

THE RETREAT OF HARRY BRIDGES

Stanley Weir

THE PROCESS BY WHICH HARRY BRIDGES has been destroying the myth that he is a radical and a progressive labor leader grinds on, dimming a career already in twilight. The latest episode in this saga of self-destruction began in 1963 when the International Longshoremen's & Warehousemen's Union (ILWU) under Bridges' leadership, in league with waterfront employers, locked out 82 San Francisco longshoremen. The following year, 51 of them brought federal suit against Bridges the ILWU and the employers' Pacific Maritime Association (PMA). The fired men, 90% of whom are black, found it difficult to obtain anything more than marginal employment, largely due to the blot placed on their job records by the ILWU and the PMA. However, with the aid of the Workers Defense League, they were able to form a special defense committee which issued a public statement and letters appealing for funds to help finance the fired longshoremen's suit. Some months later, in August 1965, Harry Bridges sued 15 of the defense committee members for a quarter of a million dollars in damages, alleging that in the process of defending the longshoremen they had libeled him and damaged his career.

On December 18, 1969, after four and a half years, Harry Bridges dropped that suit which served only to harrass the committee, the Workers Defense League and the fired longshoremen.

During the first four years of the suit, Bridges' lawyers took depositions from only two defendants—Dr. Thomas N. Burbridge and Bayard Rustin—the only black members of the defense committee at the time. And unlike most libel suits, in this one those being sued for libel were pressing for trial while the plaintiff, Harry Bridges, constantly sought to postpone it.

WHILE PREVIOUS ARTICLES* ON THIS WATERFRONT BATTLE have listed the names of the defendants, a brief description is instructive:

Herman Benson, editor and publisher of *Union Democracy in Action*; Dr. Thomas "Nat" Burbridge, former president of the San Francisco NAACP; Matthew K. Clarke, former director of the Religion and Labor Council of America; Michael Harrington, Chairman of the Socialist Party;

* "The ILWU: A Case Study in Bureaucracy," an article in two parts by Stanley Weir, *New Politics*, Vol. III, 1 & 3; "Harry Bridges' Own Witch Hunt," Herman Benson, *Union Democracy in Action*, No. 13, 1964; "Harry the Gag Man," Paul Jacobs, *The New Leader*, July 6, 1964; "New Stage in the Longshore Struggle," Robert Joe Pierpont, *New Politics*, Vol. VI, 1. Also "The West Coast Waterfront: The End of an Era," Harvey Swados, *Dissent*, August 1961 and correspondence with Lincoln Fairley, Educational Director of the ILWU, *Dissent*, Spring 1962.

Gordon Haskell, Membership & Development Director of the American Civil Liberties Union; Herbert Gold, Nat Hentoff, Paul Jacobs and Harvey Swados, all well-known writers; Herbert Hill, National Labor Chairman of the NAACP; Julius Jacobson, editor of *New Politics*, Professor S. Martin Lipset, sociologist; Bayard Rustin, Director of the A. Philip Randolph Institute; Professor Philip Selznick, Director of the Center for the Study of Law and Society at the University of California, Berkeley; Reverend William Shirley, pastor of an interracial Presbyterian church in Detroit.

For reasons unknown, Bridges did not sue the following members of the defense committee: Professor Daniel Bell, sociologist; Norman Hill, assistant director of the A. Philip Randolph Institute; and the late Norman Thomas.

The identity of the attorneys who defended the libel defendants and are defending the 51 longshoremen is also instructive. They are Arthur Brunwasser, a San Francisco attorney who has undertaken civil liberties and draft resistance cases and is West Coast Counsel of the Workers Defense League, and Francis Heisler, National Counsel of the Workers Defense League, veteran labor, civil rights and civil liberties attorney of Chicago and Northern California.

Joining the defense committee after the libel suit was instituted were Professor Bernard Karsh of the University of Illinois; Professor Jerome Skolnick, director of the Task Force on Violent Demonstrations and Protests of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence; and writers James Baldwin and Dwight Macdonald.

