela stepped down as the new Columbia River organizer. Vossela, 34, came to the ILWU from organizing maritime workers in New Bedford, Massachusetts with SEIU Local 1199. "I've been to nearly every port in the ILWU in the 1999 Seattle protests against the WTO and in the labor-community coalition that formed to support the locked-out Kaiser Steel workers. She salted for the ILWU in a Washington warehouse, and is a writer and musician as well as an organizer.

Along with Wendt and Vossela, the ILWU International Organizing Dept. now includes Rodolfo Gutierrez and Carlos Cordon, the ILWU locals in Southern California, Agustin Ramirez in Northern California and Paul Bigman in the Pages Sound, as well as the International Representative Jerry Martin and Communications Specialist Marcy Rein.

The dispatchers had a reputation as "last line in, first line out," and the company treated labor law with equal disregard. Then they turned to the law for protection, and found its promise hollow too.

"We should be running our own union, for better or for worse," Wendt said. "We won't give up, because we know we're right," Temblador said. "We know the union won't give up either, but we need changes in the law so we have the right to organize."
Filming “Lords of the Docks”

After more than two years of performing his one-man play “From Wharf Rats to Lords of the Docks” about the life of Harry Bridges and the history of the ILWU, actor Ian Ruskin and Academy Award winning cinematographer Haskell Wexler (“Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?” and “Bound for Glory”) gathered a crew to film the play for television broadcast.

The film was shot at a performance at the Warner Grand Theater in San Pedro July 26 with a new magnificent set, six cameras, 150 lights, a row of mixing decks, a crew of two dozen, and Edward Asner and Elliot Gould adding a prologue and epilogue. Additional scenes for the film with longshore Local 13 members as extras were done the next day at ILWU Local 13 hall.

The film is now in post-production—editing, sound mastering, addition of archival footage and original music. Although the film crew worked for minimum union wages and director Wexler donated his services, it still cost $60,000 to film the play. Another $10,000 is needed to complete this project and take Harry’s story to millions of Americans. (PBS, HBO, Showtime, A&E and the History channel have all expressed interest in seeing the final product.) The film will also be released on VHS cassette and DVD. If you can help with a donation or wish to order your own copy (ready early next year) please send a check to:

The Harry Bridges Project
PO Box 662018
Los Angeles, CA 90066

A $1,000 donation gets your name in the credits, but every donation, however large or small, helps. All donations are tax-deductible. If you order a copy of the film include your name and address and preference for a cassette or DVD.

Cost - $10 ea. plus $2 s&h...$12
On DVD - $15 ea. plus $2 s&h...$17.

FROM WHARF RATS TO LORDS OF THE DOCKS

The Warner Grand Theater in San Pedro on the night of filming “From Wharf Rats to Lords of the Docks.”

Actor Ian Ruskin as Harry Bridges

Director Haskell Wexler and Ian Ruskin discuss how they will do the next scene.

Filming one of the extra scenes outside the Local 13 hall about the 1948 strike and the imposition of the Taft-Hartley injunction.

Costume designer Dana Woods dresses Local 13 extras for a scene.

Make-up artist Day Nguyen touches up Ruskin for the next scene.

The Local 13 extras.

photo by Steve Stokoe
Workers who fuel ships in California formed a broad maritime coalition to win relief from a state tax on ship’s fuel or “bunkers.”

The tax had been suspended for the past decade, but then-Gov. Gray Davis in effect re-imposed it with his veto of a bill that would have extended the suspension for another decade. The tax kicked in Jan. 1, 2003.

Rather than increase state revenue, the tax caused an estimated 40 percent decline in bunker sales, eliminating hundreds of jobs in the state. When these no longer earning wages, their ability to pay taxes was greatly reduced. Over all, that meant a net decline in tax revenue.

The tax, a sales tax of sales of between 8 and 9.5 percent depending on the county it is sold in, made it more expensive to bunker a ship in California than in states such as Texas, Louisiana and Alaska overseas, and reduced bunker barge and tugboat work performed by the ILWU and Teamsters, the Longshore and Warehouse Unions. Even time Division of the ILWU.

An IBU-crewed tug nudges a bunker barge to an oil terminal in the Los Angeles-Long Beach harbor area. Repeal of the California sales tax on ship’s fuel will bring back bunker work to the state, saving union jobs.

