

WORKING TOGETHER: WATERFRONT POLITICS, PEACE AND SOLIDARITY DURING THE
1948 WEST COAST MARITIME STRIKE

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ABBREVIATIONS

AFL	American Federation of Labor
ARA	American Radio Association
CIO	Congress of Industrial Organizations
ILA	International Longshore Association
ILWU	International Longshore and Warehouse Union
MEBA	Marine Engineers Beneficial Association
MFOW	Pacific Coast Marine Firemen, Oilers, Watertenders and Wipers Association
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NLRB	National Labor Relations Board
NUMCS	National Union of Marine Cooks and Stewards
PASA	Pacific American Shipowners Association
SUP	Sailor's Union of the Pacific
SIU	Seafarers' International Union
WEA	Waterfront Employers Association of the Pacific Coast

*We'll show you that the membership, not the officials, are the boss. They should be.
Because they are the unions.*

-Maritime unions' radio program, October 25th, 1948.

In his role as an arbitrator between the Waterfront Employers Association of the Pacific Coast (WEA) and the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), Clark Kerr recalled sitting down with Frank P. Foisie, President of the WEA, and Harry Bridges, the fiery leader of the ILWU, attempting to get the two diametrically opposed leaders to sit down and negotiate.

They said, 'Sit down, this won't take long...[Foisie said:] 'Mr. Bridges, we do not know what you are going to demand, but, by God, the answer is no.'" Bridges replied: 'To tell you the truth, Mr. Foisie, we have not yet finally decided on our demands, but, by God, we will never take no for an answer.'" So the parties turned to me and told me that here was my case, that they had negotiated.¹

In 1948, this animosity between Bridges and Foisie and the organizations they represented reached a tipping point in a West Coast Maritime Strike. Unable to reach an agreement on the issues of hiring and the politics of the union leadership, the longshoremen and a coalition of other marine unions walked out on September 2nd, 1948, beginning a 95 day strike that would be one of the longest in the union's history. The strike shut down the United States' West Coast ports, effectively bringing trade and commerce to a standstill. Antagonism between the ILWU and the WEA was not new, but in 1948 it had reached new heights, escalating to the point where negotiations were completely called off. In a surprising turn of events, the strike was finally ended with a complete reversal of the nature of waterfront labor relations. In place of open

¹ Clark Kerr, *The Gold and the Blue: A Personal Memoir of the University of California, 1949-1967*, vol. 1 *Academic Triumphs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 137.

hostility, employers instituted a policy of mutual cooperation with the ILWU, known as the “new look, ushering in an era of peace on the waterfront.”²

The events of 1948 raise several questions: Why was there such animosity between the WEA and the ILWU? What made the 1948 strike so difficult to settle? What led to the complete reversal in the two parties’ attitudes from hostility to cooperation? The answers to these questions can be found in an examination of the national political climate of 1948, as well as the internal politics of both the WEA and the ILWU. Shifts away from New Deal progressivism and towards a new Cold War conservatism had already begun to take place by 1948, and these changes challenged the great gains workers had made during the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The WEA believed that the tide had turned enough in its favor to get rid of Bridges and other left-wing leaders of the ILWU with whom it had been bitterly fighting for fourteen years. However, in a period when radical unions across the country came under attack and became increasingly weak, the ILWU resisted and survived, ultimately winning a peace with employers that would last for more than two decades. This change was the result of a severe miscalculation of the political situation by the WEA, both on a national level and within the organizational levels of the ILWU and WEA. Even after months of attacks by the WEA, the ILWU was able to maintain its solidarity, despite facing divisions within its ranks.

This solidarity ensured the union’s strength, forcing employers to back down from their staunch demands to eliminate left-wing radicalism within the ILWU. Why was this possible? In a time when other labor organizations were purging their left-wing leaders, why was the ILWU an exception? The answer lies within the democracy of the ILWU; the union’s history of radical, militant unionism and participatory democracy enabled it to withstand the employers’ attacks

² Jennifer Marie Winter, “30 Years of Collective Bargaining: Joseph Paul St. Sure: Management Labor Negotiator, 1902-1966” (master’s thesis, California State University, Sacramento, 1991), http://www.pmanet.org/?cmd=main.content&id_content=2023238683.

during the 1948 West Coast maritime strike, making it an exception to the growing number of left-wing unions being dismantled or weakened in the wake of the anti-communist sentiment.

