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The employers’ plan to shred the longshore contract

By James Spinosa
ILWU International President

If you think ratifying a contract with longshore employers that guarantees ILWU jurisdiction is a lock on your job, think again. The shipping and stevedoring companies that make up the Pacific Maritime Association—the employer group under contract with the ILWU—are setting up another organization designed to make an end run around your legal contract and oust your job. The ILWU contract developed through decades of wrestling with the employers. Your first contract that established the union after the great strike of 1943 brought us the dispatch hall and protections against unfair and unsafe conditions on the job. The employers didn’t stop assaulting our dispatch halls until we won the bitter strike of 1948. Then the employers reorganized as the Pacific Maritime Association and agreed to our system of cooperation and arbitration. But today the PMA is moving away from those past commitments to the contract. The days the union could work with the employers to build a better industry for everyone seem far away. A faction set up in the PMA is trying to frustrate the 2002 contract settlement and undermine it in new and devious ways.

The organization this faction wants to set up is called the West Coast Marine Terminal Operators Discussion Agreement. They have to call themselves a “Discussion group” and get approval to meet from the Federal Maritime Commission in order to avoid prosecution under federal anti-trust laws. But it’s not as if all they were doing was getting together and talking about matters of mutual concern. They are already moving those discussions into ways to violate our jurisdiction, to outsource the work that Section One of our contract defines as ILWU jobs. Without those jobs we will not have our wages, benefits and pensions or a union to defend them. The Discussion group has formally put up to high tech companies a Request for Proposals (RFP) to develop an electronic tag or transmitter to be put on each truck that services the terminals. They will have encoded in it all the information about the contents of the container being brought into the terminal. As the truck enters the gate, this information will be automatically transferred to a central command center as the truck rolls past.

The employers, set up outside the ILWU and the contract obligations, programmed and serviced by non-ILWU workers, are an alter-ego to the PMA that was the deal—ones that were set up to frustrate the 2002 contract settlement and undermine it in new and devious ways. A faction within the PMA is trying to frustrate the 2002 contract settlement and undermine it in new and devious ways.
LOCAL 5 WINS HEALTH CARE FIGHT

After fighting for nearly eight months to maintain health benefits, ILWU warehouse, retail and allied job and joined them. Altogether, more Safeway," said Local 5 Shop Steward through non-economic issues for a few months after they opened negotiations in July. "Bargaining had slowed down completely when management started talking money. Powell's first health proposal would have doubled monthly premiums, imposed new co-pays on doctor visits and made prescription drugs six times more expensive than they had been. 

Mayors of traditional and creative mobilizations by Local 5— including a solid unfair labor practice strike on the day after Thanksgiving, the busiest shopping day of the year—didn’t move management a bit. Even the International President Bob McElrath and longshore Local 14's Seafund started negotiations. It is clear that Local 5 had the backing of the ILWU. Powell's ball, cancelled sessions, then refused to meet from Nov. 25 on.

In an unfair labor practice charges in late January over the failure to bargain, and got nearly three-fourths of the membership to sign a letter urging management back to the table. The two sides began meeting under the mediator immediately after Powell's got the letter.

The Powell's contract should provide a "day of action for health care" Feb. 14 that put the talks back on track. The rally targeted Powell's as well as Safeway, linking the contract struggles of the Southern California and those of the Southern California grocery workers.

The event began with some 80 activists quietly shopping at Powell's main store on the day after Thanksgiving, gathered at a nearby park. At an appointed hour, the "shopppers" converged in the main store and started silently shopping and other customers and belting out love songs tweaked for the occasion.

"We have to fight for health care, even if we don't get what we want," said Portland Jobs with Justice organizer Laurie King. "We need to fight for health care that isn't cool!"

They presented the workers with a hatbox full of chocolates and gave Powell's CEO Ann Smith a not-so-sweet Valentine's card when she leafleting with those of the Southern California grocery workers.

"We have to fight for health care for all and these contracts are a big part of it," said Portland Jobs with Justice organizer Lauri King "We need to fight for no cuts in employer health and some kind of national health care plan. Health care is not a privilege. It's something we all need and not having it grinds us down to a very low level."

—Marcy Rein

BIG RALLY FOR OAKLAND 25 DEFENDANTS

OAKLAND—A boisterous crowd of several hundred people rallied outside Oakland's Superior Court building to oppose the prosecution of 25 people arrested April 7, 2003 at a dockside antiwar rally. "They demand—" the district attorney's office filed a motion to dismiss the case. The judge ordered the prosecutor to turn over documents and video tapes in violation of civil rights. The judge ordered the prosecutor to turn over the documents. One of the subpoenas included video tapes, however, was blank.

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Injuries to six of its ten observers and three arrests. Police shot Local 19's Billy Kepoo with a wooden pellet, tearing his thumb and exposing the bone. Activist Will Rosenthal, shot in the leg, suffered permanent nerve damage.

The district attorney's office filed misdemeanor charges June 23 against Heyman and 34 protesters. Injured protesters and all nine injured ILWU members filed a federal lawsuit June 26, charging the police with violation of civil rights.

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—Marcy Rein
Bush lies, proposes dishonest budget

By Lindsey McLaughlin

WASHINGTON — Bush has refused to release money to maintain the channel. The Bush budget proposes to make his expirations permanent and to roll back benefits.

Bush’s budget ensures that American workplaces will be dangerous. He proposes to slash the Occupational Safety and Health Administration by $6.5 billion. The third year’s budget once again proposes to disburse Medicare funds to the governor of the state—a ruinous plan.

Bush’s budget is most callous in its cuts to health care for the nation’s impoverished. This year’s budget once again proposes to disburse Medicare funds to the governor of the state—a ruinous plan.

Bush’s economic report as well as his chief economic advisor Gregory Mankiw said it was good to send jobs overseas. Bush’s economic report values the contributions of jobs created by his policies are at best delusional—at worse, just more lies.

Two million Americans are expecting to exhaust their unemployment benefits over the coming months. The United States of America’s budget is all talk, no action.

In her 57-page Jan. 23 decision, federal law, she wrote. "The budget is all talk, no action. The Bush PRIORITIES are not tax deductible. The Bush PRIORITIES include job destruction and more fees. The Bush PRIORITIES for the biggest sink hole of Bush policies are the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, but light on accomplishment."

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Secretary-Treasurers cope with new rules

By Gene Vrana, ILWU Director of Educational Services & Librarian
Photos by Frank Wilder

The ILWU’s Secretary-Treasurers Conference has not fared well under the Bush administration. In 2001 the events of 9/11 interrupted the proceedings and shocked the participants. This year’s edition was burdened by new anti-labor administrative regulations and procedures imposed by Bush.

Yet once again the gathering pulled together to prevail in difficult circumstances and increase their knowledge and skills in order to better carry out their financial and organizational responsibilities for the benefit of the rank and file. Of the 66 participants, 36 were local officers, 21 were trustees, and nine clerical employees—representing 34 locals and IBU regions from Alaska to San Diego, making it by far the most representative group yet to attend a Secretary-Treasurers Conference.