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A Worker’s Journey: Jerry Tyler

Edited by Harvey Schwartz
Curator, ILWU Oral History Collection

I was born 11-11-11. That’s a birthday you can’t forget. I was born in Shenandoah, Iowa, a little country town. You only had to walk 15, 20 minutes and you’re out in farm land. When the Depression hit in the ‘30s, we didn’t even know there was a depression. ‘Cause we thought everybody had a tough life all the time. Dirt farmer, small farmer, he didn’t have a very easy time between the bank, the mortgage, the thunderstorms, the hailstorms and every damn thing you can think of that could go wrong on a farm.

Although I grew up a farm kid, after a while we moved into Shenandoah. They had two of the country’s biggest rail yards there, and I worked what’s called a nursery rat, pruning, sanding, doing stoop labor. Then I got a job in a clothing store. I also worked in a vegetable cannery over in Nebraska City.

I tried fighting, but I didn’t make much money at that. This was in the late 1920s when I was 16, 17, 18. I had a good trainer and didn’t do too bad. I started out as a bantam weight, I was a little warm then. But when I gained weight—I ended up a lightweight—that slowed me down a bit. They started tagging me. We discovered I had a good chin. There’s only one cure for that, that’s don’t take punches. So I got the hell out before I was brain damaged. Well, I think I did, anyway.

My mother always wanted me to go to college, and they had one over in Lamoni, Iowa, so I went there for a year. But I knew my parents couldn’t afford it, because this was in 1929, ’30, ’31. There was no work to be had anywhere, and they had other kids. So I just took off. Grabbed myself an armload of box cars and headed West, like everybody else.

It was a crowded existence. There were a lot of guys on the trains. You’d be coming north out of L.A., heading to Portland or up to Washington to work the apples. And here would be a bunch of guys going the other direction. They’d say, “Where are you going?” You’d answer, “Up to Wenatchee, over in there, to pick apples.” They’d say, “Hell, man, there’s a picker for every apple.” You’d say at the guy and think, “Aw, you dummy, you wouldn’t know a job if it hit you on the ass.” and you’d find out your wrong. I just walked right on through, hoping you’d find something.

Getting something to eat, that was a little tough. It took a long time for me to get enough nerve to hit a back door. That was in the little town of Turlock, California. There was a Black gul out the back yard, spittin’ wood. I said, “Hey, lady, I’d be glad to split some wood for somethin’ to eat.” She said, “Get on it.” So I split wood. Then she called me in. I discovered I’d been at the back door of a whorehouse.

Every thick gal is sittin’ around in their bathrobes. And boy, they fed me good! When I left, they gave all laid a half a buck or so on me and wished me good luck. So I’ve got a soft spot in my heart for prosti- tutes and for people that are down on their luck and got a rough way to go.

I got one job on the Oregon shortline out of Salt Lake City. This was as a waterboy for the D&RGW. They had a new line, a branch line, the Rio Grande Western railroad. They were laying new steel. Waterboy—They masqueraded the fact. You were a mule. First thing I had to do, before anybody was up, was uncover the ice, wash it off, bust it up and put it in the keg on a pushwagon.

The guys go eat breakfast in the mess car and the day would start. I’d push that damn thing about a half mile, and finally move it off on a siding made especially for it. Then I’d start walkin’ with a rope around me that had two great big water buckets with tin cups hanging off it, and you’d find in the desert—God, it was hot! I’m yelling “agua,” because the workers were Mexican, and I’d walk up and down with that goddamn thing—oh, I was tough then.

I landed in Modesto, California, where I got a job on a fruit ranch. Then I worked as a roadhouse and worked in a night club—this was in 1933, when liquor came back, after Prohibition ended. If times were bad, I’d get laid off from the roadhouse and work the night club. I never could get no work. Well, the cooks in this one Modesto joint where I got hired were in the Culinary Workers union, and I joined. Officially, they said, “The waitresses over at the Greek’s are not unionized.” So they pulled a stick. We went over there just before noon, took all the stools and tables, sat down and had a cup of coffee. We stayed all during lunch. The management decided, “I guess we’d better talk to these guys.” That’s how we organized that place. It was my first experience with a union and it opened my eyes quite a ways.

When the 1934 strike happened I was still in Modesto. Rent was $4 a week. I’d joined the National Guard with my roommate, Clancy Johnson. We got two bucks a week for drills, so that paid the rent. They wanted to take the Modesto National Guard to Stockton for strike duty. I went to Capt. Freeman and said, “Cap, I can’t do that. My old man was a working stiff and working stiffs always knew I’m going to go over there and stick a bayonet in some other poor working stiff? I can’t do it.” He said, “Okay, we’ll put you down as if you’re leaving the state, no problem.” So I didn’t go.

