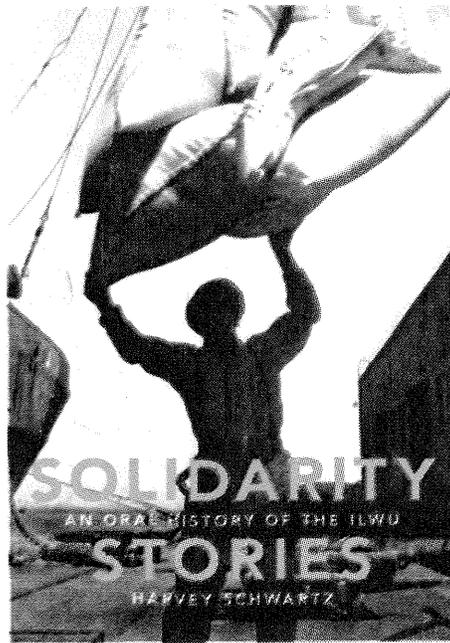


Article 28

"Keeping Solidarity Alive" - by David Bacon

**and three stories from
Solidarity Stories - An Oral History of the ILWU**

by Harvey Schwartz



By Harvey Schwartz
University of Washington Press, 2009

Keeping Solidarity Alive

A new book takes a backward glance at the ILWU's organizing history—and issues a wake-up call for today's labor movement.

By David Bacon

The labor movement seems to have lost its way. Today only 12 percent of American workers (and only 7 percent in the private sector) belong to unions; the lowest level of organization since the years before the great longshore strike of 1934. And falling numbers don't tell the whole story. Some labor leaders now say that only huge deals at the top, far from the control of rank and file workers, can bring in new members on the scale needed. To make these deals

attractive to employers, they argue, unions have to be willing to make deep concessions in wages and rights, and in our political demands on everything from single-payer health care to immigration reform.

We need some better ideas about how unions should organize—we need to rethink what a union actually is. That's why *Solidarity Stories: An Oral History of the ILWU*, by historian Harvey Schwartz, is such an important book. Here, in the history of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union, we can see some alternatives. And we hear these ideas explained by the people who lived by them, in their own words—from rank and filers on the docks, to warehouse workers and field hands, to book clerks and elected leaders of the union.

Solidarity Stories is a remarkable achievement. Workers give gripping testimony about the conditions they hoped to change, and explain how they did it. We hear how the union was organized and how it functioned, from those who built it. We see the crucial role strikes and democracy played in that process. And Schwartz is unafraid to look at the politics of the union's leaders, including activists and black workers fighting racism.

Harry Bridges, the West Coast's most famous labor leader, begins with the story of the 1934 waterfront strike. While the history is familiar to many labor activists and ILWU members, what's unique is Bridges' voice. He doesn't talk like a "labor statesman," although by the end of his life, when the interview took place, employers and politicians tried to treat him as one. But while he was in office, he says, "I always felt that the ones that direct everything is the rank and file. And I'm its spokesman, that's all. The rank and file is the power of the union, see? They're the ones that can shut things down."

"Shutting things down"—the capacity to act on the job, to withdraw labor in an effective way—was the key to building the union. Without the 1934 maritime strike, and those three days in San Francisco during the General Strike when nothing moved without the workers' permission, the union would never have gained the power it needed to make radical changes. And that was the goal. Not just any agreement or the ability to collect dues; not just a list of work-

ers who were members on paper but knew nothing about how to organize and use their power.

Bridges describes those beginning demands. “We went to our rank and file convention that February,” he recalls of the months before the strike. “We drew up a set of demands and came out with a program to set up committees, to negotiate, and, if necessary, to strike. Our demands were for a six-hour day, a wage increase, and union hiring halls. So, we come out with a program, and then we set up a negotiating committee.”

As Sam Kagel, a union advisor who later became the powerful coastwide longshore industry arbitrator, recalls, they made one other crucial demand: “Once the ‘34 strike began, and the other maritime unions went out too, the longshoremen expanded their original demands to include the requirement of a settlement for everyone.”

Without solidarity all along the waterfront, all along the coast, the strike would have been lost, and the unions crushed. In *Solidarity Stories*, strikers describe how they held out for a coastwide agreement for all unions, when employers would readily have agreed to local settlements.

Organizing Then and Now

These are not just past controversies—they are the crucial issues for labor’s future today. Some advocates for the top-down approach say setting up committees of workers is unnecessary and slow. They argue that workers in a single workplace can’t see the bigger picture and put their selfish interests above the larger interests of the union as a whole.

Longshore, transport and warehousing have changed beyond recognition, but modern ILWU organizing campaigns are based on the same ideas; help workers organize on the job and build an organization they run themselves. Workers, not staff organizers, at RiteAid’s huge Lancaster warehouse, decided when to hold (and win) their union election. Mary Winzig, a rank-and-file leader who played a critical role in organizing workers at Powell’s Books in Portland, says she and her coworkers chose the ILWU for its democratic practices. “Some of our group had looked into the history of the ILWU and learned about its militancy and support for different causes.” They arranged a meeting with an ILWU organizer, and after listening to what he had to say they signed cards that night.

The institutions born in 1934 made it possible to balance local with union-wide needs, and democracy with centralized bargaining with all shipping employers on the coast. Today even the smallest longshore locals elect delegates to the longshore caucus and pass resolutions on bargaining demands. Those delegates hash out a common program, elect the bargaining committee, and sit down with employers. Any agreement must be ratified by vote.

The ILWU pioneered other organizing ideas that today’s organizers have “rediscovered.” In Hawaii, former Wobbly Frank Thompson helped plantation workers set up a union organization right after they signed up. When workers elected a chair of one nationality, he convinced them to include officers of other nationalities in order to build interracial solidarity.

According to Lou Goldblatt, who served as ILWU’s secretary-treasurer from 1943 to 1977, “[Thompson] would go to these plantations one by one and conduct a rehearsal election. He would put out a sample ballot, call a meeting, and say, ‘We are going to vote. Everyone gets a secret ballot.’... Well, the NLRB election results speak for themselves. We had entire plantations that voted unanimously.”

“These are not just past controversies – they are the crucial issues for labor’s future today.”

Those elections were just the prelude to the big strike that everyone in Hawaii knew was coming—and it was the strike that forged the union. “The ‘46 strike brought all the groups together as a fighting force, where they won a major struggle for their life. We’d either get over the hump or that was it,” Goldblatt recalled. “One thing winning the 79-day ‘46 strike taught the sugar workers was that they could be damn self-sufficient and they could take a long beef if they had to. They could survive.”