International Secretary-Treasurer Willie Adams opened the conference by emphasizing the importance of learning how to survive the Bush administration’s anti-labor program, including the increased burden placed on unions by more complicated, time-consuming, and expensive federal regulatory procedures.

He also noted how the conference’s mix of local officers, trustees, and clerical employees continues to be a uniquely ILWU approach to training that enriches the educational and union-building experience of the sessions.

The program was initiated in 1999 to help improve compliance with federal regulations and internal union procedures. Held this year Feb. 2-5 in Palm Springs, California, the hot topics were recent changes to procedures in the Labor Management Reporting and Disclosure Act on LM-2 forms, and procedures controlling political action fundraising that are greatly impacting how the union collects money for its Political Action Fund.

Instructors were a combination of ILWU attorneys, International officers and staff and local union officers. Participants got a chance to get their hands dirty in an audit workshop set up to help provide the knowledge and skills to fulfill the internal financial obligations of their offices—their “fiduciary responsibility.”

Other topics included clarification of compliance with Beck procedures and case law governing “financial core members,” an overview of compliance with federal regulations. ILWU procedures governing the conduct of union elections and a training session on bookkeeping software increasingly popular among several locals and compatible with electronic filing of government forms.
UFCW rank and filers: Why we walked the line

I’ve worked for Von’s for 34 years, and I’ve never gone through anything like this in my life. I raised two children as a single mother. This particular job got me through that. And I’ve always been very, very proud to work for Von’s. It just upsets me so much to see what the corporations are trying to do to the labor force of the United States of America. It scares me, and that’s why I’m standing strong, and I’ll continue standing strong for the labor movement from this moment on.

Kevin Portnall

No one’s really pleased being out here, especially with the company making money hand over fist. Not just Von’s by itself, but all three of them combined. Profits have risen 225 percent over the last 10 years. Let us get back to work. They can also make concessions. In the latest union proposals, we gave in a lot, and they just walked away from the table like we slapped them in the face. They are just trying to bust the union. It’s a disgrace, because from the workers, our high integrity is making them a high profit. I have no complaints on how I’ve been treated over the last 23 and a half years. Why all of a sudden do they want all these take-aways now? They’re heartless.

John Fiddler

This strike is not about Wal-Mart. They do not fear Wal-Mart, they’re inspired by Wal-Mart. They want to see us get their [Wal-Mart’s] type of wages, their type of benefits. When I took this job 25 years ago, they promised me the best benefits, the best medical and the best pension program. Now they want to take it away from us. There are over 40 take-aways on the table. They don’t tell the public that. They claim it’s a family-run business, but it’s not. It’s just plain corporate greed, that’s all it’s about.

Lori Rodriguez

I’ve been working for the company for 29 years, and I think this really sucks. I’m about to lose my benefits and my retirement. I just want to go back to work.

Nancy Mehlmauer

We’re doing this to keep affordable health care and to keep this a class industry to be proud of. We want to make sure that the employer maintains the contribution to our pension plan, and not the lower levels they are now offering. I want to retire with a decent pension.

Tanae Sanders

I’m concerned about the older employees who have kids and bills to pay. Myself, I live with my mom, so the effect on me hasn’t been as bad. We broke the record for being out here. We do appreciate all the people who support us by shopping elsewhere.

Jim Griffin

I’m out here to protect my pension and my medical benefits. I’ve been with the company 39 years, but I’m out here for the people behind me to make sure they have a decent living standard and medical benefits. The union has made California what it is, it brought wages up, it’s what made the middle class. Now they are trying to downsize the middle-class. I don’t think it’s right. Everyone is entitled to a decent wage and medical benefits. I don’t want to be on welfare, I don’t want food stamps and I don’t think the State of California and L.A. County should pay for my medical benefits. That’s why I am here, and I think the company owes me that.

John Hunter

I’ve been with company for 34 years, working in produce. As a produce manager, I went through several strikes. This is the worst the retail clerks have ever had, and the longest. We’ll be out here during the whole duration, and we’ll be out here as long as it takes. We’re fighting for our benefits. They want us to make a co-payment that no one can afford. They want to put caps on the medical, make us pay 50 percent of our hospital, doctor and prescription bills. They want to have two-tiered wages. This would devastate the future of our union. We have to stay strong.
Other locals organize for upcoming contracts

By Steve Stallone

SoCal grocery workers accept troublesome pact


And we are going to take the next step with the questions and ask how many they are willing to do to get what they want," Lind said. "We are going to tie actions to the demands."

The UFCW International leaders have a three-day meeting. "There's hope that newly installed president Joe Hansen (10 -尺) can play that role." Grogan said. "We need someone to help unite the clans and Hansen could play that role."

The task at hand now is organizing the union's strengths and exploiting the companies' weaknesses.

This is a protracted fight and we need to figure out how to keep pressure on the employers in different ways," Grogan said.

Part of that will be enforcing the contract on the shop floor, like making sure vendors don't drop out. Part of that will be public pressure, building on the high-profile successes in Southern California and mobilizing all the community and faith groups and the elected officials who came out in support towards the end of the Southern California fight.

Local Central Labor Councils and the California Labor Federation are geared up for the fight and the AFL-CIO's field staff is itching for another shot at the companies.

"When the Southern California locals were doing eight weeks into the strike, we're already doing now," Lind said.

The UFCW organizers know that the grocery workers can lose more than $2 billion in sales in Southern California even though there wasn't a statewide or national boycott in force and that rattled the stockholders. So now there's talk of beginning to organize an effective boycott of the stores. In the next few months UFCW will get politicians union leaders and community and faith groups to sign petitions pledging to boycott if necessary, so they are ready to move in short order.

"We will have that all lined up and then say to the companies, 'If you even put two-tier systems or caps on health care on the table, we will pull the boycott.'" Grogan said.

February 2004

'The DISPATCHER'
Ike Morrow: Tacoma's Legend

Introduction by Harvey Schwartz

In honor of Black History Month, February's oral history profiles Isaac (Ike) Morrow, a legendary figure on the Tacoma waterfront who just retired January 31. Morrow, a tough, hard-working realist with a powerful streak of kindliness, was the original inspiration behind the Port of Tacoma's unique straddle carrier-driven North Intermodal Yard. He started on the waterfront in Local 23 during the early 1960s, became a Port of Tacoma Foreman in 1972, and a Port of Tacoma Terminal Foreman in 1981. Morrow became a father confessor to a new generation of Black and White longshore workers. He was awarded a handsome plaque for this service by Tacoma's African American Longshoremen's Association in the 1980s. In applauding his contribution to the waterfront community, the plaque's inscription characterized him as "head engineer of the soul train" in a reference to his influence and to the celebrated fact that his four-longshore sons then worked for him.