DURING THE COURSE OF THE LIBEL SUIT, Bridges claimed that the defendants were "made up of a few professional 'revolutionaries,' writers and professional men, plus a few characters like Paul Jacobs, a man who has been an openly declared, self-confessed enemy of the ILWU all the way back to the late 1930's," (Bridges column "On the Beam" in the ILWU publication *The Dispatcher*, July 30, 1969). The accusation that some are professional revolutionaries is revealing, coming from Bridges. It fits in with the lying attack by Morris Watson, former editor of *The Dispatcher*, against the 51 longshoremen at a press conference in 1963, claiming that many of the men were fired because of their "subversive backgrounds" (see "ILWU: A Case Study in Bureaucracy, II," *New Politics*, Summer 1964). It may also be related to the fact that Professor Philip Selznick and Paul Jacobs have supported a number of militant movements in the Bay Area, such as the Berkeley Free Speech Movement (1964-1965) which Bridges failed to do.

According to Bridges, Jacobs and the others are not only enemies of the ILWU but "phonies" who are "enemies of labor." (This, despite the fact that a number of the defendants vigorously condemned all

government attempts to deport Bridges.) If this were true, they could easily have been unmasked by Bridges had he taken the opportunity offered to him by Julius Jacobson, as editor of *New Politics*, to use the pages of that journal to reply to an article I had written about the ILWU in the same magazine. (He not only refused to answer Weir but sent an insulting letter in reply.) He would also have taken depositions of more than two of the 15 libel defendants. Instead, Bridges tried to get Paul Jacobs fired from his position at the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions in Santa Barbara. A police mentality in operation! All Bridges really had to do to end the crisis was to have proved his allegations against the longshoremen in a fair hearing rather than a secret kangaroo court. This request was put to him many times, particularly by Herbert Gold when Bridges was pressuring Gold to withdraw his support of the fired longshoremen. This request for a fair hearing was denied, of course, since it would have exposed the filthy mess concocted by Bridges, the ILWU bureaucracy and the employers.

SPECIFICALLY, WHAT WERE THE ALLEGEDLY LIBELOUS ACTS committed by the 15 sponsors of the longshoremen? They allowed their names to be used in an appeal for funds to cover the legal expenses incurred by the men in trying to get their day in court. Bridges claimed that the appeal accused him of "practicing autocracy" and of colluding with the employers. It can be proved that Bridges and the employers did in effect collaborate to lock out these longshoremen and that Bridges did autocratically play a leading role in the frameup. Bridges also alleged that he and the ILWU were accused of racial discrimination. That allegation is a lie. The accusation was never made. The lie was circulated at the 1965 AFL-CIO convention in San Francisco by friends of Bridges in order to drain off support the framed men had obtained among unionists. While the lie was exposed, some harm may have been done to the longshoremen; it is still too soon to tell. The ILWU of San Francisco is anything but a "Jim Crow" local union. Nevertheless, 90% of the fired longshoremen are black and were thrown off the waterfront into a society with racist employment policies. What is more, their efforts to get decent jobs were further hampered by Bridges' televised accusations that they were "liars, chisellers and cheats."

What reason did Bridges give for withdrawing the libel suit? One big lie demands another. Thus, in *The Dispatcher* (December 16, 1969), he claims that the sponsors have admitted they were wrong and that changes made in the law by the Supreme Court in "recent years" make winning a libel suit impossible. That the defendants "admitted they were wrong" is a pathetically feeble lie. The truth is that the defendants were pressing hard to get the case tried in court and, in fact, had made

arrangements to appear in court as scheduled in January. This is hardly symptomatic of defendants admitting to error.

Bridges' snide swipe at "recent" Supreme Court decisions, widely hailed by civil libertarians, which undermined his libel action has about it the aroma of Birch Society propaganda. The big lie here is easily nailed down. The Supreme Court decision to which Bridges refers—*New York Times vs. Sullivan*—was rendered in March 1964. *Bridges filed his libel suit in August 1965*. What is more, the Supreme Court decision "that an extra heavy burden of proof" is needed to establish libel where public officials and personalities are involved, *was based in important part on a Supreme Court case—Bridges vs. California—based on an appeal by Bridges from a charge of criminal contempt of court for criticizing a judge*. Bridges took the case all the way to the Supreme Court to establish the principle of a person's privilege to criticize public figures and institutions.