The strike of ‘46 fundamentally changed the relationship between workers and Hawaii’s sugar and pineapple barons, laying the foundation for the political machine that eventually won statehood

Confronting Racism

Building solidarity among members was not an easy process, and the voices in Solidarity Stories draw attention to one of the biggest obstacles: racism. Black workers had to fight their way onto the waterfront, and into good jobs in warehouses. The union was their vehicle, but they also had to fight for their rights in the union itself.

African Americans came onto the Los Angeles docks during World War II, but after the war the promise of continued employment was unfulfilled for many. The “500 unemployed” lost their jobs with the complicity of the conservative leadership of the longshore local. While they fought a long battle back onto the docks, one of their strongest allies was Warehouse Local 26, which helped them survive by dispatching them through its hiring hall. Some workers even sued the union, a controversial decision, but their objective wasn’t a monetary settlement, but to become full and equal members.

Racism is an uncomfortable topic for many unions; Solidarity Stories makes an important contribution by describing the way rights and equality were won in the ILWU. Change came about because of the persistence of the African American workers. But the struggle for equality and democracy also made the ILWU stronger because white leaders like Bridges, and “white progressives” in the membership, supported them.

Cleophas Williams, an African American who became president of the San Francisco longshore union, says, “Local 10 was the most democratic organization I’ve ever belonged to. If you wanted to go out there and face that membership and campaign and work with them and related to them, that was your challenge, and you won and you lost... This union was the greatest thing in my life, other than my family. In terms of economics and social growth, this union was a platform on which I made my stand and found a place in the sun.”

Equality in the union helped the ILWU to develop the power of workers where they lived, and the community around the union became more than just an ally. “We found that, in a sense, the union is the community,” says Bill Chester, the ILWU’s first African American international officer. “We went into every aspect of community life... We were pretty well established by the 1950s as a group of workers who didn’t just look at their own selfish points of view as

far as what they had economically. We were willing to participate and spread the experience that we had learned in the trade union movement.”

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Lessons Of the Past

Harvey Schwartz’s courageous oral histories are loyal to the real history of the union. “Down through the years,” recalls Jack Olsen, “the ILWU has been a refuge for radicals who were run out of everyplace else. As a result of the policy to protect everybody regardless of political affiliation, many were able to get work... to me that’s the key to why the ILWU was always a radical organization.”

All along the coast the ILWU had a close and complicated relationship with radicals, not just in big cities and the islands, but also in tiny coast towns like North Bend, Oregon. “Around 1950 some people started calling us ‘reds,’ but that was something you kind of had to get used to,” remembers Valerie Taylor, who organized the Women’s Auxiliary there. “The FBI knocked on your door every few months. ... The name ‘left-winger’ stayed attached to me around this area, I think, because I was on all the picket lines. Whenever I’m around town, I still join em. ... Somebody has to do these things. I was certainly never by myself.”

The union also fought the prohibition in the Taft Hartley Act forbidding Communists from holding union office, and Archie Brown, a San Francisco longshoreman, successfully fought a case to the Supreme Court.

The left still takes a bad rap in labor, where unions often denigrate the need to educate workers about politics and fail to inspire them with a vision of real social change. But we need the idea that another world is possible, along with the fresh ideas of democracy and militancy that radicals brought into the ILWU.

Because of the span of time covered by the book, some parts of the union’s history couldn’t be given full attention, such as the unique contribution of the Filipinos of Seattle and Alaska—Chris Mensalves and Ernesto Mangaoang, who organized the Alaskan fish canneries during the

witchhunts, and Gene Viernes and Silme Domingo, who gave their lives to create new bonds of solidarity with unions in the Philippines. The book also leaves at least one important question unanswered: How can the union revive the solidarity and organizing energy of its famous March Inland?

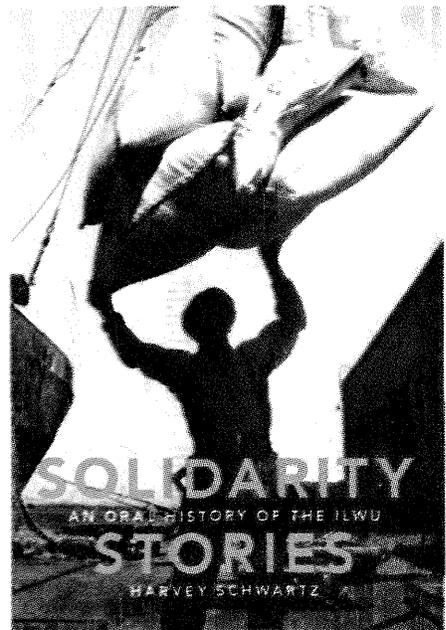
But no book like this can be truly complete; nor is it ever finished. Solidarity Stories challenges the union to make greater efforts to preserve the history of its own members—and the ILWU does much more than most. If we don't learn from our history and pass it on, we are denying it to our successors, who nevertheless must make the lessons of the past relevant in a new era.

Former labor organizer David Bacon is an award-winning photojournalist and author who lives in Berkeley, Calif. Comments are welcome and encouraged. Email to: editor@ilwu.org. Solidarity Stories will be available soon from the ILWU. Watch forthcoming issues of the Dispatcher for pricing and order information.

Solidarity Stories On Sale

Harvey Schwartz's new book, *Solidarity Stories: An Oral History of the ILWU*, is now on sale. This inspiring collection of first-hand accounts from ILWU union leaders and rank-and-file workers paints a vivid portrait of the union's past and present. Available for \$17 each, including shipping and handling.

Make check or money order out to "ILWU" and mail to
1188 Franklin St,
San Francisco, CA
94109. Price includes shipping and handling.



Solidarity Through Struggle— **The ILWU Story as Told by Its Members**

By Paul Rosenberg, Senior Editor

Solidarity Stories, by Harvey Schwartz, and published by University of Washington Press, is sub-titled “An Oral History of the ILWU”—and that’s just what it is, not “*The Oral History of the ILWU*”—so many people gave years, decades of their lives to bring the International Longshore Workers Union into existence, and to strengthen and sustain it over the years, that the idea of a definitive history would be utterly absurd. But despite its inherently limited nature, this volume—re-printing accounts previously published in *The Dispatcher*, the union’s newspaper—does an admirable job of providing first-hand accounts of a tremendous range of the individual sacrifices and collective struggles that have gone into the making of arguably the most unique union in American history, whose struggles have always involved it in the larger fabric of struggles for dignity and justice.

It’s obviously fitting that the first word goes to the legendary Harry Bridges, founding President of ILWU, who tells the bulk of the story of the struggles that lead up to the founding of the union, culminating in the 1934 coastwide strike, supported by the San Francisco General Strike. But others add important vivid details, along with chilling matter-of-fact recollections. Prior to the formation of Local 13, Henry Gaitan recalled, “If

a ship was going to sail that day, you kept working till it left. The longest shift I ever worked was 32 hours.” This no-nonsense glimpse of waterfront life and struggles before the union was formed is in some ways the most fascinating and instructive part of the book, and Bridges’ view is the most sweeping and inclusive. But true to the spirit of this most democratic of unions, one not only hears from a wide range of other workers at all levels in the union, one hears the same sort of pride of ownership from each and every one of them, even when the subject matter is internal struggles as deep and divisive as the decades-long battles to realize the ideal of a union for all workers, transcending all divisions of race and gender.