I interviewed Morrow in late January, during his last week on the waterfront. From the truck that served as his command center overlooking the North Intermodal Yard that he helped create, he tirelessly aided my work and even arranged a strad ride for me with one of his top drivers, Darryl Dixon. Here is Morrow's story.

ISAAC (IKE) MORROW

Edited by Harvey Schwartz

Current Curator, ILWU Oral History Collection

I was in a little place called Froggville Bottom in Choctaw County, Oklahoma in 1940. My dad's name was Isaac Morrow and my mom's name was Ada. We were one of the first families to move from Choctaw County to Washington. So, my folks had to make a decision. My dad became a Black and White longshoreman. He started on the waterfront in Local 23 during the early 1960s, became a Port of Tacoma Foreman in 1972, and a Port of Tacoma Terminal Foreman in 1981. Morrow became a father confessor to a new generation of Black and White longshore workers. He was awarded a handsome plaque for this service by Tacoma's African American Longshoremen's Association in the 1980s. In applauding his contribution to the waterfront community, the plaque's inscription characterized him as "head engineer of the soul train" in a reference to his influence and to the celebrated fact that his four-longshore sons then worked for him.

I interviewed Morrow in late January, during his last week on the waterfront. From the truck that served as his command center overlooking the North Intermodal Yard that he helped create, he tirelessly aided my work and even arranged a strad ride for me with one of his top drivers, Darryl Dixon. Here is Morrow's story.

Ike Morrow presides over his domain at the North Intermodal Yard.

It was never easy, although it didn't take me long to start working 25 years for McChord Field. I guess I am lucky. Dad always had at least two jobs, maybe three. My mom worked until I was 13 or 14. We always had food on the table. One day, to beat the heat and the cold in Eastern Washington, dad just packed up and came over here to Tacoma. He was a naturally heavy-equipment operator and wound up working 25 years for McChord Field. I guess I am my father's son, because that's what got me going on the waterfront—my ability to handle equipment. In my early days in Local 23 I became a real good crane driver.

I went into the Marine Corps in 1959. That's how I got on the waterfront when I got back to Tacoma. James Cook, a guy in my Marine outfit, was a reservist from here who worked as a longshoreman. He asked me what I did for a living. I told him I worked in the bar at the Wintthrop Hotel. I'd worked my way up in another place from dish washer to bar manager. Cook asked me what I made, and I told him. Then he asked me if I ever thought about being a longshoreman. "Come on down," he urged, "And try it some time." And I did. That was 42 years ago.

I started coming down to the waterfront when I had a chance—a day here, a day there. When I went home from my first day throwing these big flour sacks there was nothing left in my tank. My muscles were raw and every joint in my body ached. It was a horrible day, but I refused to quit. At first I hated the waterfront because it was dirty and the people were so rough in those days. But it was good money and I got lucky and made the bench, which meant you became a permit man, and got picked, I eventually learned, partly because of my work attitude and partly because they mistakenly thought I was the grandson of a legendary longshoreman named Barney Bucker.

Actually, the only thing that kept me on the waterfront is the money. I was once in an accident. We were making a shift and I realized I didn't belong to anyone, they kind of ostracized me. Nastepism was strong back then. For six months hardly anybody would talk to me or teach me anything. The Black guys ostracized me same as the Whites. So I decided I'd show them. And that's why I'm still here today!

I came to love the waterfront. Eventually all four of my sons became longshoremen. They earned their way in through a high school program. When I started I was just a little shit, a 145 pounder tossing 150-pound sacks and 450-pound bales of pulp. It was never easy, although it didn't take me long to start to get it. My wife's support helped, too.

Then I ran into a Black guy named Willie Lee. One day, he says, "I'm going to show you how to be a longshoreman." And he would yell and scream and harass me. I was with that man so much he made me a damn good longshoreman. It seemed like all the Black guys then were huge, 6'2", 6'3"... 240, 250. Here I was 150 pounds. I couldn't muscle it like the big guys. So Willie Lee taught me how to use every ounce of my body for leverage. One time we had this 450-pound bale of pulp wedged in tight on its edge. These big guys were down in the hold sweating with peaveys trying to get it in place. Finally Harvey Matthews, the hatch tender, came down. He wasn't a big guy. There were two bands holding that pulp that you could get your hands on—one in back, one in front. Matthews reached back with two hands, grabbed the bands, squatted down, humped the bale with his body, picked it up, and shoved it in place, using his legs and everything. That's leverage. I never forgot that lesson.

Back when I was still new you didn't talk with your mouth because they'd send you down the road. I can recall how this White old-timer, Bud Mostrom, used to show me so much disrespect. One day he asked this other young man to work a pulp ship with him. We were the only two younger guys there. Mostrom looked right in the eye and said, "Picked a young stud, because some of these kids can't handle it..."

I'd see the pictures of the civil rights movement on the waterfront. I thought "no" at first. Then, as the work became mechanical and gentrified, I said to myself, "Well, what's that once thought about you," changed my mind and decided I'd never hard-time women on the waterfront. In fact, I've come to admire them.

I had my own little civil rights movement on the waterfront in the 1960s, teaching people to respect me. Every time I'd see the pictures of the dogs and the hoses attacking Blacks in the South I'd get mad, and Lord help the first guy who crossed me the next day. The union itself wasn't prejudiced, but I had our individual problems on the waterfront.
For instance, just after Martin Luther King died we were working rubber when our gear broke down. Back then you waited for repairs. I heard these White kids down below from where I was. They were talking about shooting Black people. Foul names came up like nigger and mudder. Finally I exploded. I grabbed a bear claw, which is like an axe handle with a triangle end and nubs to pull the rubber. I jumped down 12 feet to where these guys were and landed on boards. It sounded like a gun shot.

I screamed, “Come on!” I’d tried to hold it all in, but I’d had enough. I got these four guys in one corner and I was going to kill somebody. All of a sudden I heard this soft, caressing voice. “Take it easy, Ike. You’re 280 pounds, a gentle giant. After much talking, he said, “Thank you, brother.” He was a white guy. Then we all became good friends.

If you ever get lashed, the first person you think of is the person who can get you out. I’ve been stuck for 12 years. Finally I exploded. I grabbed a bear claw, which is like an axe handle with a triangle end and nubs to pull the rubber. I jumped down 12 feet to where these guys were and landed on boards. It sounded like a gun shot.

“Where,” I asked, “are these guys going?” She said, “Up to Tukwila” where the BN rail yard was. “Well,” I says, “why can’t we make rail delivery right here instead of putting all those trucks at our gate?” She said, “Why can’t we? Let’s give it a shot.” We talked to management. The Port had a little rail setup with 21 cars in the North Yard and 10 elsewhere. We had house and dock tracks. I said, “I’ll make it work.”

To talked to all the longshoremen. The Port gave us the next ship. We had all these rail cars waiting when the ship discharged. Fast as the cars got on deck we loaded the cars using straddle carriers (strads). Our tallest strads could maneuver right over the cars. It worked beautifully. The pressure was off the doggone gate. Then, after months of success, the BN said, “That’s enough. You’re not going to get any more railroad cars. You’re cutting into our load center profits.” That really ticked Judovic off. I don’t know where she applied pressure, but six months later they relented and I got those cars again.