An understanding of how the union's past played a key role in shaping its identity and its democratic structure and the impact of World War II and the beginnings of the Cold War on American politics, labor, and the waterfront industry are necessary to uncover how the ILWU was able to survive in the midst of such hostility. If this solidarity is a function of the ILWU's democracy, an analysis of what union's democracy looked like in 1948 will reveal the presence of a highly participatory democracy which promoted solidarity, enabling a divided ILWU to remain united and establish a peace with the WEA rather than being forced to purge the union's radical elements.

The most comprehensive account of the strike exists in *Industrial Relations in the Pacific Coast Longshore Industry*, by Betty V.H. Schneider and Abraham Siegel, as part of a series on West Coast collective bargaining systems. It presents a history of the hostile relations between the WEA and the ILWU, an overview of the strike, and a brief explanation of the peace reached at the end of 1948. The account does not thoroughly explore the social and political history of the union, instead primarily focusing on the economic causes and impacts of the strike. This paper hopes to delve into that history to develop a better understanding of the strike both inside and outside the negotiating room. Since it was published in 1956, less than a decade after the strike ended, a fresh look at what the strike and the "new look" meant to the longshore industry is necessary as well. Much has been written about communism and radical labor within the United States, particularly about its downfall after World War II. Enough time has passed to begin placing the strike within this conversation; by offering an exception to the story of deradicalization and growing conservatism, the 1948 West Coast maritime strike offers insight

into why the rest of American labor was so susceptible to the pressures of the Cold War whereas the ILWU was able to resist.

It is important to note the sources used to piece together the story of the strike. Many of the sources came from the ILWU archives at the Anne Rand Memorial Library, while others came from the Labor Archives of Washington at the University of Washington. Generally, sources for the ILWU were more plentiful than those from the WEA, as great care has been taken to preserve the history of the American labor movement. Additionally, most sources reflect the opinions of the leadership of both organizations, rather than the membership or general public, as most of the paper trail left from the 1948 strike was from the organizers and leaders within the ILWU and WEA. Voting records, letters, and some meeting minutes are a few sources that offer insight into the rank-and-file opinions during the strike. It is my hope that this paper, by attempting to use sources from both sides, as well as from various levels of authority, will more fully develop the story of the 1948 strike.

THE ORIGINS OF THE ILWU: THE EARLY WEST COAST LONGSHORE INDUSTRY

Relations between the WEA and the ILWU in 1948 can only be understood with background knowledge of how waterfront workers came to be organized on the West Coast, particularly in regards how the ILWU's strong culture of solidarity and democracy developed, the importance of the hiring halls to the union, and the significance of the 1934 in creating the ILWU's identity. An understanding of the past enriches the story of the 1948 strike; it explains the animosity between the WEA and the ILWU, as well as contextualizes the attacks made by the employers and the union's response.

The organizational culture of the ILWU was central to the union's success in rebuking attacks made by employers during the strike, so it is necessary to examine its origins. An

organizational culture can best be defined as the way a group of people choose to organize themselves, the ways members relate to one another, and why. The ILWU's organizational culture therefore can be defined as a participatory democracy influenced by, among other factors, the radical tendencies of the workers who came to be employed on the waterfront and the nature of longshore work. This identity was rooted in a philosophy of social justice and radical politics, which laid the foundation for the attacks made by the WEA against the ILWU and its politically left-leaning leadership during the 1948 strike. This tradition can be traced to the origins of the workers who would come organize the ILWU. The predominantly male longshore population came largely from the logging and various maritime industries emerging in the western United States, which attracted a demographic on the fringes of society who often held radical political tendencies.³ These workers often took work as longshoremen, and occupational communities formed along the waterfront, facilitating the sharing of new, radical political ideas.⁴ Many of these workers were European immigrants from Scandinavia and Germany, populations which tended to be more socialist and radical than the American population at-large.⁵ Syndicalism and the Industrial Workers of the World, or Wobblies, became prevalent on the waterfront.⁶ These workers, accustomed to a strong work place culture of radicalism, are the ones who came to be employed on the docks of the West Coast.