Legally, to drop a libel case is to lose it. But one aspect of the libel suit remains. Bridges must now pay the court costs of the defendants. (It remains to be seen who is going to pay the costs: Bridges or the ILWU.)

WITH THE LIBEL SUIT OBSTRUCTION ELIMINATED, the 51 longshoremen are free to go into Federal District Court in San Francisco for the trial that the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals and the U.S. Supreme Court have said they must have. It took 6½ years to win this right to a trial. All the men need to do to exercise this legal right is to raise \$30,000 which is what they are trying to do now with the aid of WDL President, Rowland Watts, and their special defense committee. Bridges is busy propagandizing the ILWU membership in an effort to rationalize the existence of this suit. For a long time, *The Dispatcher* implied that the case was dead but now that it is coming to trial, Bridges barrages the members with the urgent news that it will cost them money. And it well may if the members allow Bridges to pass the costs on to them since some of the fired men, if they win the suit, may get a wage differential between what they have earned since being fired and what they would have earned working as longshoremen.

Bridges continues to tell the ILWU members that he does not know the identity of the deregistered men and yet he singles out this writer: "Funny part of it is I never met the bum [Stanley Weir] in my life, never heard of him until the case came along, and, in fact, wouldn't recognize him right now if he turned up in my soup." (*The Dispatcher*, December 16, 1969.) The wisecrack is reminiscent of old Hollywood "B" gangster movies in which the suspect attempts to establish an alibi. But although a little humor and a gag can be a temporary salve for fear,

Bridges can hardly expect the ILWU membership to take it seriously. Most members remember the confrontations on the floor at B meetings and know that Weir was the elected representative for the B men for three years. What is more, it is now well known that for some time Weir's name was a swear word in the offices of the international union headquarters, especially after the receipt of a letter to Bridges from James Baldwin in which Baldwin said that if Weir is "anti-progressive and anti-labor" that he (Baldwin) was "a dues-paying member of the Birch Society."

But more to the point, the gag is in bad taste because there is no humor in the destruction of people's lives. After all, men who can rig ship's gear and move cargo do not take lightly a return to shoeshine and busboy jobs. And wives who were at home caring for children now find themselves working as domestics or at home husbandless and on welfare. Then, too, we have learned that Ed Reed is dead. Maybe Bridges "never met the bum." He was a quiet, gentle man. We are told that exhaustion from long commutes to jobs far out of town brought death at a railroad crossing. This destructive process must be stopped and it can be stopped the day we return as first class citizens to the hiring hall that Bridges has said we are trying to destroy.

What a monstrous and cynical lie that is—that we would destroy the hiring hall. Bridges learned his tactics in a bad school and his own victimization did not lead him to help others avoid like treatment. Instead, he has used police state tactics to create victims of his own. Bridges, at least, had a public trial, was represented by lawyers and had the right to face unfriendly witnesses and produce friendly ones. We do not know where and when we were tried and found guilty, and at our appeal hearing on the afternoon of July 11, 1963, we were not even told the charges against us. The appeal jury was the same one that had found us guilty, in secret. This did not take place in a totalitarian society in the 1930s but in an office above Pier 24 in San Francisco in 1963. The truth is Bridges and supporters saw in our victimization a way to intimidate others who might one day pose a vague challenge to his power. To remain in power has become Bridges' end and he has used any and every means to serve that end. Writer Herbert Gold said it well on learning that Bridges had dropped the libel case. Gold, who as a teenager had donated his lunch money to defend Bridges against government attempts to deport him said, "It's sad that a man who has been persecuted by the government, and defended by artists and intellectuals, should have spent his union's money and many men's time and money in 4½ years of legal persecution of writers, artists, ministers and teachers whose offense was that they sought to help a group of longshoremen deprived of their jobs. It's as if, secure in his power, he wished to imitate bureaucratic tyranny."