I went to San Francisco and got a job as a waiter at Goman’s, an old place at Fillmore and Geary Streets. It was then that I sold my first fiction story. They called it “The Coward Who had Killer Fists.” I’d been writing all the time, trying to write for the pulps. In Modesto, when I’d worked in the roadhouse, I’d write during the day and go to work at night. A junior college teacher— I took some classes—told me to contact and I sent stuff off. After that I couldn’t write a thing for about two months! Then I started whacking them out while I was working at Goman’s.

In December 1941, when we got into World War II, I was still at Goman’s. My ‘Gos was an old dyed-in-the-wood, accustomed to go to sea since I was a kid. A farm boy, going to sea was romantic as hell. So when the war broke out I got my chance. They needed people. I registered, got a trip card and started out of San Francisco and
I'd been in Local 30 of the Culinary Workers at Goman's, but when I went to sea I really got introduced to unionism. At my first MCS meeting, I thought, "These guys mean business." They had a rank-and-file operating union. I popped my mouth off over some deal and that kind of set things in motion. They heard I could write and they accepted me, babied me along and got me involved. They asked me to write some stuff, and I wrote a steward newsletter for my ship. They put it up on the bulkhead in the mess room.

During the war I went on the old Matsonia. She was a trooper with a big stewards department. That was when the Communist Party first approached me. I knew there'd been something wrong with our system, our economy. I'd heard all about these Communists and all that stuff, but pretty soon it seemed like they were the only people talking any sense. I joined the ILWU.

I started there was no packaged cargo. You stowed it everywhere by hand. Then you began getting packaged cargo, crbs, robots and containers. If anybody told us 10 years before that we were going to handle that kind of cargo, we'd have thought they were reading science fiction. But Harry was smart, he saw it coming.

I passed on the longshoremen's union card the first day of 1974, when I was 62. I took all my work clothes, boots and all, to the laundromat, washed them, and put a sign up, "I'm retired. If you can use this stuff, it's yours." Soon we had to reprint and make more copies. I retired the first day of 1974, when I was 62. I took all my work clothes, boots and all, to the laundromat, washed them, and put a sign up, "I'm retired. If you can use this stuff, it's yours." Soon we had to reprint and make more copies. I was single, I didn't own anything, and I didn't owe anybody anything. I even sold a couple of stories while I was on the waterfront, and put that tape on the dock and that kind of set things in motion. They heard I could write and they accepted me, babied me along and got me involved. They asked me to write some stuff, and I wrote a steward newsletter for my ship. They put it up on the bulkhead in the mess room.

I retired in the whole revolution of cargo handling. When I started there was no packaged cargo. You stowed everything by hand. Then you began getting packaged cargo, crbs, robots and containers. If anybody told us 10 years before that we were going to handle that kind of cargo, we'd have thought they were reading science fiction. But Harry was smart, he saw it coming.

Bridges attended some Local 19 membership meetings in Seattle. He said, "We can fight the employers on this container issue and we can cost them millions of dollars. But we're going to lose money. You cannot fight progress. So here's what I propose. That's what I come up with the Mechanization and Modernization idea in the late 1950s of trading no opposition to containers for better health and welfare, early retirement and nobody loses a job.

A lot of guys thought, "Bridges is crazy," I says. "That's what you said when he started in about pensions, and now you're glad that happened. So the crazy old son of a bitch must know something." He told me on it, and I still think that was the best thing. There's a lot of guys that still say, "No, we should have fought it." Well, how are you going to fight the inevitable? We got a good deal out of it.

In the mid-1980s I made regular membership in the local. They had meetings for pool members and I used to speak. And I'd been active in MCS. So it wasn't too long before I ran for Local 19 executive board and got elected. I was vice-president of the local in the mid-1980s. Around the same time I became editor of the Local 19 newsletter, The Hook. When I was back in Seattle, I did start a newsletter for the union members of The Rusty Hook, the women at the ILWU.

That was when they disbanded the strike committee, which I thought was a shame, and paid back the strike fund. We had a Social Security overpayment for our local. I wrote about guys who'd throw their old beat up gloves and socks around, crap like that. "If they did that at home," I said, "the old ladies would beat their brains out.

Then we had what we called the "big lump." That was when they disbanded the strike committee, which I thought was a shame, and paid back the strike fund. We had a Social Security overpayment for our local. I wrote about guys who'd throw their old beat up gloves and socks around, crap like that. "If they did that at home," I said, "the old ladies would beat their brains out.