Then it just kind of blew up as people got intersted. Maersk Line came to town because of our intermodal yard. Everybody up in 1980 some had little mom and pop operations with a few conventional cars, but no intermodal dock. But here the Port started expanding in our North Intermodal Yard because Maersk bought into Taurus’ program. When Maersk got to town, they initially took the car loading process out of our hands. This was really insulting. We’d been loading successfully for years.

Maersk fumbled around for several months. The last train they loaded was 300 cans in 16 containers. Tally seemed the proper time for me to step in.

“Look,” I said, “just give us three sorts of containers—20 footers, heavy 40 footers for bottoms and light 40 footers for tops—and get out of our way.” What they were donin’ was flooding the yard with different kinds of equipment so nobody could move. Our adjustment cut out all that traffic. The next week or so we moved 571 cans in one shift. Then we started setting records like crazy.

Of course, every system in the North Intermodal Yard was protected by the ILWU. At first nobody knew anything about loading railcars. But we’d have a meeting, me and my guys. And they just worked their asses off. Now you’ve got all those lines—Evergreen, Maersk—because we were so productive. It’s been a boon to Tacoma and to the men. Once we got up and cranking it opened doors for the entire coast, too. But we were the grandparents of them all.

I had a terrific crew of drivers, ground men, and clerkers in those early days. My six crack pioneer strad drivers were Harry Dixon, Dave Ginnis, Roger Marshall, my son Terry Morrow, Ramo Natalicio, and Tony Tomal. We used to give synchronized shows loading railcars before we attracted customers. Our strads were painted orange, so the nickname was Orange Angels. Early on we also employed a great top pick driver to complement our strads. His name was Signal White. There should be a statue of those “Magnificent Seven” drivers, as they were called, down at Local 23.

The zenith was 1987. We set a record of 937 lifts in that shift. We’ve done over 1200 moves in a shift since then, but that 937 was made with just three tracks and six three-high machines that could go over railcars. Later we had eight tracks and more strads. Some of those 937 runs were over two miles long. When I look back on it now it still blows my mind.

After a while most guys called me “Pops.” They seemed to dub me a kind of a father figure. White guys, too—even more White than Black—would ask me to counsel them. I wanted to help, and I didn’t believe in polarization, which is horrible. I tried to get guys together. We formed a group called the African American Longshoremen’s Association (AALA) so guys could at least have somebody to talk to.

Our union back in those days lacked any line of communication, even for White guys. If you had a problem with a foreman or a guy, who did you talk to? I tried to get people together so they could talk to each other. The pressure was so great that now you just get transferred up here from Portland, which was racist. They had chips on their shoulders. I tried to settle them down and urge them not to make every situation a Black and White issue, because every group getsticker that way. Eventually the ILWU awarded me a plaque in appreciation of my work.

That really touched me. When we were looking back, this waterfront has been good to me. It’s given all my sons a job. And the waterfront is about the only place I know where a man, especially a Black man, can be as much of a man as he wants to be. That’s worth its weight in gold. Sure, there are racists on the waterfront, but the union is not racist. If it was, how come I was so successful? And how come my son Terry was elected Dispatcher, one of the most powerful jobs on the waterfront? How could Willie Adams get elected International Secretary-Treasurer? You get those votes because the union itself respects you, not because you’re White or Black.

Today we have many new people on the waterfront who don’t know as much about unions. If you’re going to come into this industry, you have to be taught where you have been, where you are now and where you are going. You have to be taught the longshore way. We can only do this by education. I think the ILWU lockout was a wake-up call to us.

Now everybody knows we’re here and what we control. We better be ready for 2008. Don’t sit there and do nothing. If you’re a fat cat. You’d better be ready for a fight.
The Netherlands declared it will no longer abide by an international labor standard protecting dockers' work and rights. The announcement came at a Jan. 26 meeting attended by maritime employers, the dockers' union FNV Bondgenoten, the labor ministry and the International Labor Organization, which in 1919 and 1970, respectively, gave the country's implementation of those labor protections.

In February 2004, Aart Jan de Geus, the Netherlands' Labor minister, called for the country to abandon the ILO Convention 137, which guarantees dockers' rights to organize and collectively bargain. The convention was ratified by The Netherlands in 1976, and requires signatory countries to maintain a registry of dockworkers and give preference to them in the allocation of technological advances when new jobs open up. Now the government desires an "observed" standard that would award dockers' work to the lowest bidders.

Abandoning the convention will harm all dockers, FNV Bondgenoten Coordinator Nick Stam said. "If we lose it in The Netherlands, then the Belgians and Germans also lose," Stam said. "If they can cheapen labor in Rotterdam, that will affect them because the ship owners will say their ports must lower prices or lose cargo to Rotterdam. If they can do it in the largest port in the world, they can do it anywhere."

The ILO, founded under the League of Nations in 1919, now ratified by the tri-partite ILO, all three partners-labor, employers and government—labor, employers and government—agreed that workers should have a say in the protection of their labor laws. Even Saddam Hussein's Iraq adopted Convention 137 in 1982.

Convention 137 came out of dockers' struggles during the imposition of containerization in the 1960s. Workers fought for their jobs, and trade disruptions followed. The ILO sought to solve the problem by establishing international standards. Even though wages were reduced and union representation was reduced, dockers were protected from their labor laws. Even Saddam Hussein's Iraq adopted Convention 137 in 1982.

The main center of Bangladesh's maritime industry is, according to the United Nations, "the Kingdom of the Ganges River." About the same size as New York City, Umm Qasr is described as "a crossroads of civilizations."

On the job in Rotterdam, three longshore workers are lowered by a crane to remove twistlocks on the containers. The seven-high stack is too tall to be worked with lash sticks, so the lashers go over the side. The person on the top is a radio operator who stays in touch with the crane operator for safety reasons.

International Dept. "This is a horrible sign of times ahead. We're looking at the de-unionization of the docks through casualization. Failure to maintain the lists is a direct threat to the future of our employment on the docks."

The Dutch dockers called for the support of all workers.

"This is an international problem for us to solve," Stam said. "We are preparing for the second half of this year because then The Netherlands will be chair of the EU (it rotates semi-annually). There will be a lot of attention then. All unions should send us a letter to the ILO and I will deliver it.

BANGLADESH DOCKERS RESIST SSA PORT PRIVATIZATION

The members of the Chittagong Port Workers' Union knew they were in for a long fight when they heard in 1997 that Stevedoring Services of America had cut a deal with their government to build a huge private terminal on their port. The two parties signed an agreement in 1998, and since then dockers have fought it to a standstill with strikes, demonstrations and court battles. But if the project is built, it will undermine the union contracts with the public port and threaten the Bangladeshi dockers' union's very existence.

Now the union is asking for international support, beginning with a workers' conference in Chittagong March 18-19.

