Local 10 recalls the fight against apartheid

ILWU members carried the fight to the battleground states

Teamster port trucker organizer assassinated in El Salvador
Local 10 commemorates anti-apartheid boycott

by Tom Price

Local 10 members and friends jammed the Henry Schmitt
room at the local hall Dec. 3 to
remember the union's struggle
against racism in South Africa.
Twenty years before, the Nedlloyd
vessel Kimberly remained tied to Pier
80 in San Francisco for 10 days while
rank-and-file longshore workers
refused to discharge its South African
cargo. At that time, the white minori-

ty government of South Africa main-
tained a vicious system of racial sepa-
ration called apartheid.

Each crew dispatched refused to
work the vessel. Word spread along
the Coast, and the growing move-
ment against South Africa's racism
took hold among the workers. Across
the bay students at the University of
California, Berkeley occupied the
steps of the administra-
tion building the next spring and
built a thirty-town, which they occu-
pi ed until brutally removed by the
campus police. ILWU International
officials, like Henry Schmitt, the
euris and Curtis McClain attested their
rallies. Local 10 former ILWU President
Harry Bridges came out of retirement
in 1968.

to join the demonstration. The stu-
dents wanted the union to use its
resources and put itself in companies
that made profit off the institutional
racism.

"Local 10's struggle against
apartheid began in 1958 with Bill
Chelsea, later International Vice
President, and at that time Regional
Director." Local 10 retiree Leo
Robinson, a veteran of the boycott,
told gathering. "He belonged to the
United Negro Congress, a black
workers' organization, and raised the
question of apartheid, the first time it
appeared in the records of the ILWU."

Robinson and former Local 10
member Larry Wright (now in bosses'-
Caucus) told the audience that the ILWU
secretary committee in 1976 to explain
apartheid to the members. Wright
and longshore Local 10's Bill Proctor,
Clark's Local 34's Eddie Gutierrez
and Local 10 retiree Herb Mills and
Howard Keylor and other veterans
attended the celebration. Local 10 BA
Jackie Taylor, from the Ladies
Committee. The events Members attending got their books stamped for education credit.

"An apartheid system against
apartheid goes back deep and wide. The Longshore Caucus called for a boycott of South Africa in 1959 and in December of that year Local 10 mem-
bers did not unload the Apartheid
picket line protesting apartheid cargo on the Dutch ship Raki. Two years later
the union voted to return the only
outraged black South African dockers. The ILWU's International Convention in 1973 carried a motion to halt
sanctions on South Africa to "take the
profit out of racism and the employ-
ment of slave labor."

In January 1977 the hapless Kimberly experienced her first trouble
when she arrived in San Francisco
with South African cargo.

"The heads of a gang thrown
around Pier 27 on Easter Sunday, and
we didn't work it," Robinson told the
meeting. "From those first 10 people
from the community showed up so we
stood down on health and safety."

"We need to educate women's
rights," he added. "We need to
educate women's rights." And the
media. Both said media
right-wing myths and pro-
privatization threats.

They include the system's pro-
gressivity, which Congressional Black
Caucus Foundation economist Maya
Rockeymoore said particularly aids
lower-income groups, notably women
and minorities. Other plusses are its
universalism, its guaranteed income
and its guaranteed cost of living
increases, all of which are lacking in
private pension plans, Weller noted.

"Disadvantaged people will have
a triple or quadruple whammy from privatization," in the form of higher
taxes to pay for the transition costs,
less progressivity, a higher retirement age, which cuts out African-
Americans who on average die sooner
than whites, and lower benefits,

Africans have the good sense to give
up gracefully in order to minimize
bloodshed..."

Cracks began appearing in the
apartheid system in the late 80s.
Nelson Mandela, imprisoned for 27
years, was released Feb. 1989. One
of the first things he did was thank the
ILWU, and he became and honorary
member of Local 10 in June 1990. He
was elected South African president
in 1994. Apartheid was abolished.

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by Mark Gruenberg

Staff Writer

WASHINGTON—With partial priva-
tization of Social Security a top goal
for George W. Bush and Republicans
next year, a panel of economic experts
said progressives must debunk right-
wing myths about the program—and
raise financial questions about privat-
ization that Bush and the GOP avoid.