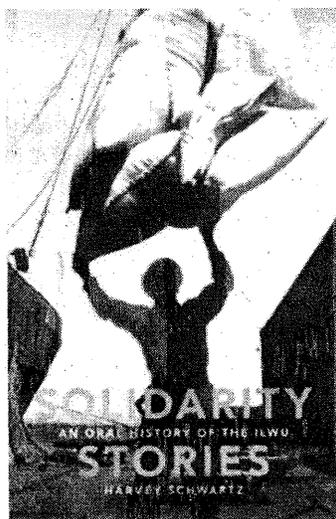
From the very beginning, Bridges was committed to non-discrimination. Cleophas Williams, the first black president of San Francisco Local 10, recalls hearing Bridges saying “that if things reached a point where only two men were left on waterfront, if he had anything to say about it, one would be a black man.” That attitude was crucial in the beginning, in an era when blacks rarely got any chance for advancement except as strike-breakers. It helped make the union unbreakable. Yet, it proved very difficult to fully realize in tensions with another key precept—that of rank-and-

file democracy. Walter Williams emerged as an informal leader in the wake of the de-registration of 500 overwhelmingly black workers at the end of World War II. More than a decade later, he pressed Bridges to deal with the issue of discrimination in promotions in Local 13, to which Bridges responded: “You got local autonomy, it’s a democratic organization. Go back and do it in the Local.”

The chapter devoted to Los Angeles and Long Beach is largely absorbed in the long struggle for full racial inclusion. We hear from others, black and Latino, who struggled to gain a foothold, and how the dynamics played out in everyday work life, as well as over periods of years, and we hear from two white local leaders of Warehouse Local 26—Lloyd Seeliger and Jackson Newton—who fought hard to hire, train and promote black workers, providing an avenue for some the de-registered 500 to eventually return to the waterfront.

Separate chapters deal with the Pacific Northwest and Canada, and with inland California warehouse organizing. But perhaps most intriguing is the story of Hawaii, for its mix of longshore and agricultural organizing, the extreme ethnic diversity of the workforce the ILWU organized, the complex interactions of different unions, and unique situation of organizing in a non-self-governing territory that was even under military rule during World War II. Just when you think you really appreciate how unique, how distinctive the ILWU really is in the American labor scene, *Solidarity Stories* drops another little nugget in your lap, that simultaneously makes you think, “I never imagined...” and “but, of course!”

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* **The seven cities are those which border on Los Angeles Harbor.**

Solidarity Stories -- pp. 102 - 108.

MARVIN RICKS: THE 1934 STRIKE IN PORTLAND

Portland longshore Local 8 veteran Marvin Ricks recalls the Big Strike in the Columbia River city. He vividly depicts pre-strike working conditions, the strike itself, and his ordeal as one of twenty-eight workers unjustly charged with the murder of a scab who was killed shortly after the strike.

Marvin Ricks

I was born October 22, 1911, in Newberg, Oregon. When I was four, my parents moved to north-central Washington, where my father had been a wheat farmer. In the spring of 1929, we moved to Ethel, Washington, ten miles out of Centralia. We were going to start a dairy farm. Dad bought a bunch of cows. I bought a bunch of heifer calves. I figured I would have to milk for ten years—then I could hire the work done.

The crash and the Depression came in the fall of '29. Milk that had sold for \$2.20 for X amount dropped to \$1.10. So in 1931 we sold the cattle. We got just half of what we paid for them two years before. Next we moved to Portland, although I would go back to north-central Washington and work in the apples, picking and spraying.

Over the winter of '31-'32, I cut cord wood in the Portland area. I was getting one dollar a cord, all split and piled four-foot wood. On a good day I could make two cords. That gave me two dollars a day. I had to take my saw over to the neighbor's to file and set it—he had a vise. His name was Neal Dagen. He also happened to be a longshoreman.

Dagen was working steadily, as much work as there was in those days. When I turned twenty-one, he says, "Hey, kid, be over at the house in the morning and I'll take you down to the hiring hall and get you a day or two's work." We didn't have a union-controlled hall then. The hall was run by the employers. The first day I was there, Dagen got me a job. We worked from eight in the morning until midnight. Basic pay was seventy-five cents an hour, no overtime. I still made more in one long day than I made in any week cutting cord wood.

Neal Dagen introduced me to a man who had a gang that worked shoveling sulfur two days a month. Nobody making any money at all wanted to shovel sulfur, but there were two days every month that I did it. Another man had a gang that loaded green hides once in a while. I got a day or two's work there.

A green hide was a complete cowhide that made a bundle two feet long, a foot and a half wide, and six or eight inches high. In August, if those uncured hides had sat for a month, you can imagine the smell. They would keep the doors on the docks open about six or eight inches so the air could blow through a little, but it didn't do much. If you got on a streetcar after work, everybody got as far away from you as they could.

Hides paid a ten-cent penalty, so you made eighty-five cents an hour. Making any money when I first started was good. I have sat in the employer-controlled hiring hall for fourteen days and gotten two hours' work, what we called "noon relief." They would hire a complete gang of men for eleven o'clock and have them relieve one hatch between eleven and twelve while that gang went to dinner. Then you relieved the second hatch between twelve and one. At seventy-five cents an hour, you made a dollar fifty.

I was also introduced to a fellow who occasionally ran a job lining a ship, which meant building a wood centerline down the middle of the vessel so that bulk wheat would not roll when the ship rolled. You didn't want all the wheat to get on one side and capsize the ship. So sometimes I got a job doing that.

After we got a union and won the '34 strike, of course, the work was evenly divided. We used the same hall. We just had different people running it, and we moved the loan shark and beer joint out of there. But before the union, we had fifty-five gangs working out of the employer-run hiring hall, thirteen men to a gang. Usually those gangs were full. All the other workers, myself included, were called "extra men." They did the less organized jobs, like lining ships for bulk grain and working on the docks where there were no regular gangs.

I always refused to pay for a job, which back then kept me from getting a certain amount of work. One fellow said, "My brother is taking out an extra gang this afternoon, do you want to work?" I says, "Certainly." In an hour, he came back and said, "I need one dollar." I says, "Certainly, I'll loan you one dollar." Come payday, he didn't pay me. The second payday, I said, "Hey, where's my one dollar?" He says, "Didn't you work for my brother?" I said, "I still want my one dollar." I got my one dollar back, but I never worked for his brother again.

