

LABOR

ILWU convention confronts job crisis

During his long career retiring president Harry Bridges has been denounced as a Communist and a class collaborator.

by Stefan Ostrach

Seattle. For more than two hours on April 22, 30 delegates to the 22nd Biennial Convention of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU) took the floor to pay tribute to Harry Bridges, Lou Goldblatt and Bill Chester, who were stepping down as officers of the West Coast waterfront union. The delegates also voted to give a \$13,000 retirement bonus to each of the three men.

During his long career Bridges, who is still physically active and mentally sharp at age 76, has been both denounced as a Communist and accused of being a class collaborator.

In 1934 he was a central figure in the San Francisco General Strike. Twice—in 1939 and 1941, the federal government tried to deport him to his native Australia for being a subversive. And in 1950 he was jailed for opposing the Korean War.

More recently politicians have praised him as a labor statesman, and in 1970 he was named to the San Francisco Port Authority.

Bridges continued his enigmatic ways at this year's convention. He warmly embraced conservative Washington Governor Dixie Lee Ray and argued against demanding 40 hours pay for 30 hours work. But he also told a press conference: "I'm not proud of bringing peace to the waterfront. It's only a truce. There will never be peace as long as there's the eternal conflict between those that own and those that don't."

►A progressive union.

The ILWU and the United Electrical Workers (UE) are the only two of eleven left-wing unions forced out of the CIO in 1949 that survived the red-baiting offensive of the 1950s. Resolutions passed by the convention reflect the union's progressive tradition.

The ILWU called for "restoration of full relations, including trade, with Cuba, Vietnam, and the People's Republic of China."

Support for the liberation struggles in Southern Africa was unanimous, although a boycott resolution was carefully worded to comply with contractual requirements. The delegates voted "to begin exploring and, wherever possible, to implement immediately means through which to stop all handling, warehousing, and transportation of all goods to or from South Africa and Zimbabwe." They also voted to notify employers that no future contracts would be negotiated which require them to handle such cargo, although the present dock contract extends until July 1978.

The convention went on record in support of cutting military spending and transferring funding from the Pentagon to job-creating social programs. Another resolution demanded environmentally-sound full employment.

The ILWU pledged itself "to take whatever steps are necessary to wipe out any discrimination" in the union and declared, "This union will not join in any agitation or legislation to punish alien residents for the hard times and unemployment which have been caused by our big-business oriented economic policies." The delegates unanimously supported the Campaign to End Discrimination against Pregnant Workers.

The union attacked multinational corporations for exporting capital and jobs and demanded the "curbing of



A serious shortage of jobs face lonshoremen due to the rise of mechanization and containerization.

Paul Sequeira

U.S. corporate investment abroad" and "an end to U.S. tax privileges for such foreign investment."

The delegates hailed the recent agreement between the United Farm Workers and the Teamsters and renewed their strong support for the farm workers' struggle.

►A crisis of jobs.

While the progressive political consensus distinguished the meeting from most U.S. union conventions, the Bridges era is ending at a time of crisis for the ILWU.

As a rank-and-file longshoreman (who was not at the convention) declared, "The convention is just window dressing." He described a serious shortage of jobs on the waterfront caused by mechanization and containerization.

Back in 1960 Bridges decided that technological progress on the waterfront could not be resisted. He negotiated a mechanization and modernization agreement that he said would share the advantages of automation with the workers. Bonuses were paid and pensions raised to encourage early retirement, and union members were guaranteed their pay whether there was work or not.

Since then, cargo tonnage and company profits have increased, but jobs have steadily declined.

In the San Francisco Bay area, second largest port in the U.S., the situation is critical. In spite of record tonnage moving through the port, longshoremen are averaging only 13-15 hours of work per week. While the union contract provides a pay guarantee plan (that excludes pensions and fringe benefits), it also requires that workers at "low work opportunity ports" can be forced to move to other areas or forfeit their pay guarantees.

Many Bay Area longshoremen don't want to move, however, and longshoremen at other ports don't want increased competition for jobs in their locations. In some cases resistance to transfers also involves opposition to an influx of Third World workers.