At the Nov. 18 symposium at the
Center for American Progress, a
liberal think-tank, they offered differ-
ent ideas on how to do so.

Social Security privatization, fea-
turing diversion of one-sixth of its
annual payroll tax revenues into Wall
Street-managed "private investment
accounts," is one big item on Bush's
agenda.

The day of the symposium, Senate
Majority Whip Mitch McConnell (R-
KY) continued to push the Bush myth.
"The Social Security system is a speed-
ning train heading for a brick wall,
and must be set right for future
generations," he said on the Senate
floor.

But privatization costs at least $2
trillion—to pay for benefits for sen-
ers and about-to-be seniors—and the
right wing is avoiding the implica-
tions of that expense, the panel said.

Even more, they pointed out,
Social Security does not need to be
"fixed" because it is not—contrary to
what the right says —running out of
money. That's one myth they said
progressives must dispel.

"First, we have to get the basic
facts out," said Dean Baker of the
Center for Economic Policy and
Research. "The Social Security short-
fall is modest"—less than one percent
of gross domestic product—and will
not be fully felt until at least 2043,
after most Baby Boomers die. That
impact is less than the new defense
spending over the last four years, Baker
said.

Another myth Baker blasted is the
claim that investing Social Security
proceeds in the stock market, as advo-
cated by Bush and his allies, will give
large returns. He said Bush projects a
seven percent annual return on invest-
ment of Social Security's money,
channelled through the private accounts,
from the stock market.

But the market's long-term return.
Baker noted, is at most five percent.
Economist Christian Weller added brokers' fees would take 20 to 30 percent of the money flowing to pri-
ivate accounts.

Besides the negatives of the Bush/GOP privatization plan, the
panel said Social Security's defenders
also stress its positives, which
privatization threatens.

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Caucus Foundation economist Maya
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Americans who on average die sooner
than whites, and lower benefits,

Rockeymoore added. "A lot of the individual account
(privateization) proposals blow up the
program in order to save it," added
Brookings Institution fellow Peter
Orszag. Progressives must get that
message out, he said.

But the four differed on how to do
so, even as Rockeymoore pointed out
that privatization backers will have
the next six months in the GOP-run
Congress for their scare tactics.

"Our most important job is to get
people the facts. Right now, we have
most of the public thinking that in 10
or 20 years Social Security won't be
there," Baker said.

Rockeymoore noted putting Social Security money in the stock market is a "sexy and captures atten-
tion" of voters, but did not offer an
alternative. But she said talking the
myth that Social Security does not need a major overhaul means getting
outside the Beltway.

"We deal with national organiza-

tions here and assume they're reach-

\nout to their affiliates," she added.
"But those organizations have to lean
on their grass-roots operations, so that we can shunt down the Capitol

twitchboards with phone calls from
irate folks."

Orszag and Miller advocated edu-
cating the media. Both said media
outlets are uncritically reporting the
right-wing myths and pro-privatiza-
tion campaign, without asking ques-
tions about how to pay for Bush's
partial privatization plan.

"We need to educate women's
groups and younger" people, Weller
added, since both also benefit from
Social Security.
By David Bacon

A recent evening fell on Nov. 5. Gilberto Soto received a call on his cell phone that his brother, Gilberto Jr., had been shot and was at a local clinic where he died shortly afterwards. This was an extension of his work as an organizer and trade unionist in El Salvador. The Teamsters turned down an offer to help fund organizing efforts of truckers around the world. Three Thugs pumped bullets into him as he lay on the pavement.

This was a demonstration of the police's intent to intimidate him further. His family was a brief prelude to a one settling some old political score. One of the top drivers for Maersk’s line, a 16-hour driver, had been shot and killed in a call to El Salvador.

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By Tom Price

ILWU members and retirees from all divisions took weeks or months off work to fight corporate power in key election states. About 300 participated in the union’s expanded Nov. 2 election campaign by traveling to Ohio, Nevada, Iowa and Wisconsin. Others stayed in their own states and kept busy securing them for Kerry and win many local races.