There was one gang boss who raffled off a radio. He had twelve men in his

gang. Every week everybody in the gang bought a chance on the radio for a dollar. I don't know how many years this went on, but there was never a drawing. If you're only making twenty-five or thirty dollars a week, twelve dollars is quite a little addition. In other cases—remember, under Prohibition, liquor was illegal until 1933—a bottle of moonshine whiskey passed to a gang boss bought a job.

The employers cared little about safety then. If it slowed the work down, to hell with safety. We killed five or six men a year in Portland from waterfront accidents. Any way you could think of to kill a man, we managed to do it. My friend, Dagen, who took me down to the waterfront, was killed just a few years afterwards. They dropped a load of scrap iron that hit a piece of pipe laying in the shelter deck with one end sticking out over the open hatch. Dagen was tending that hatch ten feet above and twenty-five feet across. The pipe hit him in the head and killed him.

You didn't have safety nets or anything. Fellas would slip off the dock and fall into the river. In those days you had a log around the dock to keep the ship from rubbing the piling. If you fell in, you landed on top of a log twenty-five or thirty feet down, and that was the end.

One day Howard Bodine came around when I was at the hall and says, "Hey, Marvin, you wanna join the union?" I said, "What's a union?" I was from inland, I'd never heard of one. I'd heard of Communists, but I'd never heard of a union. He started explaining, and I told him, "Can I wait 'til tomorrow to give you an answer? I'll talk to a couple of my good friends."

Well, Dagen and his best friend both says, "Yes, we plan on joining, and we think you should, too. We don't think the union will last over a year before they break us, but it'll give you a chance to get better acquainted." I forget whether it was one dollar or two dollars—some outrageous sum—to join. Dues were one dollar a month.

We all got a button when we joined the union, but nobody dared to wear one before the strike. Your gang boss might have joined the union, too, but if he showed up with a bunch of men with buttons on their hats, the walking boss, if he was a good company man, was not going to hire that gang. So there was kind of a blacklisting, but not as such.

Several ships were still working the morning the '34 strike started. One of my first jobs was to go around with a bunch of men to every ship in the harbor that was working and tell the gangs that everybody was out and they'd better get off the ship right now. We talked most of them into leaving. Some gangs



Picketing during the first day of the 1934 strike, Portland waterfront. Oregon Historical Society, OrHi 81702.

didn't quit, but we did nothing at the time because we were just four men per group making the rounds. As the strike got going, the things we did were considerably different.

When we got organized, then those guys who were working the ships had been warned. That's why the employers kept the strikebreakers on board ship, or on the grain docks, or out at Terminal 4. That way, those men didn't have to come back and forth, because they had a little problem getting back and forth.

One night the phone rang. It was the fellow that ran the beer joint up on Twenty-third and Burnside. He says, "Hey, I've got two guys in here that sound like scabs." We said, "Okay, we'll be there." We walked in. Here are two fellas sitting down, drinking. We knew them both.

We said, "Well, hi, fellas. We know you're too drunk to drive home. We'll see you get home safe." Meanwhile, you have a wristlock on each one, so if they make a sound, you could break their arm. We led 'em out. You go as good pals, you're helping the two drunks. We got 'em outside, talked to 'em by hand a little while, and turned 'em loose.

You might say I was in a flying squad—we called it a "riot squad." These were squads made up of football players, boxers, or wrestlers, the single men

that didn't have much to lose. There were four squads of us on the shift I was on. If there was trouble at a dock, they called for us, and here come forty men down there in a hurry. Throughout the strike we kept ten pickets at every gate, at every dock on the waterfront. We kept them twelve hours a day, seven days a week. Well then, we had these forty men that could go anywhere at any time to reinforce. And we did make a difference.

They did capture our navy though. One of our fellas had a fishing boat that we used for a patrol boat. At Terminal 4, these scabs were working a ship. We made slingshots and pulled up to the ship and started shooting at the winch driver and hatch bosses. They were throwing shackles at us, or whatever they could find. I don't think anybody hit anybody. But they swore out John Doe warrants for the four or six of us in the boat. Then the harbor patrol confiscated our navy—they took our boat away and tied it up.

When the strike started, nearly all the regular police were our friends. They were working men. Then, pretty soon, you found all the good guys uptown, directing traffic, and you had every bad one on the waterfront, plus a bunch of special police they stationed at Terminal 4. The July 11 tragedy, when the police opened up shooting near Terminal 4, was completely unnecessary. They claimed they only used riot guns, but Elmus "Buster" Beatty had a .45 slug in his neck and was off for a year. Four pickets were shot that day, two critically.

We did have someone in the police department who sent us a list every week of all the special police that were hired, including addresses. So there were specials who happened to run into unfriendly people in the streets. Then we had this detective who used to tell us this and that. Once he says, "They're moving a bunch of scabs in the morning. We have orders to take them to point X. At point Y, the harbor patrol is to pick them up and guard them the rest of the way. Somebody forgot there was one block in between those two points."

"I will see to it that we protect them only to the point that we were told," the detective said, "and that none of the harbor patrol go beyond that point." So there was quite a bit of monkey business out in the street that morning in that one block. There were police on both ends, but none made a move because they hadn't any orders. That is what you call having friends.

We had other friends, too. The local prostitutes made us sandwiches, which were wrapped up real nicely with the girls' cards inside. Broadway Cab delivered the sandwiches for free. One night a week, everybody on the picket line, two or three hundred men, got sandwiches. Another thing, being times were tough, the madams

donated rooms. They would put four to six men in a room for the duration of the strike. A lot of the area farmers were liberal, too, and donated produce to us.

I was on the soup-bumming detail for a while. One of my duties was to go up to the Good Eats Cafe on Burnside at ten o'clock at night when they closed. They gave us whatever coffee and soup they had left over. We had bumming committees for rooms, food, produce, and everything, because you couldn't get much help from other unions. In '34, what unions you had were very weak. We were what got unions going.

After the strike, the work paid \$.95 an hour. I made \$2.10 the first twenty-one days. That's \$10 a day. I was working pretty steady. I remember twenty-one days because on the twenty-second day I got arrested. What happened was that a bunch of our men who were provoked by an employer agent raided this company union scab hall.² A shot was fired, and a scab named James Connor was killed.

When I got arrested, I said, "What for?" They says, "Murder." I thought, "Ah, what a relief." This might have been for assault and battery, kidnapping or sabotage, but when they said murder, I knew I didn't do it. I wasn't there. I'd gone to the dentist that day. He was late, and I was waiting alone at his office when the shooting took place. But I couldn't prove it. He had no secretary. In the '30s you did well to support yourself, let alone a secretary. Anyway, they picked up everybody that any of the scabs saw or thought they saw.