So far the Bay Area has been able to dodge being declared a low work opportunity port, but the trend is inevitable.

►Hawaiian sugar companies running away.

In Seattle, where the problem is not yet as serious, tonnage has doubled in the last five years, but man-hours have declined, according to Local 19

Secretary, Del Castle.

In Hawaii, where the ILWU is the most powerful union, the organization also faces a crisis. The union organized 30,000 workers on the islands in just 18 months during World War II and represents workers on the docks and also in the sugar, pineapple, and tourist industries.

The last time around, the sugar workers won a pacesetting agreement with the sugar companies that prohibited the employers from closing down any operations for the life of the contract.

When it expired in March, however, the Big Five sugar producers served notice that they would not renew this provision because of their desire to move to low wage areas like the Philippines.

The union persuaded them to extend the contract until November, hoping in the meantime that Congress would act to protect the Hawaiian sugar industry. If it doesn't, Hawaiian sugar workers face runaway plantations and mass unemployment.

►New officers nominated.

The last business "on the deck" at the convention was nomination of candidates to succeed the retiring officers.

For President, the candidates are Jimmy Herman of the San Francisco clerks' local and G. Johnny Parks, a Portland longshoreman. Both men are in their fifties and have been loyal supporters of Bridges' administration. Herman, who has Bridges' support, is considered to be the more progressive and is expected to win. He was screened off the waterfront during the Korean War and more recently has actively supported the farm workers. Parks is Northwest Regional Director and is known most for his role in opposing government limitations on the export of whole logs—a and that helped preserve jobs on the docks but hurt northwest sawmill workers, who face competition from exploitation of low-wage Asian workers.

Rudy Rubio, a Los Angeles longshoreman, was nominated for the Vice President slot without opposition as was George Martin of Hawaii, the incumbent Director of Organization.

In the race for Secretary-Treasurer, the favorite is Curt McClain, a black who is president of the San Francisco warehouse local. He is opposed by Fred Huntsinger, a Portland longshoreman.

Union members will vote by secret ballot in mid-June. The results will be announced and the new officers will take

up their posts in July.

►30 for 40.

The new officers will inherit a union that has largely given up the struggle at the workplace in recent years. By accepting mechanization and containerization in 1960 the ILWU gained a large measure of economic security for its older members, but it lost control of the work process that had been won in the great 1934 West Coast waterfront strike.

For the most part these problems simmered below the surface of the convention, although they were expected to emerge at the division caucus meetings (which were closed to the press) immediately following the convention. Only during discussion of a demand for forty hours pay for thirty hours work did the internal problems of the union emerge in public session.

The shorter work week was offered as the solution to the shortage of jobs on the waterfront. Bridges argued against it, saying that thirty hours work at no reduction in pay was an impossible demand. A resolution calling for thirty hours at no reduction was defeated and the issue was referred to the longshore caucus.

►A democratic union.

The new ILWU leaders are unlikely to change the union's established policies or to take a more militant stand. But the union's constitution provides for considerable internal democracy. Officers on all levels must stand for election every two years and are subject to recall on petition of 15 percent of the membership. All major policies, including contracts, must be discussed in division caucus and ratified by the members affected.

The convention itself was run as democratically as a large meeting can be. Delegates were free to take the floor and did not hesitate to argue with Bridges. Bridges himself asked for convention approval of controversial rulings. He dominated the convention by force of personality and reputation, not manipulation.

As conditions on the waterfront, in Hawaii, and in the world continue to develop, the ILWU rank-and-file have the means at hand to again put their union at the forefront of the class struggle.

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CRIME&PUNISHMENT

More young people going to jail

The swelling ranks behind bars parallel the shrinking opportunities for young people in the streets and schools of American cities.



Elliot Currie
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Ten years ago, study after study concluded that imprisonment was the worst possible treatment for children who broke the law. But today a decade of liberal reform aimed at channeling young offenders away from penal institutions—into counseling, job-training programs, mental health services and the like—has been reversed.