The commitment to participate in the elections had been made at all levels of the ILWU as far back as the 2002 longshore contract struggle. The 2003 International Convention made the defeat of the Bush regime its major priority. That was followed up by action at the Longshore Caucus last spring, where the Coast Legislative Action Committee recommended a large-scale siege of the “battleground states,” those states where there was no clear leader in the race for the presidency. Members from all branches of the union responded, packed their bags and off they went.

Peter Peyton, co-chair of the Coast Legislative Action Comm., stayed behind to coordinate the effort. The members organized themselves into 11 teams and divided up the work of calling on union members in the battleground states.

“They need to know that we’re all here for them. Our job is to unload a ship. That means we get people together, get paper work, move move move. We’re probably better organized than most people at getting things done,” said Peyton, who also serves as secretary of marine clerks Local 66.

Another 11,800 workers lost their jobs in August. Peyton, who also serves as secretary of marine clerks Local 63.

Connie Chaney worked in Columbus, Ohio. She expressed shock at what had happened to the middle of the country during the last few years, especially during the last four.

“Right now there are some very angry working class people out there and they don’t understand what’s happening,” Chaney said. “What I saw was something I’ve never seen in my 84 years on planet Earth. Poverty right here in America is as bad as what we see across the water on TV. These are people who have worked all their lives for a decent retirement, for a wage and a means for their children, and it’s all been burned.”

Chaney saw the effects of corporate globalization up close and personal. Ohio lost about 250,000 jobs during the first Bush term. Three-quarters of those jobs were in the manufacturing sector. Another 11,800 workers lost their jobs in August.

“I did a lot of canvassing,” she said. “A lot of people wanted to phone bank, but I didn’t want them to think I was just another solicitor on the phone. It was more fulfilling to talk to somebody face-to-face.

Chaney would finish her list of 40 union households and hurry back for more.

“I’ve seen peoples’ houses with the door knobs hanging off the door, windows busted out in freez-
fight to the battleground states

Southern California Congresswoman Loretta Sanchez (right) joins longshore Local 13 members Socorro Fimbres (left) and Angel Blanco in Las Vegas to get out the vote.

(Left to right): Victor Valazquez, Local 13; Congresswoman Stephanie Tubs-Jones; Teamster’s Local 507 Secretary-Treasurer Al Mixon; Auxiliary’s Shannon Donato; Local 13’s Melody Jeffries.

Donato gave the Congresswoman a longshore worker’s hat to give to Kerry. “I put a business card inside it with a note to Kerry,” Donato said. “It read: ‘Dear JFK, Port security is national security. ILWU says inspect all containers.’ Kerry looked right at us and repeated what we said during his speech, and later came right into our crowd to shake hands.”

I'm a practicing Catholic and in my church we were praying to stop the war. Some of these fundamentalists are praying for Armageddon. They’re praying for the apocalypse!” Sanchez said. “What are these people thinking?”

Longshore Local 23’s John Reed was captain on Torres’ Dayton Ohio team. “It was very great to see how organized everything was. We had it down to a neighborhood, a street and a family,” Reed said. “It was good to get to know a few of the people who worked with only union families, and we found there wasn’t a whole lot of support for unions there. With Ohio we were trying to get across how hard they’d been hit with the outsourcing of jobs, and the Bush administration was giving corporations giant tax breaks to do that.”

Reed wants to do it again, with a few changes. “We would like to get there a few months earlier and get involved in the registration process,” he said. “That’s the time we think we could be most effective in planting bugs in our cars.”

James Long began his career in longshore Local 10 about 15 years ago. He transferred to Local 34 five years ago. He’s been involved in security with four Kerry events in Wisconsin. In Milwaukee there were 7,000 people involved in one rally. It was terrible. We all stood out in the rain seven hours to get a picture of Kerry. Kerry looked out at the audience and said he’d never forget the people who stood out in the rain. We asked for a picture, and the Secret Service said there was no time. But Kerry reaches over, grabs Ed Jeffery’s camera and says, ‘Yeah, we got time.’ And his staff took the picture.