The Port of Chittagong sits on the banks of the Karnafull River about nine nautical miles up from the Bay of Bengal in one of the poorest countries in the world. The half-billion dollar terminal SSA wants to build would make SSA the main player in that country's trade. Its location would effectively block much of the public port's traffic and its huge capacity would suck up most of its work. According to the union, this would have enormous social consequences.

"The main center of Bangladesh's communication and trade with the outside world is supposed to become the private property of a U.S. multinational which will be free to hire, dismiss and impose its rules on Bangladeshi workers," General Secretary Shariat Ullah said in appeal for international support. "No job will be secure. Previous union contracts will no longer operate."

With a public facility workers' rights as citizens in a parliamentary democracy give them some input to governmental decision-making. But with a U.S.-private, foreign corporation in control only answerable to its owners, citizens will have little chance of affecting corporate decisions. Without a union, dockers would become casual employees.

Union members objected to SSA taking over most of the work in Bangladesh's main port largely because of that company's anti-union attitude. Longshore Local 10 Union president Clarence Thomas attended the convention.

"It was one of the most beligerent of PMA member companies at the ILWU-PMA negotiations," Thomas told the conference, "They're outsourcing our jobs at the same time they are privatizing Chittagong."

The company has a cozy enough relationship with the Bush administration to have won a no-bid contract to run the docks at Um Qasr in occupied Iraq. Its officials also met with the Oakland Police before the April 7 demonstration against war profiteering at which police opened fire with "less lethal" weapons on demonstrators and longshore workers.

Chittagong's workers began their fight in 1997, as soon as they heard of the pending agreement with SSA. By July 2001 they had shut the port down for a total of 33 days with protests, according to The Cargo Letter, an industry journal. The government called off the plan after a three-day strike July 7, 2001, and it became clear that the scheme might founder.

But the U.S. government intervened. U.S. Ambassador Mary Ann Peters bluntly warned Bangladesh in a Jan. 1999 letter that SSA would be imperiled if SSA didn't get the terminal, according to the Bangladesh magazine The Holiday.

The 50,000 port workers continued demonstrations and hunger strikes. They formed a coalition with the port and Chittagong Mayor Mohiuddin Chowdhury, and took the government to court.

The coalition won a major round last May 19, as Supreme Court found that the government's deal with SSA was illegal. The court ruled the government had bypassed the jurisdiction of the Port Authority. The government granted the lease "in an arbitration manner, without...a competitive bidding procedure through public auction," the ruling said.

The coalition also exposed how one-sided the deal was—in SSA's favor.

The agreement gave SSA a 198-year lease in the land and the local Workers Federation President Fazluzzal Husain told Local 10's Tom Price, "Even under British rule it was only 99 years. All rights would remain with SSA; all control under the SSA's rules. There will be no Bangladeshi rules applied to that port. Only SSA employees would be factory workers."

Since the court decision the Port of Port of Chittagong has not been securing any new work and has not allowed any new yard cranes, according to a Feb. 19 Journal of Commerce report. Planned new construction will raise the annual capacity to 1.2 million TEUs. This increased capacity will help ease port congestion and could make the SSA plan unnecessary, even if it was still trying to build the private port.

Meanwhile the dockers are globally organizing. More than 500,000 workers from 119 countries will attend the conference. "We are calling the convention to save our ports, says Chittagong workers and save our country," Husain said.

HEALTH CARE COSTS TAKE CENTER STAGE

The most tangible sign yet of the breakdown of the American health care system was when some 70,000 grocery workers in southern California struck and were locked out for more than four months. Their bosses cited the increased cost of health care and low wages, but the life-and-death issue for them was who will pick up the tab for their health care.

Percuous though their economic well-being is, the baggers, checkers, stockers and other employees at Vons—a Safeway subsidiary—gave up their Thanksgiving week contract Oct. 11 and then submit to a company demand that they pay a substantially larger share of their health care costs. The company's weekly wage for Los Angeles super- market workers is $6.22 to $7.09, well below the $11.07 an hour demanded, according to the United Food and Commercial Workers, would have to come from them as much as $3 per week in co-pays by the end of the contract.

As soon as the UFCW-represented employees at Vons and Pavilions—
another Safeway subsidiary—walked off the job, Albertsons and Kroger subsidiary Ralph's locked out 1,100 workers, and Wal-Mart, among other employers, has been jerry-rigging various health care packages temporarily, but will eventually dismantle one of the best union health care plans in the country (see story page 7). Safety and priority claims are that they have to shift their costs to compete with Wal-Mart, a notorious job machine bottom-feeder, whose health plan is so expensive that employees can only afford the coverage. Their argument is overstated—at this point, even Wal-Mart’s don’t sell groceries—but it does underscore the burdens that the cost of providing essential human services is left in the hands of the largest and most maximizing corporations. And while the resulting burden is shifted most readily to the weakest and poorest sectors of society, the same logic actually fits for a total shift into the ranks of middle-class America.

The health care squeeze, as illustrated by the grocery workers’ struggle (CPA), is twofold. On the one hand, the U.S. health care system has spread our country in the world without a national health care system, leaving costs subject to the vagaries of an imperfect market in which the customs of the market, not an overall social welfare, have artificially limited choices and little access to relevant information. The supplier-driven system of medicine, drug companies, insurance companies, HMOs—have few effective price restraints. As a result, health care costs increase rapidly outstrip overall economic growth the U.S. now spends 12 percent of gross domestic product on health care, according to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, an amount equal to $5,440 per person in 2002.

Further adding to the costs is the sheer wastefulness of the current, very poorly organized administration Medical School study, for instance, concludes that $209 billion a year on useless health-care paper work, trip the cost of treating patients in the U.S. over the $1,000 mark and send them to one in Canada. One example: WellPoint in the U.S. had an administrative staff of 15,000 for 10.1 million customers, while the Ontario Health Insurance Plan covered a slightly larger population—11.7 million—with a staff of 1,400.

But as costs go up, the U.S. default position of privatized health insurance is breaking down because employers are eating at the higher bills. Indeed, the Commonwealth Fund, a private foundation that supports public policy research on health and social issues, reports that 32 percent of all uninsured workers in 2001 were employed by big companies. Enrollment in health plans offered by big business dropped from 80 percent in 2001 and in 2002 because of rising unemployment, but also because some workers dropped coverage that they could no longer afford. Wal-Mart, again, is the prototypical example, although it’s hardly alone in the practice: The company chose its workers, on average, to pick up 42 percent of the total cost of their health care coverage, or roughly 15 percent of the average of all large employers. As a result of such practices, the number of uninsured workers has been on a back-up and approaching 44 million—

Employers also are whacking retiree health plans. Roughly 10 percent of companies with more than a thousand employees gave up guaranteed coverage in just the past year, according to a recent study by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, and another 20 percent are expected to do so over the next three years. Meanwhile, of those that continue to offer retiree coverage, 71 percent hiked premiums last year and 46 percent plan to do so over the next three years.