The bewildering array of youth institutions—public and private, local and state, huge prisons and small homes—makes it difficult to accurately estimate the number of young people in detention. But it appears that more children are locked up, in adult jails as well as juvenile facilities, than ever before.

The swelling ranks behind bars parallel the shrinking opportunities for young people in the streets and schools of America's cities. A partial result of rising unemployment and cut backs in school, recreational and social welfare programs, youth "property" crimes spurted up by 50 percent between 1970 and 1975. FBI statistics indicate young people under

18 now account for over half of all arrests for burglary and auto theft and over one-third of those for robbery.

A growing public outcry against the urban crime wave had fueled what Jane Ward of the California Youth Authority calls "a more punitive attitude towards kids, a feeling among judges and others that kids should be locked up." Juvenile justice has become a boom industry—the agency of first, rather than last resort.

The trend was spelled out by a national study done at the University of Michigan's School of Social Work. "Juvenile justice resources have increased," it concluded, "at the same time other youth-serving agencies experienced declines in their resources..."

►Reform of Sixties.

During the 1960s, juvenile court judges scholars and blue-ribbon commissions all agreed that locking young people up not only failed to "rehabilitate" them, but often made them worse.

In 1967, the President's Commission on Law Enforcement and the Administration of Justice declared the juvenile

justice system a "failure." "The youth who has once been through the process and comes out a delinquent is more likely to act delinquent again," it said.

"The most informed and benign institutional treatment of the child, even in well designed and staffed reformatories and training schools, thus may contain within it the seeds of its own frustration, and itself may often feed the very disorder it is designed to cure."

Fueled by the emerging consensus, many states experimented with programs to "divert" youth from the justice system to presumably more constructive social services.

But today, after extensive studies of this "diversion" process, many criminologists say that rather than replacing jails, the new alternatives have simply made room for more young people—including the less serious offenders—in the juvenile justice system.

►Surge in detentions.

In 1960 one of every 50 Americans aged 10 to 17 came before a juvenile court on a delinquency charge. By 1974, according to the University of Michigan survey, the rate had doubled, to one of every 25. Though comprehensive statistics for the years since 1974 are not yet available, the federal Office of Youth Development says the rate is still climbing.

Between 1971 and 1973 more young people came before juvenile courts, but the diversion trend brought about a 16 percent drop in the population in state and local facilities, according to the federal Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA). In 1974, however, that trend flattened out.

The Michigan survey, covering state but not county or municipal facilities, found the same drop between 1971 and 1973, but recorded a nationwide surge in detentions—from 28,000 to 34,000—in 1974.

Since then, evidence from those states with available data suggests the trend toward more lock-ups has continued.

In California, for example, a state

that gained national attention for juvenile justice reforms in the '60s, Youth Authority detentions jumped 30 percent between 1972 and 1976. And once in custody, youths were staying longer.

The real rise in detentions may be much higher when several other factors are taken into account:

- A growing number of youths sent to adult jails to compensate for cutbacks in juvenile facilities, a practice condemned by reformers for more than a century.

- A trend toward use of private facilities to replace state and local lock-ups. These include everything from large detention centers run by private charities or church groups to small private homes for juvenile delinquents.

- An unknown number of youths sent by the courts each year to homes for neglected and dependent children, mental hospitals and institutions for the retarded.

In the early 1970s, several states passed legislation requiring that many "status" offenders—those, like truants or runaways, whose crimes are illegal only for youths—be handled outside the juvenile justice institutions. But no systematic data is available showing where they went.

Given continuing high levels of youth unemployment and reductions in social services for young people, it is likely that youth crime will continue to be a problem. At the same time, the public outcry is likely to continue to push states and localities, even those like California and Massachusetts that led the reform swing of the '60s, to confront rising youth crime with more lock-ups and jails.

The irony of the situation was expressed by one California juvenile justice worker: "So we know locking them up won't do anybody any good. So what else is new? Where else are we going to put them?"