I was taken to jail. You weren't allowed to call out for twenty-four hours. I disappear, wiped off the face of the earth. When they questioned me, there was the assistant district attorney, "Big Bill" Browne, the head of the police "Red Squad," two policemen, and two detectives. You're this scared twenty-two-year-old kid with six people throwing questions at ya, and you haven't even been allowed to call out. Well, one thing, being as I hadn't been there, I could tell the truth. I didn't get confused in my story.

They took us down to the city jail and threw us into the bull pen where the drunks had been heaving their guts out. It was horrible. They were picking up two, three, four longshoremen a day. We got watery mush for breakfast with two slices of moldy bread and a little thin soup at lunch and dinner. The only thing you could buy was Milky Way candy bars. It took me twenty years before I could eat another one. After a week they moved us to the county jail, where the food was good, and they let the union or your wives or friends bring food in to you.

There were twenty-eight of us charged. A quirk in the law let them charge us all. Once there were thirty-two, but we proved that four of us weren't there.

When we started having our preliminary hearings at city hall, they hauled us down and back in the Black Maria. They'd take us out ten at a time on a chain. We only shaved on shave day, so the public got to see these ten unshaven, rough-looking characters on the chain.

In a while, some kid that had scabbed broke down and told the police he'd seen another scab, Carl Grammer, shoot Conner. The cops found the gun, too. It matched, and they had proof that Grammer did it. So we finally got turned loose.

After the strike, we had our names in rotation on the dispatch board. We had to take in some scabs, including "Big Nose" Riley, who was right next to me on the list. So I got him often. I managed to work with that man for over two years, not steadily, but quite a bit, without ever speaking to him. And neither, as far as I know, did anybody else in the gangs.

When the strike was over, I was happy to have a little money to spend, which before I didn't have. I owed the kid at the service station two dollars and I could pay that off. Today, *The Oregonian* says we are upper middle class on account of our good wages. Years ago we were looked down upon and called "Communitistic bums." I do recall that Matt Meehan, one of our '34 leaders, was a Wobbly, a member of the radical Industrial Workers of the World, the IWW. I used to be against the idea of Wobblies, and against Communism, but now I think they did more for the union and getting organized than anyone.

You have to have a radical. The rest of you may hate your conditions, but you go along, whereas you need some no-good so-and-so to stir it up and get you going. I think nearly all of our early top leadership was a little bit on the Wobbly side, whether you could prove it or not. Now I don't know about Harry Bridges, but it takes someone like him to get out and do the job.

I also feel we have to organize to stay alive. You just can't stand alone. You need people to back you when you have trouble. Taking in the salespeople at Powell's Books, which we did recently in the new Local 5, hits my sense of humor as a good thing. It was getting two completely opposite types of workers together.

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JERRY TYLER: SEATTLE ACTIVIST

Seattle's longshore Local 19 veteran Jerry Tyler had a career that resembled those of many dedicated mid-twentieth-century ILWU activists. He lived on the road and worked survival jobs in the 1930s, went to sea during World War II, and found being an ILWU longshore worker a lifesaver in later years.

Jerry Tyler

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

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

I tried fighting, but I didn't make much money at that. This was in the late 1920s when I was sixteen, seventeen, eighteen. I had a good trainer and didn't do too bad. I started out as a bantamweight; I was a little wart then. But when I gained weight—I ended up a lightweight—that slowed me down a bit. They started tagging me. We discovered I had a glass chin. There's only one cure for that—that's don't take punches. So I got the hell out before I was brain damaged. Well, I think I did, anyhow!

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

It was a crowded existence. There were a lot of guys on the trains. You'd be coming north out of L.A., headin' to Portland or up to Washington to work the apples. And here would be a bunch of guys going the other direction. They'd say, "Where are you going?" You'd answer, "Up to Wenatchee, over in there, to pick apples." They'd say, "Hell, man, there's a picker for every apple." You'd

look at the guy and think, “Aw, you dummy, you wouldn’t know a job if it bit you on the ass,” and you’d find out you were both right. You’re just traveling, hoping you’d find something.

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

All the gals are sittin’ around in their bathrobes. And boy, they fed me good! When I left, them gals all laid a half a buck or so on me and wished me good luck. So I’ve got a soft spot in my heart for prostitutes, people that are down on their luck and got a rough way to go.

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

Then I’d go eat breakfast in the mess car, and the day would start. I’d push that damned wagon about a half mile, and finally move it off on a siding made especially for it. Then I’d start walkin’ with a yoke around me that had two great big water buckets with tin cups hanging off it. This is out in the desert—god, it was hot! I’m yelling “*agua*,” because most of the workers were Mexican, and I’d walk up and down with that goddamned thing—oh, I was tough then.

I landed in Modesto, California, where I got a job on a fruit ranch. Then I worked as a roadhouse waiter. A roadhouse was a nightclub. This was in 1933, when liquor came back, after Prohibition ended. If times were bad, I’d get laid off from the roadhouse and work at whatever I could get.

Well, the cooks in this one Modesto joint where I got hired were in the culinary workers union, which I joined. One time they said, “The waitresses over at the Greek’s are not unionized.” So they pulled a sit-in. We went over there just before noon, took all the stools and tables, sat down, and had a cup of coffee. We stayed all during lunch. The management decided, “I guess we’d better talk to these guys.” That’s how we organized that place. It was my first experience with a union, and it opened my eyes quite a ways.

When the 1934 strike happened, I was still in Modesto. Rent was four dol-

lars a week. I'd joined the National Guard with my roommate, Clancy Johnson. We got two bucks a week for drills, so that paid the rent. They wanted to take the Modesto National Guard to Stockton for strike duty. I went to Cap Freeman and said, "Cap, I can't do that. My old man was a working stiff and I'm a working stiff, and here I'm going to go over there and stick a bayonet in some other poor working stiff? I can't do it." He said, "Okay, we'll put you down as if you're leaving the state. No problem." So I didn't go.

I went to San Francisco and got a job as a waiter at Goman's Gay '90s, an old place at Fillmore and Geary Streets. It was then that I sold my first fiction story. They called it "The Coward Who Had Killer Fists." I'd been writing all the time, trying to write for the pulps. In Modesto, when I'd worked in the roadhouse, I'd write during the day and go to work at night. A junior college teacher—I took some classes—told me who to contact, and I sent stuff off. After that first check, I couldn't write a thing for about two months! Then I started whacking them out while I was working at Goman's.

In December 1941, when we got into World War II, I was still at Goman's Gay '90s. I'd wanted to go to sea since I was a kid. For a farm boy, going to sea was romantic as hell. So when the war broke out, I got my chance. They needed people. I registered, got a trip card, and started shipping out of San Francisco in the old MCS [Marine Cooks and Stewards Association of the Pacific Coast, CIO].⁸ I'd been a waiter, so I got a mess job. I even sold a couple of stories while I was going to sea, but there was a paper shortage, the pulps went to hell, and the short story market just died.