Diminished coverage is even more extreme at the economic fringe, as exemplified by the grocery worker strike. Workers with the lowest fifth in incomes spent approximately 17 percent of their 2002 after-tax earnings on health care—or simply went without.

If employers are no longer willing to keep up their end of the social contract they accepted after World War II, the U.S. may finally have to adopt some kind of national health plan, just such a step was urged in mid-January by the National Academy of Sciences, which concluded after three years of research that “lack of health insurance for tens of millions of Americans has serious negative consequences and economic costs, not only for the uninsured themselves, but also for their families, the communities they live in, and the whole country.”

Although Canadian members of the ILWU have enjoyed the benefits of a nationalized health care system for several decades, U.S. opponents of such a plan frequently claim it results in health care “rationing” and lower overall levels of care. Statistics comparing U.S. and Canadian outcomes, however, don’t support the argument. Infant mortality rates are lower and life expectancy is longer in Canada than in the U.S. While and middle class U.S. and Canadian residents have similar odds of surviving cancer, those in the bottom one-third of the socio-economic ladder have a 25 percent better survival rate north of the border than south of it.

Which means as nothing else why the grocery workers fought for their scraps of health care coverage, and why the rest of us should pay attention.

—Andy Spiker Editor, The Guild Reporter

SAN FRANCISCO GETS A RAISE

San Francisco—The lowest-paid workers here got a hard-earned raise Feb. 23 when the city’s new minimum wage law took effect.

Strong grassroots campaigning by low-wage workers and their advo- cates; a pushed Proposition L to victory in the November 2003 election. Prop. L approved by more than 60 percent of San Francisco voters, raised the minimum wage for anyone working in the city to $8.50 per hour. This is the highest rate in the country and $1.75 per hour more than the California minimum wage $6.75.

The raise will make a marked dif- ference in their lives, said several workers at a City Hall press confer- ence celebrating the new law.

Now my family can eat more healthily and live more healthily,” said Lily Zhu, a waitress and member of the Chinese Progressive Association (CPA). “This can get us out of the SRO (single-room occupancy) hotel we’re living in.”

“Tuition at City College of San Francisco has gone up almost 100 percent,” said Ruby Kalsen-Bremer of Young Workers United (YWU). “This will help young workers sup- port themselves, get an education and stay in San Francisco.”

More than 5,700 workers will get an average annual pay increase of $1,846, according to a study by the Berkeley Center for Labor Research and Education. The study also found that 91 percent of San Francisco businesses would see cost increases of no more than 3 percent under the new law.

Using this to rebut business-own- ers’ claims the raise would ruin them, the Minimum Wage Coalition called and visited voters in San Francisco’s working-class neighborhoods. Besides the Young Workers and the CPA, the coalition included SEIU Local 790 and HERE Local 2, the Day Laborers’ Program, ACOB, People Organized to Win Employment Rights, the Central City SRO Collaborative and other community organizations.

—Marcy Reif

WORLD’S UNIONS BLAST U.S. LABOR LAW

Just in time for the Jan. 14-16 review of U.S. practices by the World Trade Organization, the world’s largest confederation of trade unions issued a highly critical report of U.S. enforcement of internationally recog- nized labor rights.

Noting that the U.S. is the world’s largest economy and its largest trading party, the Interna- tional Confederation of Free Trade Unions—of which the AFL-CIO is a member—nevertheless observed that it has ratified only two of the eight international labor conven- tions adopted by the ILO’s International Labor Organi- zation and subsequently affirmed by the ILO’s 1996 World Conference, then reaf- firmed in 2000. Unions can’t enforce the IFTU report makes clear, the U.S. refuses to live up to its responsibilities even as it continues to use its power to ensure that countries continue to deteriorate. Specifically, “The U.S. has not ratified Convention No. 78 on the Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organize, nor Convention No. 98 on the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining. Although the National Labor Relations Act is the primary U.S. labor law, it excludes substantial categories of workers, including agricultural and domestic worker, supervisors, and independent contractors. In addition, only 40 percent of all public sector workers have the right to bargain col- lectively. The right to organize is also protected as a foreign national workers—of which the AFL-CIO is a member—nevertheless observed that this rights are not guaranteed. Meanwhile, those who have such rights must claim them for themselves, and workers who have not have such rights are not guaranteed that employers routinely pervert.

Union penalties to those businesses that violate the law during any of four organizing campaigns, 75 percent of employers hire outside agencies to generate opposition to organizing drives, while 92 percent force employees to attend closed-door meetings to hear anti-union messages.

“In practice,” the report observes, “the right to organize is often violated and sanctions are not adequate. As a result, violations do not provide sufficient deterrents. The right to strike is rec- ognized but restricted.”

• The U.S. has not ratified Convention No. 105 on Discrimination (Employment and Occupation). The U.S. in 2002 added a list of discrimination and pay equity in a series of laws, including Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, the Employment Discrimination in Employment Act, the Equal Opportunity Act, and the Equal Pay Act of 1963. Yet despite these legislative milestones, women workers have made no progress in the past years after passage of the Equal Pay Act, for example, women still are paid only 76 cents of every dollar paid to men. The discrepancies are seen across all occupational categories: female physicians in 1999 were paid 62.5 percent of the average wage paid to male physicians, while nursing sales occupations the corresponding statis- tic was 59.9 percent.

Discriminatory wage patterns are even more pronounced among minor- ity workers. In 2000, for every $1 in mean wages paid to white workers, Hispanic men, 63.4 cents; white women, 72.2 cents; black women, 64.6 cents, and Hispanic women, 52.8 cents.

• The U.S. has not ratified Convention No. 182, the Worst Forms of Child Labor Convention, in 1999; it still has not ratified Convention No. 138, the Minimum Age Convention. ILO statistics showed 8.4 million children working under these protections, the U.S. between the ages of 15 and 19 in the year 2002: somewhere between 300,000 and 800,000 of them were in agriculture, which is second only to mining in its need for hard work conditions. More than 100 were killed on the job.

—Andy Spiker Editor, The Guild Reporter
We, the longshore workers, have not only the obligation, but the right to examine and ensure that all containers are in place at our disposal in order to do our job safely.
Everyday terror: The national insecurity state

By Adam Conrard

February 2004

The corporate elite is able to impose this regime of fear not only because a mere 13 percent of the U.S. workforce belongs to any kind of union and because the current federal framework of labor law is consistently enforced against organizing efforts, but for far deeper, deeper reasons too. Until the middle of the last century, workers for a given enterprise, or even whole industries, as in the New York garment district, tended to live close together and close to the workplace, in tenements or row houses. Before then, they had strong social networks and practiced mutual aid out of necessity. Union organizing, despite an even more hostile legal situation, was easier because it involves individuals, each fighting their own battles, as opposed to the collective strength of the group. It is no accident that the percentage of workers who have ever belonged to a union is highest among workers employed in jobs that are highly unionized.