“On Green Bay we started at nine in the morning and worked to 11 at night. They asked us to set up these pens with police steel barricade pieces. We found a lift and I jumped on it and fired it up. We moved a huge number of these things and then set up the stage. Me and Ed and a guy from AFSCME went to a Dick Cheney rally. We were surrounded by Secret Service and cops and there were only three of us. A whole bunch of people with crosses around their necks said they’d pray for us. We thanked them.

“I’m really interested in doing this again in two years for the mid-term elections. So many people are single-issue oriented, Bush is able to get them because it’s simple. It was brilliant the way they were able to turn Bush’s bad military record into a good record and attack Kerry’s record.

“We’re all disappointed. We would like to see Kerry inaugurated in January. We did what we needed to do. We did something nobody ever did before. We’ll take this and build on it, every local office, House and Senate. We’ll keep it up.”

They were so union at heart. One of the good things in Reno is that the local people who supported labor got elected. On any given day we had 200 union people in the hall, you’d hear ‘Are you coming back in two years for the Senate race?’

Tuck also found a lot of ILWU support already in place in Reno.

“Joe Wenni [Coast Committeeman] sent me a list of active and retired ILWU members in the Reno area,” Tuck said. “I sent out 60 letters asking for their help. My first call was from the daughter of a woman 90 years old. She said her mother couldn’t get out of bed, but if she could she would be right with us. Another retiree had Parkinson’s disease. She said he couldn’t talk much on the phone, but he could still stuff envelopes.”

Tuck spent 17 days in Arkansas two years ago working on the Senate race for Mark Pryor.

“I was in Reno one week shy of three months, started off slow, six days a week, eight to 10 hours, in the end it was 19 hours a day,” Tuck said. “I was the only one, we were all running on empty. I left there a better person for it.”

Ted Sadler, from longshore Local 13, went home to Cleveland as captain of his traveling team.

“In the two-and-a-half weeks I probably talked to close to 1,000 people, through canvassing, meeting union people and stuff,” Sadler said. He saw the poverty in the area.

“What are these people thinking?” Sanchez said. “It took the work-class 10 years to get carpel tunnel disability and the Bush administration got rid of it right after they took office,” Sanchez said.

“Bush has hijacked the word patriotism, he’s hijacked the word spirituallity, he’s hijacked the word patriotism, and if you don’t think like him you’re un-American,” Sanchez said.

As a marine vet, Sanchez knows you need a good reason to start something as serious as a war. But Bush’s supporters have strange reasons for the war.

“I’m a practicing Roman Catholic and in my church we were praying to stop the war. Some of these
20 nationwide rallies highlighting Sharifi’s, termination the following year, a Maersk attorney called the group’s head in London, David Cockroft, and told him Sharifi was being investigated by the FBI as a possible terrorist. While Middle Easterners and south Asian immigrants were targets of FBI sweeps in general that year, some wonder how Sharifi, who fought the Soviets in Afghanis-
stan, made it onto the feds’ list of sub-
versives.
Sharifi wasn’t unique. Frank Miterka was denied work by BIT in Baltimore for participating in pro-
tests the same year. Gene Suggs in Nashville helped organize a work stoppage in 2000 over high fuel costs and low pay. When it was over, BIT blacklisted Suggs and other active participants.

In Houston, workers tried to get a "bill of rights" from the port authority, but when they put Teamsters bumper stickers on their rigs, they were told, "take off the Teamster sticker, or take off the BIT placed," in Hamilton Roads, Virginia, BIT terminated the contract for Robert King, and HUDD, another Maersk subsidiary, collapsed that of Paul Barnum, for the same crime of organizing.

The worst retaliation has come in Miami. When workers in Miami organized a 2004 stoppage at the same time as drivers in Oakland, Charleston and other ports, BIT in Oakland, the port got an injunction that forced them back to work after eight days and filed a lawsuit against the personal assets of three individual truckers who had stepped forward as spokesmen, for damages arising from the action. The Teamsters and the ILWU provided legal support for these truckers and put political pressure on the Port of Oakland, resulting in widespread worker support.