One night while I was working on a troop ship, a torpedo just missed us. I used to like to sleep out on deck back on the fantail. There was a gun tub right over me. I woke up in the early morning, and all these guys are tense. Everybody's at general quarters. I said, "What's going on?" A sailor answered, "A torpedo come by and passed just to stern of us. The guy on watch saw it." So that kind of put an ice cube up my rear end.

I'd been in Local 30 of the culinary workers at Goman's, but when I went to sea was when I really got introduced to unionism. At my first MCS meeting, I thought, "These guys mean business." They had a rank-and-file-operated union. I popped my mouth off over some deal, and that kind of set things in motion. They heard I could write, and they accepted me, babied me along, and got me involved. They asked me to write some stuff, and I wrote a stewards department newsletter for my ship. They put it up on the bulkhead in the mess room.

During the war I went on the old *Matsonia*. She was a trooper with a big stewards department. That was when the CP first approached me. I knew there'd been something wrong with our system, our economy. I'd heard all about these Commies and all that stuff, but pretty soon it seemed like they were the only people talking anything that made sense to a working man. So when they invited me to join, I said, "Sure, what the hell." I stayed in for quite a while after the war. I left the Party in the 1950s when I felt there was too much power at the top, that if you didn't agree with the top, the democracy wasn't there.

I came up to Seattle to ship out after I married a Seattle gal. Then I took port jobs when the act screening workers off the waterfront came in. This was during the McCarthy period after the war. Later I bumped into Senator Warren Magnuson, who'd backed screening. He was supposed to be liberal. I said, "What did you do that for? You know what you did to us? If you were a member of the Party, you got screened. But if you were even sympathetic or if you were a damned good union man, you got it, too. Didn't have to prove nothing." He said, "I never thought they'd use it that way." I thought, "You stupid son of a bitch, and you're a U.S. senator."

I became a MCS patrolman—that's like a business agent—in Seattle and was publicity chair for the union. I also got elected secretary of the CIO Industrial Union Council. We decided to have a CIO radio program. The Joint Action Committee pointed the finger at me. This was by 1948. After my first broadcast, I couldn't go anyplace on the waterfront without guys saying, "That was good, man, you gave it to them. My neighbors listened, too." Which was what it was for. On the day the 1948 longshore strike ended, I interviewed MCS and ILWU guys at a meeting and put that tape on the air.

When I was secretary of the CIO council and had the radio show, our local CIO didn't have any money. So I went down to the executive board meeting of ILWU longshore Local 19 and said, "It's important to keep this council moving. I would like to come down to the dispatch hall, and after everybody is gone, before you go outside to get casuals, I'd like to get a job. Anything I earn will be deducted from what the council was supposed to pay me." They said, "Yeah," and that's when I started longshoring. Soon, of course, with the McCarthy period on, station time got hard to get, and we had to fold the radio show.

When Local 19 opened the pool—we called ourselves "poolies," it was a B list—I applied. They took me in. We used to get all the crap jobs, stuff the regulars didn't want. Regulars we called "buttonheads" since they wore their union



Longshore operations, Seattle, 1963. Photo by Otto Hagel. Courtesy ILWU Library. Copyright 1998 Center for Creative Photography, University of Arizona Foundation

buttons on their caps. We got the jobs working green hides, bananas, pig irc fish meal, and all that good stuff. When you worked hides, you muscled eve one by hand. They'd stink and have lots of maggots. They were hell to sto because they were slippery. There was nothing worse than having a tier of hic silently melt and fall all over, making you rebuild.

Actually, I started longshoring at the best time. I saw the whole revoluti of cargo handling. When I started, there was no packaged cargo. You stow everything by hand. Then you began getting packaged cargo, cribs, robots, a

containers. If anybody told us ten years before this started that it was going to happen, we would've thought they were reading science fiction. But Harry was smart; he saw it coming.

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

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

In the mid-1950s I made regular membership in the local. They'd had meetings for pool members, and I used to speak. And I'd been active in MCS. So it wasn't too long before I ran for Local 19 executive board and got elected. I was vice president of the local in the mid-1960s. Around the same time I became editor of the Local 19 newsletter, *The Hook*. George Olden, our secretary, talked me into it. He said, "We got some things we got to get out to the membership." So I had to do it. We always had a "safety first" bit, because longshoring then was neck and neck with hard-rock mining for danger.

Still, I says, "They want a hook, I'll give 'em a hook." So I burlesqued it, made it funnier than hell. I adopted the pen name Stevie Adoree, after "steve-dore." It was a takeoff on the advice columnist Ann Landers. I wrote about guys who'd throw their old beat-up gloves and socks around, crap like that. "If they did that at home," I said, "their old ladies would beat their brains out."

Soon we had to reprint and make more copies. After a few months we found out it was the wives who wanted the paper. "Where's *The Hook*? Bring *The Hook*," the auxiliary told us. The women at home didn't hear what's going on, the men wouldn't tell 'em anything. So they'd go for *The Hook*. It got real popular. I'd write about the guys, using lots of names. "So-and-so's wife had twins," I'd say, "so we know he's gonna work a lot of overtime." Now, I was very careful and didn't go too far or insult a guy unfairly.

Then we had what we called "the big lump." That was when they disbanded

the strike committee, which I thought was a shame, and paid back the strike fund. We also had a Social Security overpayment we called "the little lump." I wrote in *The Hook* that the little lump would be paid out on so-and-so date caught hell for that one! "Damn you," guys said, "that was my hold-out money. My old lady never knew anything." I almost had to take a vacation!

I retired the first day of 1974, when I was sixty-two. I took all my work clothes, boots and all, to the laundromat, washed them, and put a sign up—"I'm retired. If you can use this stuff, it's yours." Soon there was a check in the mail from Social Security and a check from the union.

"Damn," I thought, "this is going to happen for the rest of my life." My kids were all grown up then, I was single, I didn't own anything, and I didn't owe anything. Two weeks later I was in Cairo, Egypt, and I just kept rolling, traveling around. In 1981, when I was back in Seattle, I did start a newsletter for the pensioners that I called *The Rusty Hook*. I put out one issue and left to travel again.

I guess I was one of the luckiest guys that ever pulled on a pair of pants when I joined the ILWU. I just hit it lucky when I got in the pool. If it wasn't for that, I don't know where I'd be. When they run the pension checks off in Frisco, they must say, "Is that old bastard still alive?"