This warms the hearts of the insurers, who are reaping a huge flow of capital into the coffers of investment banks and insurance corporations. At the same time, the defunding of public services over the last time this kind of terror was deliberately applied. To be fair, some unions and workers who organized in their own behalf had to overcome the shame we feel at what seem our own failures. Of course we may have made mistakes. But the economic and social conditions that have been imposed on us make the consequences of otherwise minor errors potentially deadly. It's as if the force of gravity has been doubled, so that even a small fall always breaks bones.

A terrorist is anyone says I'm naked or acting as if I loved and were loved when in fact I was alone and naked. I'm sick and waiting for test results, my spouse is talking divorce, I've found I'm charged with a felony and faces trial as an adult. What daily life is doing to them already. Such fear may reach the point at which Bush & Co. are replaced by a Democratic administration. But this by itself will not change the underlying trends. The constant threat of violence against most Americans is subjected to by the corporate elite and its allies in government and the mass media.

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YOU #978@ B+5+9/!#A!

A couple of letters in The Dispatcher of Jan. 2004 incite me to make some comments. I must admit, though, that I am not sure about the courtesy you demand for printing them. Seems to me that courteousness is a two-way street.

The letters I am referring to are from those writers who object to the liberal slant of my column. Someone who is a member of this union taking such an attitude shocked me. All I can say is that if this reality that in this country everyone is entitled to his personal opinion, but for acquire the knowledge of the benefits of belonging to the ILWU to object to. And another thing: no comment is mandatory.

Any organization, union or otherwise, that is progressive has to be liberal. Or else be content with the status quo, and willing for the only change to be backward.

One of these writers called you liberal bastards. That is much, much nicer than what I think he, and the other of the stripe, should be called! Keep up the good work.

Jim Hammons
Local 32, retired

INDEBTED FOR SPOTLIGHT

In response to two letters to the editor from The Dispatcher’s January publication complaining of The Dispatcher’s liberal slant, Webster’s Dictionary defines a liberal as one who is progressive in thinking or principles, open handed, generous, broadminded especially as to religious or political ideas.

I, for one, am indebted to The Dispatcher for spotlighting the Bush administration’s policies. And all the liberal bastards who sent them like to see a liberal union which helps and protects all others. I am indebted to those people who do not know the meaning of the word “liberal”.

If you remember correctly, you will note that it was the Reagan administration that slashed attack on unions, the working class, civil rights, the U.S. Constitution, Social Security and Medicare, and our judicial system, the environment, and the financial solvency of United States.

The Dispatcher has filed a void in the mainstream which the rightwing are reticent and remiss to cover.

Denise Schatte
Local 4

LIBERAL IS NOT A 4-LETTER WORD

Regarding those letters in the last Dispatcher, I wonder why someone who sent them like to see a liberal union which helps and protects all others. I am indebted to those people who do not know the meaning of the word “liberal”.

If you remember correctly, you will note that it was the Reagan administration that slashed attack on unions, the working class, civil rights, the U.S. Constitution, Social Security and Medicare, and our judicial system, the environment, and the financial solvency of United States.

The Dispatcher has filed a void in the mainstream which the rightwing are reticent and remiss to cover.

Denise Schatte
Local 4

Hard to believe the two letters from “conservatives” in the January issue of The Dispatcher.

I find it really sad and disturbing that men who claim to be part of our wonderful society do not have any idea of what it is all about.

For an example, they sound like the kind of reactionaries who for so many years tried to get rid of Harry Bridges. Their only explanation of why they come up with is that they have gotten such incredible benefits from belonging to the ILWU that they are not of our union they think of themselves as part of the conservative Republican elite!

If our union and our philosophy are so disturbing to these two men, and others like them I suggest you quit and get a job at Wal-Mart.

Robert “Skip” Melcher
Local 10, retired

MAJORITY RULES IN ILWU

The authors of letters entitled “Ashamed of The Dispatcher” and “Unfair to Conservatives” are certainly entitled to their opinions, but their opinions differ from ILWU Convention policy.

Unfair to Conservat ises can be certainly entitled to their opinions, but their opinions differ from ILWU Convention policy. Without going into detail I’ll simply point out that in a majority of the delegates at the last Convention passed membership resolution: “The delegates supported our own men and women in uniform. They called on the U.S. not to send them home—alive.”

The history of our union is a fascinating saga. One should take the time to read old editions of The Dispatcher, and in particular, Harry Bridges’ “On the Beam” columns. They’ll find progressive, working class oriented articles. As to the harangue against “liberal” it appears too many workers are listening to the lies of Ralph Limbaugh, Sean Hannity and Bill O’Reilly on hate. What I really fail to understand is why any work or liberal conservative will listen to those manipulated hands non-workers. Let’s all embrace what is written in The Dispatcher.

DENTAL PLANS: For Los Angeles Locals, dental choice is between Delta Dental Plan and the Kaiser, Simmon, Simon and Sygupema group plan. For San Francisco Locals, dental choice is between Delta Dental Plan and the Kaiser and Hemaent group plan. For Port of Portland/Local 10 Locals dental choice is between Blue Cross of Oregon Dentists, Oregon Kaiser Dental Plan and Oregon/Dental/Partnership Dental Plan. For Washington Locals dental choice is between Washington Dental Service and Dental Services.

Information on the dental plans, and Kaiser and Group Health Cooperative medical plans, and forms to change plans can be obtained at the Locals and the ILWU-PMA Benefits Office. The ILWU-PMA Coastwise Indemnity Plan description booklet is under preparation and will be forthcoming soon as it is available.

All enrollment cards must be completed and submitted to the Benefit Plans office by May 31 for the change to be effective July 1.

DO THE HANDS OF BROTHERS SYMOUR AND MORSE SHAKE WHEN THEY PICK UP THEIR PAY OR PENSION CHECKS?

They ask for balance in reportage on our working class newspaper as “liberal versus conservative” outlook.

Yes, they are correct when they say there are two sides; however, the opposing sides are corporate and working class, there are no other.

If there is a middle class, of whom do they speak? Do they rub elbows with the CEOs in the beer parlours?

I’m sure George W. Bush wasn’t very concerned about balance when he went ahead with his (conservative) program of gutting workers’ hard-earned rights and benefits.

Our union and its press are to be congratulated for taking the hard positions required to face up to the onslaught of the employers and THEIR government—there is no middle ground!

Deneil Scott
Local 500, retired

MAY IS MEDICAL, DENTAL CHOICE MONTH

Active and retired longshore families in the ports where members have a choice can change medical plans during the open enrollment period May 1 to May 31, 2004. The change will be effective July 1, 2004. San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Portland/Vancouver active and retired longshore workers may change dental plans in the month following open enrollment, or effective July 1, 2004. In addition to the May open enrollment period, members may change their health coverage once again during the plan years July 1, 2004 to June 30, 2005.