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The CPA published Order No. 39 Sept. 19, permitting 100 percent foreign ownership of businesses—except in the oil industry—and allowing companies to take their profits out of the country. Order No. 37 suspends income and property taxes for the year, and limits taxes on individuals and corporations in the future to 15 percent.

"Father Ali Kashab, manager of the Al Daura refinery, predicted that privatization would have an enormous effect.

"A worker starting here today has a job for life, under the old system, and there's no law which permits me to lay him off. But if I put on the hat of privatization, I'll have to fire 1,500 [of the refinery's 3,000] workers," said Al Kashab, formerly the manager of the maintenance department, as he sat in his machinist's overalls behind the huge desk of the plant director, a position he was only appointed to when the occupation began. "In America, when a company lays people off, there's unemployment insurance, and they don't lose from hunger. If I don't pay my employees, I lose my family.""

The state-owned Mamoun Vegetable Oil Factory, which employs 771 workers, is another prime candidate for sale to a private owner.

"But there's no private person in Iraq with enough money to buy this place," said manager Amir Faraj Bhaig. "It would have to be a foreign owner. They would like the assets, but would they want the workers?"

Foley, director of private sector development for the CPA, announced a list of the first state enterprises to be sold off, including cement and fertilizer plants, phosphate and sulfur mines—except in the oil industry—and allowing companies to take their profits out of the country. The CPA described its goal as a "fully thriving capitalist economy."
the plant, the sons of refinery workers have set up little roadside stands selling it to passing cars. 

"In Saddam's time no one could afford to retire. The pension wasn't enough to pay a taxi to collect the check," Betrab laughed. But the refinery and every other state enterprise did pay other important benefits. They had a system of bonuses and profit-sharing that often equaled the salary itself, and a food subsidy as well. All those benefits disappeared when the occupation authorities took over. Essentially, workers have suffered a drastic cut in income since April as a result of CPA decisions. A skyrocketing currency exchange rate has made imports more expensive, effectively cutting salaries even more.

No one in the refinery, except the fire department, has boots or gloves. Safety glasses are unknown.

"Lots of us have breathing problems, and there are accidents in which people get burned," explained Rajid Hassan, another union member. "If anyone gets hurt or sick, they have to pay for their own medical care, and lose pay for the time they are out of work.

Two months ago, organizers came out to the plant from the Workers Democratic Trade Union Federation or WDTUF. They encouraged workers in each of the nine departments to elect union committees and to choose leaders for the entire installation. While the plant manager seemed very willing to talk with the union, he was not in a position to sign any kind of contract with the federation.

The refinery and all other state enterprises are still covered by the law issued by Saddam March 11, 1987 abolishing such rights as the eight-hour day. Saddam's 1987 decree turned workers in the public sector into "civil servants," thereby denying them the right to form or join unions or to bargain. Their pension funds were handed over to the national treasury without compensation. At the same time that unions in the public sector were banned, new "unions" were created for the private sector to, according to the law, work with management to "increase efficiency and work discipline.

The 1987 law has a special effect on workers employed in enterprises set to be privatized. If they have no legal union, no right to bargain and no contracts, they will be much less able to mount organized resistance to the privatization and the huge job losses that will follow.

CPA head Paul Bremer issued a decree June 5 called "Public Incitement to Violence and Disorder." In part it says that those who "incite civil disorder, rioting or damage to property...will be subject to immediate detention by CPA security forces and held as a security internee under the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 [which governs prisoners of war]." The phrase "civil disorder" can easily be interpreted to apply to people advocating or organizing strikes.

A delegation of unionists from U.S. Labor Against the War (USLAW—a coalition of unions and labor councils that began opposing the Bush intervention before it took place) had a formal meeting Oct. 13 with Dr. Nuri Jafer, assistant to the Iraqi Minister of Labor. The unionists asked him three times whether Saddam's 1987 law would be repealed, and each time he failed to answer the question. Sitting on a couch next to him in his ornate office, Leslie Findley, a British operative assigned by the CPA to oversee the ministry, was asked the same question. She also refused to answer. Then she complained about the number of union delegations visiting the ministry making the same request.

"I'm going to tell the minister that these are taking too much of his time, and recommend that he concentrate instead on doing his job," she warned.

At the shoe and vegetable oil factories another new labor group, called the Workers Unions and Councils, began organizing workers this summer. With its encouragement, shoe factory workers organized a union and demanded legal recognition. Like workers at the refinery, they complained about long hours without overtime pay, lack of vacations and the disappearance of their extra pay when the occupation started.