We feel that our crime consisted in openly daring to criticize the so-called "mechanization" contract negotiated by Bridges in 1961. We have not changed our minds about that. Because we were subjected to "trial" in a Kafkaesque world does not mean we are willing to live in it. We will not recant. That contract is destroying the hiring hall. It has created a permanent non-union group of registered longshoremen who cannot afford to stand up for their rights on the job or in the hall. It has alienated young and old, and ranks from leaders. It is the existence of that contract and the weakened hiring hall that is Bridge's problem. Attempts to use the fired longshoremen to divert the attention of the membership from the state of the union are in vain because we cannot be separated from the question of the contract and the hiring hall; we are simply one of the manifestations of Bridges' dilemma.

STANLEY WEIR is co-chairman of the Longshore Jobs Defense Committee, the organization formed by the 51 fired longshoremen.

"YOU ARE HEREBY NOTIFIED THAT ON THE 17th DAY OF JUNE, 1963, AT A MEETING OF THE JOINT LABOR RELATIONS COMMITTEE, YOU WERE DE-REGISTERED FOR CAUSE AS A CLASS B LONGSHOREMAN . . ."

The Workers Defense League has undertaken to defend the rights of these men in court. The cost of this defense is gigantic. Travel expenses between California and New York by the lawyers, court costs, depositions, briefs, and the very task of defending 51 men is running into tens of thousands of dollars. The Workers Defense League needs \$18,000 immediately to take this case into court.

Your immediate and generous contribution is needed to help these men get their jobs back and to protect democratic principles. For six years these 51 men have been unable to obtain decent jobs because of the blotch on their records caused by this unjust firing. Please Help.

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To:

THE WORKERS DEFENSE LEAGUE, 112 East 19th Street, New York, N.Y. 10003 Enclosed please find my contribution of \$..... for the defense of the 51 Longshoremen. I do...../do not..... wish to receive further information on the progress of this case.

NAME: ADDRESS:

.....

CITY: STATE ZIP CODE:

THE SHORT SPRING OF THE ITALIAN STUDENT MOVEMENT

Gianni Statera

TWO YEARS AFTER THE SUDDEN and impetuous rise of the Italian student movement, it is practically dead as an original phenomenon of collective behavior. To realize the extent of its demise, a sketch of its short life is necessary. This will lead us to follow the rapid evolution of a utopian set of ideas, its role as a mobilizing factor, and most important, its sudden decline and conversion into something substantially different.

I. The origins of the protest in Italy

IT HAS BEEN MAINTAINED that the student unrest which developed in 1965 at the *Istituto Superiore di Scienze Sociali* of Trento (the only institution offering a degree in sociology in Italy) initiated the new student movement. Indeed, the Trento protest of 1965 represent a significant change in the orientation of student organizations, from local issues and dependence on political parties (especially Socialist, Communist, Christian Democrats, and Neo-Fascists) to broader political-ideological goals. Founded by Catholic groups linked to the ruling Christian Democratic party as a private institution with the view to restoring the Catholic sociological tradition in Italy¹ and located in a strongly Catholic-conservative region, the Institute of Social Sciences attracted a large number of students, most of them from other regions, who turned out to be anything but quiet, moderate future social technicians. Rather, they were able to pressure Parliament through sit-ins, rallies, repeated occupations of the school to support legal recognition at the *Istituto* of a degree in sociology, and not in "political science with a sociological orientation" as had been suggested.^{1a} As a matter of fact, the official recognition of sociology as an autonomous discipline was opposed at that time by the academic establishment on the grounds that it would disrupt the traditional academic system, the implicit assumption being that sociology might be a "subversive" subject.

From 1965 to 1967, political and ideological development continued at an intense pace and proceeded in different stages, often implying different demands: a limited sharing of power by students; a broader critical approach in courses; redefinition of the role of the sociological profession in a capitalist society. Finally, at the beginning of 1968, the cri-

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