Another key component of the ILWU's organizational culture is an emphasis on solidarity. In part, this derives from the philosophies of the left, encouraging an encompassing sense of social responsibility, which is evident in the ILWU's slogan, "An Injury to One is an

³ Howard Kimeldorf, *Reds or Rackets?: The Making of Radical and Conservative Unions on the Waterfront* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 23-24.

⁴ Margaret Levi et al., "Union Democracy Reexamined," *Politics & Society* 37, no. 203 (2009): 210-211. <http://pas.sagepub.com/content/37/2/203210-211>

⁵ Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001) 137-140.

⁶ Kimeldorf, *Reds or Rackets?* 28-29.

Injury to All.”⁷ Longshore work was physically hard and dangerous, so workers needed to be able to rely on their coworkers for their own safety.⁸ Working in groups known as gangs, longshore work reinforced bonds that already existed amongst the working communities that formed around the waterfront.⁹ The fellowship formed through the sharing of dangerous, hard work would be another element of the workplace culture that would lay the foundations for the solidarity which enabled the ILWU’s success in 1948.

Another element of the ILWU’s past that would be critical in the 1948 strike was the experiences of workers under past hiring systems. The union-controlled hiring hall system in place since the foundation of the ILWU came under attack during the strike because employers believed its closed shop was illegal under the recently passed Taft-Hartley Act. Negotiations came to a standstill as the ILWU was unwilling to surrender the hiring hall, which was an integral part of the union and its identity. Prior to the 1930s, because there was no uniform system of organization of workers or employers, hiring systems varied from port to port. Although unionization had existed on the West Coast longshore industry before the ILWU under the International Longshore Association and the Riggers and Stevedores’ Union, several unsuccessful strikes and factionalism rendered both unions ineffectual.¹⁰ The systems in place in Seattle under the “fink hall,” the “shape up” in San Francisco, and the hiring hall system in Tacoma, reveal the importance corrupt open shop hiring systems played in shaping the identity of the ILWU.

⁷ Levi et al., “Union Democracy Reexamined,” 210.

⁸ Harvey Schwartz, *Solidarity Stories: An Oral History of the ILWU* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 66, 104; Levi et al., “Union Democracy Reexamined,” 211.

⁹ Levi et al., “Union Democracy Reexamined,” 211-212.

¹⁰ Ottilie Markholt, *Maritime Solidarity: Pacific Coast Unionism 1929-1938*, (Tacoma: Pacific Coast Maritime History Committee, 1998), 20.; Schneider and Siegel, *Industrial Relations*, 8.

The open shop hiring system known as the “fink hall” originated in Seattle, under the leadership of Frank P. Foisie, but eventually spread to other ports, including San Pedro and Portland.¹¹ Essentially an employer operated hiring hall, the system allowed employers to decide who got work and how much. A known union supporter might be blacklisted and unable to get a job.¹² Not only did the system hinder union organizing, but it also encouraged corruption, and workers would often pay bribes in order to get work.¹³ There was no rotation system amongst workers, so favored workers could be given job after job while others would have to wait days or weeks without employment.¹⁴ The arbitrary nature of the fink hall meant that not only were longshore workers doing a dangerous, physically hard job, but they had little to no job security.

San Francisco’s shape up, where workers would gather on the docks in the morning and gang bosses would then choose who got work from the crowd, was slightly different than the fink hall, but had many of the same problems. As in the fink hall, bribery was commonplace, and those who refused or could not pay to gain favoritism often found themselves waiting on the docks all day in hope of a job vacancy.¹⁵ The systems of hiring on the waterfront like the fink hall and the shape up made longshoring a tenuous livelihood, and would come to symbolize the blatant corruption and disregard for workers’ wellbeing that existed before the 1934 strike and the formation of the ILWU. These past experiences with employer-controlled hiring would color the ILWU’s reaction to the WEA’s attacks on union-controlled hiring during the 1948 strike.

The case of the International Longshore Association (ILA) local in Tacoma serves to highlight the importance that eliminating these open shop hiring systems had on the formation of

¹¹ Schneider and Siegel, *Industrial Relations*, 8-9; Markholt, *Maritime Solidarity*, 26-29.