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TAXES

Double reporting by insurance companies

By Dave Lindorff

Los Angeles. The old saw about death and taxes doesn't apply to life insurance companies and property taxes. Recent events show that "Nothing is as evadable as an insurance company's property taxes."

Property taxes—the American Way of financing local government—are probably the most regressive form of taxation going. All across the nation, "home-owners" pay the bulk of the costs of government, while commercial and industrial establishments pay a pittance.

As one employee of the Los Angeles Assessor's Office—largest in the country—put it, "A guy might pay \$1,000 in taxes on a house he bought for \$30,000, while a company will pay \$370,000 on a 20-story office building that cost \$75 million to build, and that's used to make profits."

Since property taxes normally rise when land values go up in an area, the whole issue has become politically explosive. In an inflationary economy, speculators have found the safest place to invest capital is real estate, and this forces up property values and taxes.

This is particularly true in Los Angeles, where residential property values have been rising at the fastest rate in the nation. Some areas here have property inflation of almost 10% per month! It's hard on the average worker with a stagnant salary, on the senior citizen on

fixed income, and especially on the tenant, who doesn't even have the option of selling.

But commercial and industrial property is another story. While profits have soared, business property assessments (and of course their property taxes) have remained steady, or even declined.

If you can believe the Assessor's Office and the Assessment Appeals Board in L.A., the high-rise office building of the Crocker National Bank (part of a national holding company that just reported net quarter profits of \$12 million and an increase in assets of \$1 billion) is a losing operation. It has obtained tax reductions year after year. You'd think it was a car, the way they say it's depreciating in value.

Because of the complexity of appraising these sky-scrapers, it's hard to police what's happening to them.

Records in the L.A. Assessor's Office show, for instance, that the highest building in Los Angeles, owned principally by the Equitable Life Assurance Company of New York, cost \$78 million to build. But is appraised by the Assessor as having a market value of only \$62.7 million.

Equitable is not satisfied with this seemingly choice situation. They have an appeal of their assessment underway, and are claiming that the 62-story building is really worth only \$37 million—a good deal less than they paid for it.

In California and many other states

life insurance companies have to provide state insurance commissions with a list of their assets to demonstrate their ability to back the policies they sell. The California law requires the companies to list the value of all property, using construction costs, purchase price, or market value, whichever is less. In this case Equitable listed the building as an asset worth \$78 million.

In other words, according to Equitable the building has several values. As an asset (when it pays to have the building worth as much as possible) the building is worth \$78 million, and as a tax liability (when it pays to have it worth as little as possible) it is worth only \$37 million—less than half as much.

Apparently, the Assessor's office here has known about this practice of dual listings for years and considered it of "no consequence." They have been content to accept the lower corporate figure or, as in this case, to "split the difference."

Opposition arose in this case, however, from a local group, Tax Reform Action Coalition, that decided to take on the "double booking" practice at the tax appeal hearing on another of Equitable's buildings—a 20-story structure that Equitable told the state was worth \$27.4 million and told the county tax office was worth only \$20 million.

A coalition of groups including the New American Movement, Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, Com-

mittee for Economic Democracy, Coalition for Economic Survival and others, TRAC formed in March to confront the property tax issue. Where conservative tax "reform" groups have argued that the way to reduce taxes is to cut human services, TRAC has insisted that the way to do it is to increase the tax on corporations who now evade their fair share.

TRAC activists demonstrated outside the hearing and packed the hearing room—usually a dull formality ignored even by the media. The appeals board—composed of realtors—listened attentively when the Assessor's Office brought up the "newly discovered" insurance commission figures and Equitable, after first failing to have the demonstrators ousted from the room, sensed what the outcome would be and asked for a one-month delay in the hearing. It will resume in mid-May.

It was a good move. Two weeks later, another appeals board turned down a similar request for a \$54 million assessment reduction by the owners of a skyscraper complex currently appraised at \$174 million. The major owner of the property was the Prudential Life Insurance Company. It had argued that the value of the building was really only \$120 million, but to the state insurance commissioner, it had said the building was an asset worth \$197 million.

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