In Miami, Maersk and the Port of Miami filed a lawsuit against the truckers. Maersk lawyers argued that the drivers held illegal meetings and com-
municated with each other" and "passed out flyers," thus violating anti-trust laws. They demanded immediate action from the courts because the truckers were "near independent businesses without sub-
stantial financial resources to pay damages...even if their tractors and other assets were seized." The suit is still pending, but the parties have agreed to mediation to try to resolve the matter.

This fall the Teamsters asked Cornell University professor Lance Campa to document the abuses in a report on human rights violations by Maersk. Campa's investigation found that, despite anti-trust law, workers "had rights under international human rights law of association, of self-organization, of free expression and other means to try to achieve their goals." Maersk, he concluded, was violating accepted international human rights and standards.

Some observers call Maersk a company with a split personality, since not all its workers suffer the same conditions or labor under the same anti-labor policies. About 100 drivers in Oakland, and 50-60 in Seattle work directly for the company, under a Teamster contract that the union inherited when it bought Sealand's trucking operation. The ILWU negotiates with Maersk as part of the multi-
employer group, the Pacific Maritime Association. And in Denmark, as well as Europe generally, the company enjoys a benevolent reputation. There are established rights and conditions for port drivers far in excess of those in the U.S., Central America or other parts of the world.

But according to one union observer, "the company may have succeeded in organizing workers in those countries, to share information, support, and get their ideas and perspectives. How do we deal with these multinational-dollar multinational corporations? How do we end the exploitation of these driv-
ers? It's a worldwide problem.

Soto's job was to help a group of these workers with no rights, against a company with a long track record of opposing any of their efforts to organ-
ize. Bob Laneshay calls him "a great guy, someone who didn't have any enemies.

Well, not exactly. Somebody was threatened enough to murder him.
The Factory
by M.J. Carden
publishedamerica.com
reviewed by Chris Carlson

This novel is set in a small machine factory in England in the early 1970s. It begins with a young man, terribly disaffected after years of rote, mind-numbing schooling, getting a job from the local employment office and showing up to work with a cautious enthusiasm about his new adulthood. In very short time he is introduced to the inequality and brutality that rules the roost in this particular factory, a veritable denunciation that is the norm in factory life more generally.

I had the pleasure of meeting the author, and even staying at his house in Liverpool for a few days, back in 1999. Carden was one of the main organizers of an ultimately unsuccessful effort to protect the unionized dockworkers of Liverpool. In that capacity he had plenty of chances to see up close and personally the ways traditional trade unionism — and the people who rise to lead them — can become obstacles to workers asserting their own power.

In this story, the daily brutality directed by the shop steward and his henchmen against a worker who didn’t fit in (but was one of the most skilled and productive), leads that worker ultimately to a gruesome suicide in the factory. The young man, the “apprentice,” breaks out and sparks a conflict, enfacing the constrictions of the rest of the workforce who can no longer tolerate the inherent brutishness of the shop’s “leaders.” Against the violence of their own shop steward and his men, and the weight of the owners, managers and union leaders, the workers go on strike. Thanks to the calm, experienced leadership of an old hand, who had been a union leader but had withdrawn from the scene in disgust long ago, and the rock solid participation of all the women on the shop floor, the workers organize themselves to take direct action, ultimately seizing the factory and occupying it.

The most important criticism is that Carden’s account immediately transforms the workplace. Petty feuds and routine sexism give way to floor democracy and he and “his men” opt to join the exiled managers outside. Later, when the factory is retaken by the police, the shop steward and his men scalpel on the wildcat strike that continues outside in the winter cold. The union’s local leader shows up to try to repair the relationship between himself and the bosses, but the union and their company. But as the workers discovered while they held the plant, the union has already become a private company plant to close the factory and ship off the machinery to India. The local president’s position and with it, his aspirations to climb the social hierarchy — has been destroyed as surely as has the lever- age of the workforce.