The July 1, 2002 Memorandum of Understanding between the ILWU and PMA provides that new registrants in the ports where members have a choice of medical plans shall be assigned Kaiser Permanente (Kaiser Plan) or Group Health Cooperative (HMO Plan) with the new registrant being put into the Kaiser Plan. After ten years, those registrants who have qualified for continued eligibility under Mid-Year/Annual review hours requirements may choose medical plans. New registrants in the ports of San Francisco, Los Angeles, Portland/Vancouver and Washington will have a choice of dental plans on the first of the month following registration, and may change dental plans during the Open Enrollment period and one additional time during the Plan Year.

MEDICAL CHOICE: The medical plan choice is between Kaiser Foundation Health Plan and the ILWU-PMA Coastwise Indemnity Plan. Western Locals, ILWU-PMA Coastwise Indemnity Plan Local 40, 92, 63 and 94, Northern California Locals 10, 18, 34, San Francisco, (34, 50, 75 and 91) and Oregon: Columbia River Locals 4, 66, and 92. In the West, Locals 23, 47, 52 and 98 are Group Health Cooperative and the ILWU-PMA Coastwise Indemnity Plan.

DENTAL PLANS: For Los Angeles Locals, dental choice is between Delta Dental Plan and the Kaiser, Simmon, Simon and Sygupema group plan. For San Francisco Locals, dental choice is between Delta Dental Plan and the Kaiser and Hemaent group plan. For Port of Portland/Local 10 Locals dental choice is between Blue Cross of Oregon Dentists, Oregon Kaiser Dental Plan and Oregon/Dental/Partnership Dental Plan. For Washington Locals dental choice is between Washington Dental Service and Dental Services.

Information on the dental plans, and Kaiser and Group Health Cooperative medical plans, and forms to change plans can be obtained at the Locals and the ILWU-PMA Benefits Office.

Registration fee is $15 for 3 days including 1 night’s lodging. Registration is free for ILWU members, ILWU-PMA and PMA employees. For information call (206) 425-5879.

(Author is the chair of the November 4th Annual Convention Committee and editor of the Local 4 Newsletter, the World of ILWU, which will be available in the week preceding the Convention.)

Port of Los Angeles:

date: 4/23/04

P.O. Box 425584, San Francisco, CA 94142
(415) 282-1908, Fax: (415) 695-1369

February 2004

The big dictionary (something rather than this) is a place where you can find information on a variety of topics. The dictionary contains definitions, synonyms, and antonyms for each word. It is also a great resource for finding the spelling and pronunciation of words.

For example, if you want to look up the word “liberal,” you would find the definition in Webster’s Dictionary. The definition might say something like “favoring or involving the extension or enlargement of individual rights and freedoms, especially political or religious freedoms.”

Another example is the word “union.” The dictionary might define it as “an association of people who have a common interest or who are members of the same organization.”

The dictionary can be a valuable tool for anyone who wants to improve their vocabulary or learn new words. It can also be a helpful resource for writing or speaking.

In summary, dictionaries are an important tool for learning new words and understanding their meanings. They can help you communicate more effectively and expand your knowledge of the English language.

How do you feel about dictionaries? Do you use them frequently, or do you rely on other resources, like online dictionaries or thesauruses?
February 2004

Mike and David Lomeli play cards at the Harry Bridges Institute office.

FATHER AND SON PENSIONERS

Helen Kaunisto

Federated Auxiliaries Helen Kaunisto passes

by Tom Price

The ILWU Federated Auxiliaries lost a major organizer when Helen Kaunisto passed away recently at the age of 87.

Born in Detroit Nov. 29, 1915, Kaunisto moved to California in 1944 and got a job at the Coronet Bar in Long Beach. There she met longshore Local 13 member Art Kaunisto and married him in 1948. She joined Ladies Auxiliary 8 in May 1956 and carried on until just before her death, helping out wherever she was needed.

All told, she served seven terms as Auxiliary 8 president and held numer-
ous other positions in the Federated Auxiliaries over six decades. Far from shrinking violets, the women she worked with were on the front lines of political action, strike support and progressive politics in their communi-
ties. She helped with everything from welcoming new members to campaign-
ing on the big political issues of the day, and she kept them informed by editing the auxiliary's newsletter for 20 years.

As part of an introduction to the ILWU family, Kaunisto held teas in members' homes and asked the wives of newly registered ILWU members to join the auxiliary. She took an inter-
est in making the auxiliary active and interesting, finding ways to keep peo-
ple involved. She chaired the dinner-
ance committee for longshore Local 13, helping people get acquainted off the job and building the social bonds that keep the union strong.

"She was a really caring person," Auxiliary 8 President Carol Chapman said. "And could she tell jokes! She was a really caring person who helped me about six years ago when I took over the newsletter."

Kaunisto served her first term as Auxiliary 8 President in 1970-71, coinciding with the 1971-72 longshore strike, a grueling 134-day battle. The auxiliary stood by the longshore work-
ers on the line and with food and sup-
port, serving between 800 and 1,000 sandwiches per day. In the early 1970s she and other auxiliary members went to toy stores after Christmas and bought toys for the following year at healthy discounts.

Kaunisto served in the Coffee Klatch at the Local 13 hall during meetings, and on the Bloody Thursday picket after the picnic committee forgot it wasn't all cooking and cleaning— she also organized. While serving as Southern California's Auxiliary Vice President in 1971-73, she and Ruth Harris and Peggy Chandler helped organize Local 19 in Port Hueneme. In December 1979 Kaunisto traveled to San Diego with Harris and Lois Grey and helped organize Auxiliary 9.

The Auxiliaries take on many social and political issues. Back in 1972, when Kaunisto was Southern California vice president, the FBI arrested a 17-year-old girl in Portland whose elder brother was AWOL from the Navy. The FBI burst into their house unannounced, looking for him, and grabbed her 14-year-old brother. The agents brutalized her and her two sisters, ages two and 15, and accused the 17-year-old girl of striking one of the heavily armed officers. The Auxiliary mobilized up and down the coast, raising bail and legal fees. Kaunisto, according to a March 1972 report in The Dispatcher, visited the girl regularly in jail and left donated money in the prison commissary for her meals. After eight months in prison, the girl's supporters got a fed-
eral appeals court judge to release her.

Kaunisto stayed active to the end. "Last summer we sent 100 boxes of personal items to soldiers in Iraq," Chapman said. "We felt so bad for those young kids, they don't need to be there."

When Kaunisto was too ill to drive to the meetings, her friend Jean Enyeart took her.

"The Auxiliary was her baby, she was totally devoted to the ILWU and all its facets," Enyeart said. "She never missed a penioners' or auxiliary meeting."

Helen also took care of her hus-
band's mother, who passed away at the age of 107. Helen visited her daily when she finally had to go to a nursing home. Helen was especially fond of quoting one of her mother-in-law's sayings, "Just have someone stand up and say 'She was a damn good union woman.'"

Father and son pensioners

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Helen Kaunisto

by Tom Price

"Ma didn't want a preacher when she died," Enyeart said, quoting Helen. "Just have someone stand up and say 'She was a damn good union woman.'"
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