When the USLAW delegation arrived at the factory, members called on the manager in his office, then went out onto the factory grounds. They were immediately surrounded by dozens of angry workers, each interrupting the others in their urgent efforts to describe their frustration.

Dressed in the standard blue overalls of most Iraqi factory workers, they looked as if they had just taken a break from operating their machines. They hesitated to give their names, perhaps remembering the fate of workers whose names wound up on lists maintained by Saddam Hussein's security police. But this didn't make them at all hesitant in speaking their minds within just a few yards of the manager's office.

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“Life has gotten much worse,” one said, pointing emphatically at the air “Everything is controlled by the U.S., we don’t control anything.”

“We’re demanding the right to form a union which must have full authority to represent workers here,” explained another worker “We must change this law that says we don’t have the right to a union. If the law doesn’t change, we’ll change it anyway, like it or not. We are the people.”

When an assistant manager listening to the conversation began to explain the reason why the factory director couldn’t negotiate, this worker lost his patience and his loud, intense disagreement made the manager retreat back into the office.

Even without legal status, unions are finding ways to operate and win some demands. The vegetable oil factory workers tried first to set up a union for the food products industry. The labor ministry then reminded them they were civil servants, and therefore prohibited from collective bargaining. The workers and the Workers Councils responded by setting up a union for civil servants, defying the ban. The new union’s demands include reclassifying the workers so that they can receive higher salaries, lifting the punishment of banned former employees and reinstating profit-sharing.

“A major reason for our existence is to eliminate the laws issued by the Baath regime,” said Majed Salih Kareem, the new union’s general secretary. Kareem displayed a long list of workers at the plant who had been arrested and executed during the Saddam Hussein regime for belonging to the Al Daia, a Shi'ite political party that is now part of the Iraqi Governing Council. The children of these workers were often blacklisted and unable to find employment. Kareem said his union feels that part of their job is to get the government and factory management to make restitution for the old crimes, and correcting the workers’ families.

Part of the Workers Councils network is the Union of the Unemployed. For months these idled workers had tried to get the government to negotiate on their behalf for survival payments for people who often are starved. They have not been compensated at all for the dismantling of the compound of the U.S. Occupation authorities July 29, and soldiers detained 21 of the union’s leaders as a result.

“The money they spent on just 10 combat helicopters would be enough to meet the needs of all these unemployed, did our harm done to work, to our country,” claimed Qasim Hadi, the general secretary for the Union of the Unemployed, who has been arrested twice in protest.

In the face of extreme levels of unemployment, the occupation authorities have claimed that the contracts for reconstruction given to U.S. corporations will result in jobs for large numbers of Iraqis. In an Aug. 13 letter to the Union of the Unemployed, William B. Clatanoff, the then-CPA advisor to the Ministry of Labor, boasted that he intended in August a representative of the International Confederation of Trade Unions (ICFTU). Guy Ryder, the ICFTU’s general secretary, called for an international labor delegation to visit Iraq to investigate conditions for workers. The USLAW delegation has also visited Iraq.

“Ensuring respect for workers’ rights, including freedom of association, must be central to building a democratic Iraq and to ensuring sustainable economic and social development,” the ICFTU said in a May 30 statement. “Democracy must have roots. It is important that the international labor movement send a message to workers here that their struggle is an integral part of the struggle of workers throughout the world.”

Iraqis are a security threat,” said a manager for the Tamimi Company, a contractor providing food service for 60,000 soldiers.

Instead, the firm brought in 1800 workers from Pakistan, India, Nepal and Bangladesh. Tamimi in turn is a contractor to U.S. construction giant Kellogg, Brown and Root, a subsidiary of the Halliburton Corporation. Halliburton’s no-bid contracts in Iraq is worth more than $4 billion. Those Iraqis who do get hired to work for the Americans on the bases describe oppressive working conditions. Mutwafa al Saidy, who works for U.S. contractors performing construction work at the Baghdad airport, complained that soldiers aim guns at the workers wherever they go, even to the toilet. Workers are paid $5 a day, but have to give $2 of that to a “translator” who threatens to tell the soldiers they are terrorists unless he gets paid. Workers have to pass through three different gates to gain access to the area where they work. Al Saidy described instances when they were held in a no-man’s land between the gates all day, yet they are punished for arriving a few minutes late to work.

Iraqis are on strike for the presence of prisoners in the compound. Al Saidy said he’s seen children brought in from the soccer fields, bales in hand, old men in their shoes and hospital patients carrying their drip bags. He described treatment bordering on contempt—food thrown on the ground, prisoners hit with sticks and other forms of disrespect.