Every time I go to the hospital, or up to the clinic, or have to get some medicine, I think, "Thank God for Harry Bridges and the ILWU." I see other guys from other trades, retired and living on nothing but Social Security and Medicare, and I think, "You poor devil, you should've been a longshoreman." I remember when Frank Jenkins said he was talking to some guys uptown and telling 'em what we had. They kept asking questions. Finally Frank says, "Yeah, when you guys were calling us Commies, here we were, getting these good wages and conditions."

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BILLIE ROBERTS HENDRICKS: UNION PIONEER, 1936–1951

In the 1930s–40s, Billie Roberts Hendricks was widely known to Bay Area warehouse union members.¹² She joined the warehouse local during the march inland in San Francisco and persevered as a staunch ILWU advocate for the next fifteen years.

Billie Roberts Hendricks

I grew up on an Iowa farm. I'm seventy-six now [1982]. My mother was the only one of eight children not born in a log cabin near Prairie View. My grandmother rode to Iowa in a covered wagon, and my grandfather went through the Civil War as a Yank with the Eighth Iowa Cavalry. We've got family trees until it comes out of your ears. Some of my relatives wanted to join the Daughters of the American Revolution, but I never joined. It's so stuffy!

My parents were married in 1904. They weren't rich, but they owned their farm, eighty acres of corn, oats, and livestock in Van Buren County, Iowa. My folks raised me to be a little lady and marry a "professional man." Well, by age seventeen, the farm was choking me. I would wake up and see the sun come in over the cornfield and settle over the cornfield. The world was my oyster, but there was nothing to do, just grow up and pick flowers in the summer. We were five miles out of any little town.

I'd read books where you get out and see the world. I wanted to leave the farm, be on my own and go to school. My father wanted me to stay home and raise chickens, but that didn't appeal to me at all. So I went to Lawrence, Kansas, where my Aunt Lucy took me in, and I went to college. I wanted to be a schoolteacher. You didn't have to have a college certificate to do that in those days. So I took a teaching job when I was nineteen or twenty.

For two years I taught grade school in the small Kansas towns of Bayshore and Heifer. I had to sign a paper that I'd go to church at least twice a month.



Billie Roberts Hendricks and daughter Sallie, San Francisco, 1945. ILWU Library

Remember, this was rural America in the 1920s. I was supposed to stay in a village of Bayshore, and I couldn't smoke, get married, or go out with school boys. After I won a five-dollar box of candy in a local lottery, the school board charged me with gambling. So when I was invited to my uncle's in Chicago, I went. I took a job there and stayed for eighteen months.

In Chicago I met a man who was twenty years my senior. He'd been married several times, once to a silent-movie star in Hollywood. He was selling real estate traveling from coast to coast when he wasn't drinking. He said, "If you want to go to Los Angeles, I'll get you a little house with red roses around it and you can pick oranges off the trees." I quit my job in the middle of the day, got married, and came to California!

That's when the big 1929 crash came. The Great Depression shot my husband's sales business. At first I couldn't get a job. I'd go to those big all-

markets they had in Los Angeles, where vegetables were a penny a bunch, if you had the penny. I would go to Elysian Park and look under the trees where the lovers were, and pick around and maybe find a dime.

I finally got a job in a little scab restaurant. Everything in Los Angeles was scab then. Each time I called the order in, the short-order cook would give me a punch on the backside. That incensed me to death. Now, I'd curse him back, after all my years in the ILWU. Then, I just went home and told my stuck-up college husband. He said, "You must have encouraged him." Imagine!

We came up to San Francisco in 1932. A lady I knew said, "There's jobs opening in this whiskey place." That was around 1933. The first job I got, and it was before we were organized into the union, was at South End Warehouse. After Prohibition was repealed in late '33, the foreman opened his own place, Distillers Distributing. He asked several of us to go with him, including me, and I went. These were small businesses. It was before the big companies started, like Schenley's and Hiram Walker's.

At South End Warehouse, I got thirty-two cents an hour for eight hours' work, if I was lucky. If you were wanted for a second shift, it was eight hours more at thirty-two cents an hour. All we got between shifts was coffee, no meals. There was no such thing as hours-a-week or overtime. But mostly, we'd go in and work a few hours, and then they'd say, "There are no more orders. Go home." We'd work two hours, sit there and wait two more hours until the mail came, and then go home.

I worked on a line with a big machine, and it would drive you crazy. We pasted labels on whiskey flasks and put the bottles in cases, twenty-four to a case. If you wasn't careful, if the boys didn't get it right, the glass would fly. The floors were wet. You had to wear certain shoes. You wore your own gloves. These were old warehouses. Sometimes they weren't even heated. After they were union, you had clean uniforms supplied and you bought your own shoes. They supplied gloves.

Before the union, the women that worked the fastest got to stay the longest. Then the boss would come along and say, "Fire all the old bags, and keep all the pretty ones with pretty legs." Here the poor old gals were working their tails off and needed the money and was better workers. You never knew when you were going to be let out and when you weren't.

When the three-day San Francisco general strike came along in July 1934, everybody was out. The town was ours. We were just on top of the world. Nobody

dared tell us we were poor. We knew we were going to win. There was nobody quitting and saying, "We can't make a living, we'll go someplace else." During the long maritime strike, before and after the general strike, I was working at South End Warehouse. When the National Guard patrolled the waterfront following the police killings on Bloody Thursday, the longshoremen gave me a pass to go through. The women weren't organized yet, but they weren't anti.

Actually, it was our dream to be unionized. Imagine belonging to a group like the longshoremen that stuck up for your rights, saw that you had seniority and saw that the boss couldn't harass you or sleep with you. Harry Ludde, the foreman at South End Warehouse, used to say, "Come out to my house tonight." We didn't dare say "no." We were tired, but when we were invited to the boss's party, we went. Once he made us all get down on our hands and knees and bark like a dog for our plate of supper!

The first group of organized warehouses we heard about was the coffee houses. We went down to the hall to get in the union. But the work wasn't too steady. We would go to the hall and be dispatched out to work.

During the years right after the 1934 strike, people flocked to the warehouse local. All the Italian women from North Beach rushed down to join the union. Those were the years the longshoremen worked to start other unions going. They inspired everyone. The garment workers and the flour workers were organizing. Everybody wanted to get their home base, just like the longshoremen.

My first union meeting must have been about 1936. The women would just listen back then. We did think our organizers—Gene Paton, who became wonderful Local 6 president in 1937, Lou Goldblatt, the Heide brothers, Bob Robertson—were "it." And Lou knew how to get things rolling. He started our steward system. But we didn't have much of a voice. The men would make all the rules. There was nothing we could do but be a rubber stamp for them.