An interesting subplot follows the real-life experience with workers’ direct democracy in the heat of a wildcat strike brings its story to life. After a somewhat ponderous and overwritten beginning, the narrative begins to crackle. For a dissection of the real dynamics between workers, owners, managers and unions, you could hardly find a better novel. Additionally, by having the workers engage in a factory occupying a crucial and largely forgotten tactic in the workers’ arsenal is reintroduced to a new generation. Carden does not refrain from occasional political analysis masquerading as fictional prose. He ruminates.

“The system would never tolerate strikes or any other acts of defiance but they positively encouraged wage-money. Occupier. Occupier. Occupier. The man faced up to the power of capital by capturing one of its pawns, and as such it could never be tolerated: ’Occupier.’”

Long overdue maintenance is done, the exhaust system is repaired, and everything is cleaned more thoroughly. Everyone, in this context, could be seen as a consumer. To want money and want more money was a genuflection to capital and its ways. Occupation was bad. But these men and women knew what they were involved in. Above all they were practical people. They could build canals in the desert.

By the time the story reaches its climax, which is far from heroic or satisfying for fans of workers’ revolt, Carden finally discloses his deeper analysis of trade unionism:

“Trade unionism was in its most influential phase, so some said, and yet the seeds of future treachery [which M.J. Carden and his mates had to face in the late 1990s] had been sown from their inception. A constant struggle ensued between the two imperialists, and the former strove to improve their own condition beyond the class they belonged to. The latter sought to move beyond the denominators of wage slavery and all those odd international vassal of the bank’s vassal in the glory of modern struggles that had, more often than not, not been fought without their union’s support. More than not they had opposed all opposition. Caught in the middle-stream of betrayal, the union leadership moved lightly amidst both worlds, and, having two paymasters, ever mindful of past and present deceits, ever fearful of exposing their true intent. Some battled for their class and their class only, finding themselves increasingly excluded from the gravy train of influence and power as they confirmed their willful necessity to occupy the past and future glory of revolutionary labour. The betrayal had begun before the birth of the general unionism in 1889 and their representatives invaded the movement with the threat of class betrayal of pseudo-modernism in which, forever uncom- fortable with conflict, they forged pact with capital. Explained away with a conf- fused idealism that appeared to offer the spoils of revolution without the struggle, these intermediary bosses spread division and defensiveness with every act they pursued. With the pas- sage of time they openly assumed the roles of serving capital as if this was the true struggle to fight, ever so softly and meekly, whilst always allowing the sovereignty of capital to prevail. Each decade brought their movement closer to their maker as they assumed the col- lar and tie, the suits, the houses, the fine tastes and mannersmen of the boss class. The image of betrayal would soon be celebrated openly in the victory of style over content as it evolved in the official unions under the aegis of a new unionism. "The age of conflict was over, they declared. And for many it had never begun.

The strike eventually ends badly, the apprentice betrays his mates and his girl. By the end of the book, remi- niscent of the Paul Schrader movie “Blue Collar,” the possibilities of revolt seem diminished, the individu- als who revolted this time are van- quished. The plan to “offshore” the machinery has been derailed, but there is no more factory either. The writer, who has been a cipher throughout the story, representing types and behaviors, is finally in the last line of the book given his name… as he awaits assignment at the employment office, the same place where we met him with so much potential at the start of the novel.

Hints of our post-Fordist world appear, but this story feels rooted in a past that has almost vanished. The fac- tory and community it describes have been uprooted and “de-industrialized,” and the way most people experience work has evolved with the advent of globalization. Or has it?

That may be Carden’s most important point. Things cycle, specific individuals and conditions change, but the deeper logic is still as iron- clad as it was in the period his novel describes. And the way out is still as difficult and contradictory and conflicted and often defeated as his book so ably illustrates. But there is a way out. And we do learn. And books like this are important contributions to that process, best known as history.

Chris Carlson is Director of Shaping San Francisco (www.shapingsf.org), a multimedia excavation of the lost history of San Francisco, with a dedicated chapter on the ILWU, and another on the 1934 strike. Short video clips of the ‘34 strike, as well as interviews with Herb Mills of Local 10 and Peter Mendelssohn of the Tenants and Owners Opposed to Redevelopment can be found in the Shaping San Francisco movie collection at www.archive.org.
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