In August a representative of the International Labor Organization, Walid Hamdan, visited Iraq. On his return he made a report to the International Confederation of Trade Unions (ICFTU). Guy Ryder, the ICFTU’s general secretary, called for an international labor delegation to visit Iraq to investigate conditions for workers.

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Iraqi police struggle to control a crowd of unemployed men.
Baghdad, Iraq (10/9/03)—Muhsein Mull All is a hero to many Iraqis—workers to those who knew him in his own labor building unions for dockworkers.

For his efforts he went to prison, lived in exile and spent two prison twice, lived in exile and spent two

But in the midst of occupation authorities, unions on the docks of Basra, the largest port city in the south of Iraq. They needed to organize, and more than 400,000 Iraqis died in the Second World War.

U.S. companies fire dockers, killing them.

The CIA helped overthrow the government of Karim Rassem, Mull All was arrested. This time he was not released. Instead, subcontracting companies were allowed to hire workers on a daily basis as dockers. Finally, the longshore workers re-boiled. Their union demanded a hiring system under their control and a daily guaranteed wage, even if there was no ship to load or unload.

When the Baath Party took power in 1968, it purged the unions of their leaders and suppressed their activities.
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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
Vancouver seafarer’s mission celebrates 100 years

By Tom Price

Thousands of people lined the streets in Vancouver as the city celebrated Sea Sunday Sept. 21 with a 14-block long parade. Observed around the world, Sea Sunday in Vancouver, British Columbia honors the 80,000 seafarers who enter area ports annually from about 74 countries.

The parade this year was dedicated to the 100th anniversary of the Flying Angel Seafarers Club, a non-denominational mission to seafarers sponsored by the Anglican Church.

From its two centers in Vancouver and Seattle, the mission provides sailors free transportation, telephone and e-mail services, an inexpensive gift shop with clothing and personal articles, as well as game rooms and quiet areas. Sailors can read ITF seafarers’ literature, and contact the local ITF Inspector, Peter Lahay, if there are problems aboard ship. Retired longshoreman Fred Jay chairs its Board of Directors.

Longshore locals, including Jay’s Local 500, joined the parade and built a float out of miscellaneous dock equipment. They hung a banner on it reading: “Longshore Congratulates the Mission on its 100th Birthday.”

The parade began at the mission on East Waterfront Rd. and meandered through much of the city, with a swirl of kilts and the lilt of bagpipes heard blocks ahead. It ended at the mission’s birthplace, St. James church. The Rev. Richard Roberts led a service for maritime workers.

Governor General Iona Campagnolo, representing Queen Elizabeth in B.C., spoke during the service on the importance of the mission and its shipboard visits.

“Do we all share the desperation of seafarers denied shore leave,” she said. “Their ships can become litigation and its shipboard visits. A lot of them asked us to write some letters, they showed us pictures of their families.”

The Ballantyne slipped out of harbor before further action could be taken, apparently without a full load.

“One of the guys was Chinese, like me, and I can still see his face,” Jay said. “I think about what went through their minds.”

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ILWU LONGSHORE VICTORY HONORED

Coast Committeeman Joseph Wendt (at microphone) accepted the Washington State Jobs with Justice’s 10th Anniversary Solidarity Award on behalf of the union along with local officers and rank and file members in Seattle Oct. 25. The plaque is in recognition of the ILWU’s 2002 contract victory and reads: “For beating back the Bush Administration and Corporate America with a contract victory last winter and for the ILWU’s many years of solidarity with workers other than they.”

Also honored that evening at the Jobs with Justice Banquet held at the Scottish Rites Temple were Larry Gossett for being the leading force behind Seattle’s annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day celebration and the Justice for Janitors campaign.

“If 10,500 longshore workers can stand up to the immense forces that opposed us and succeed, think of the endless possibilities if all American workers united in solidarity for the progress of all,” Wendt said to the applause of the gathering.
Books and videos about the ILWU are available from the union’s library at discounted prices!

**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
- Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s By Bruce Nelson: the most complete history of the origins, meaning, and impact of the 1934 strike. $13.00
- The Union Makes Us Strong: Radical Unionism on the San Francisco Waterfront By David Wellman: the important new study of longshoremen organizing in the northern California warehouse and distribution industry. $15.00 (paperback)
- A Terrible Anger: The 1934 Waterfront and General Strike in San Francisco By David Selvin: the newest and best single narrative history of 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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