Between 1937 and 1942 the women had their own separate meetings. Our male Local 6 leaders weren't much interested in women's problems in those early days. Neither was Harry, although we were thrilled when he came to meetings. The men thought "the girls" were only going to work until they got married or made some extra money. I was on the Women's Division executive board, but we didn't have much real power. We didn't meet with the men until we bellowed. Then we got amalgamated with them. We wanted to be known as workers. I never knew about this equal rights amendment business. I always thought I was a worker.¹²

Sometimes when we were dispatched out of the union hall for jobs, we were sent to a place that wasn't organized. We would talk union to the workers. Then we would vote to get the union in. We were called Red Hots because we organized. The bosses hated us. We had some pretty rough times. Whenever anybody struck, we were on that picket line. This little Judy Anderson always had a long sock with a Sweetheart Soap bar in it. If she was bothered by scabs, they'd get hit with a "sweetheart."

My husband and I divorced before very long. Then I married a man named Roberts. While I was working at Distillers Distributors, I became pregnant. When my daughter Sallie was eighteen months old, Roberts left me to marry someone else. But by then, I had a good Local 6 job and was determined to keep care of my little girl.

I became interested in a group called Working Mothers with Children. As my daughter grew up, for the next seven or eight years, I went to every meeting they had. There were several Local 6 people who were interested in child care, including Tillie Olsen and Hazel Drummond.¹³ Hazel wrote a column for *The Dispatcher* in the mid-1940s. We'd meet with the board of education and rant and rave about getting a center for working mothers' kids. All the unions sent delegates, including the longshoremen.

Right at the end of 1939 or in 1940 I went over to Schenley's Liquors. It was just starting up. The union wanted volunteers to go in and help organize the place. One of the officers asked me to go. The company was avid to get workers. We just went down and asked for a job. We succeeded in organizing Schenley's into Local 6, too. I'd been working at the MJB Coffee warehouse packing tea bags on a belt line. It was a wrench to give up your seniority in a house, but I did.

When the bosses figured out I was organizing, they called me "that red button girl" and gave me the dirtiest job there was. I was stuck off in this washroom, standing up all the time washing bales and bales of dirty rags with glue on them and then passing them along. When the other workers put the labels on the bottles, they had nice clean cloths to wipe the extra glue off. In this job, though, I sometimes got to walk up and down the line and, when I wasn't caught, talk union.

I also got on every Local 6 committee I could. We had a publicity committee that put out a little magazine on yellow sheets. We would send these yellow sheets around to everybody so they'd know what the other shops were doing.

I was on our uniform committee, too. Each of us got a cap and a white, starched uniform for parades. On Labor Day, we were out in force on Market Street. We'd pass the reviewing stand and then get a walk-away shrimp cocktail down at the beach. We were the proudest things you ever did see!

Usually when there was a committee meeting, I'd take my daughter with me. The Local 6 hall was our second home. Everybody knew Sallie at the union. From nine to four, while I was working at Schenley's, I could leave her at the St. Francis Day Home, which was close to where I lived. It only cost me thirty-five cents a day. Otherwise Sallie went everywhere with me. Of course, if there was a night meeting or a potentially dangerous situation, someone else would take care of her.

About 1940 there was a particularly rough strike at Euclid Candy Company. We had joined the picket line and were walking back and forth across the company's door when the cops dove in. They weren't nice cops and they were on horseback. We tried to put our arms together and keep walking. They kept pushing with their horses. A horse's hoof almost stepped on my foot. One of our boys had a pocket knife, and he gave the horse a jab to make it move away.

The Local 10 longshoremen showed up to reinforce the Euclid picket line. They were all in their white hats, work shirts, and black jeans. That was kind of an ILWU uniform. The cops saw this one longshoreman I recognized who was always an organizer. They said, "All right, Hendricks, step back." That was the first time I ever heard the name of Hendricks. I thought, "That guy's for me." He wasn't afraid of the devil. At Easter, anybody else would bring his sweetheart an Easter lily. Not Frank Hendricks! He brought an Easter basket with a bunny in it for my baby. We were married in 1943.

When the United States got into World War II in the early 1940s and most of the men went into the service, I took what had been considered a man's job. I got a marvelous wage and I was now called a "receiving clerk." This was at Schenley's. The boss said, "Are you afraid to go downstairs to shipping and receiving, you and Alice Moore?" We weren't. Alice became a shipping clerk. We each got our own little office.

I used to get this solution that came in five-gallon cans. It went over the top of the liquor to keep the government stamps intact. I took in supplies for the machine shop, too. All the boys were helpful, although there was one old man who used to say, "Why don't you girls go home and raise your family? Why



Labor Day, Stockton, 1947. ILWU Library.

do you want to do men's work?" What an old son of a gun he was. We had to live, you know?

I was also quite into the blood donor scene during World War II. This was around 1944 to 1945. They needed blood for the wounded. I represented Schenley's, Local 6, and the San Francisco Industrial Union Council, CIO, in this big contest to elect Queens of the Purple Hearts. When you gave a pint of blood, you cast a vote for queen. I got four hundred votes for four hundred pints donated. We had it so well organized in warehouse. There were big signs that said, "Vote for Billie Roberts." I gave a lot of blood myself, too. You'd think I was a mainliner. But I had lots of blood. I was a strong person.

When Schenley's and all the other liquor houses closed down in 1951, I went to work in a top-grade restaurant at the Clift Hotel and became a member

of the AFL waitresses union. They were a very so-so outfit. You didn't have to go to union meetings. In early Local 6 days, we couldn't wait for our two meetings a month. But in the waitresses union, if you didn't want to go, you just had to pay your month's dues. They thought I was the craziest thing they ever saw because instead of paying for someone to picket one of the restaurants, I went and picketed after my job. They never heard of anyone getting out and walking again after she'd walked all day.

Of course, I was always in political action as a good Democrat. When Franklin Delano Roosevelt was running for president, Sylvia Maker from Local 6 and I took pamphlets around. We walked for blocks to put flyers in front windows. It didn't occur to us to charge. The waitresses union didn't care who was running. They didn't care if you voted or not. It was very different.

The waitresses, too, always worked for tips and were jealous of each other. There wasn't that comradeship like we had in the ILWU, where you knew that you belonged. You weren't fighting alone. All of my life, for the last thirty or forty years, I've remembered those Local 6 kids. They were like the buddies, I guess, in a war. We were together against the enemy every day.

I love the ILWU. I'm so proud of it. I don't know what life would have been for me without the union. It was certainly a wonderful way of life. When you were a schoolteacher, you had to get out and wrestle your own job, or go in all dressed up to see the boss, with him looking you up and down wondering what kind of a lay you were. But it was nothing seeing the boss after there was a union and we got our dispatch hall.

I never got into anything before where I thought the workers would get their just desserts. When I was in college, they used to say, "What good are unions? They're only for stupid people. Anybody with any ingenuity can get their own job." You know, stuff like that. But when I found out these workers were organizing, I thought it was beautiful.