¹² Schwartz, *Solidarity Stories*, 104.

¹³ Markholt, *Maritime Solidarity*, 26.

¹⁴ Frank Jenkins, interview by R.C. Berner, June 6 and 28, 1972, Labor Archives of Washington, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

¹⁵ Schneider and Siegel, *Industrial Relations*, 9.

the ILWU and its culture. Unlike most West Coast ports, before the 1934 strike the Tacoma local of the ILA had a system of union-controlled dispatching through a hiring hall, which meant the union enjoyed a greater degree of job security because workers were not forced to gratify the bosses in order to gain employment.¹⁶ In 1937, the Tacoma local was one of a number of locals to remain with the ILA, affiliated with the more conservative American Federation of Labor (AFL), rather than switch to the newly formed ILWU that was affiliated with the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). This conservatism can in part be explained by lacking an experience with either the shape up or the fink hall; because Tacoma was already satisfied with its union and hiring hall system, the desire to install a new system was minimal. This suggests that in places like Seattle or San Francisco, the new brand of industrial, militant unionism that arose with the ILWU can, in part, be explained by their experiences with the open shop hiring practices that were so detrimental to workers.

The frustration with working conditions and employer treatment came to a head in the 1934 Strike. The West Coast ILA locals went on strike on May 9th and were soon joined by other maritime workers.¹⁷ Violence occurred all along the coast, and on July 5th, after an intensification of the conflict days earlier, two strikers were shot and killed in San Francisco.¹⁸ This would become known as Bloody Thursday, and helped rally the public to the cause of the strikers.¹⁹ Eventually the union was able to gain major concessions from employers. In terms of the 1948 strike, 1934 was important because it secured the first coastwise contract, giving new strength to the bargaining power of the union. Secondly, it created the union controlled hiring hall, which would give workers control over jobs and ensure equality and fairness in the

¹⁶ Markholt, *Maritime Solidarity*, 26.

¹⁷ Levi et al., "Union Democracy Reexamined," 209.

¹⁸ Bruce Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s* (Chicago; University of Illinois Press, 1988), 129.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 128.

distribution of work.²⁰ Lastly, because it was such a hard fought victory, it served as a sort of “foundation myth” for the ILWU and therefore played a significant role in the formation of the militant workplace culture and pride in the ILWU identity. A few years later in 1937, the ILWU was formed as the vast majority of West Coast longshore locals left the AFL’s ILA to join the newly formed CIO, which focused more on social justice and better fit the ILWU’s radical tendencies.²¹

A UNION DIVIDED: WWII AND THE WEST COAST WATERFRONT

During World War II, divisions arose within the ILWU. Tactics used by the WEA during the 1948 strike would attempt to manipulate these divisions, which would seemingly weaken the union’s solidarity. The employers’ decision to aggressively attack the radical leadership of the ILWU can be traced to this perceived weakness arising from changes that occurred during the war.²² With the outbreak of World War II, ports along the West Coast faced a new pressure to increase production for the sake of the war effort. The skyrocketing demand for manpower and need for stability had a powerful impact on the ILWU. Political arguments within the union and fundamental changes in the demographics of the membership would eventually lead to divisions which created differences both between rank-and-file members and between members and their leadership.

First, such divisions were in part caused by a desire for stability and efficiency to better serve the war effort. Stability, critical to a nation at war requiring a steady supply of military necessities, required cooperation between employers and workers that did not exist in the West Coast longshore industry. The ILWU’s leadership took a more conservative approach to work

²⁰ Margaret Levi et al., “Union Democracy Reexamined,” 210.

²¹ Ibid., 211.

²² Article in Journal of Commerce, Union Publicity- San Francisco Bay Area, Coast Committee Box 22, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

and relations with employers in order to support the war effort. This followed a broader trend of cooperation occurring within the majority of labor organizations and the Communist Party. In an attempt to show support for the war effort, industrial unions made accommodations to management that served to “dampen the militancy of American workers and solidarism of industrial unionism,” through policies like participating with management on war boards and the prohibition of strikes.²³ In the ILWU, for example, the “Bridges Plan,” named for Harry Bridges, created a council that brought the union, employers and the government together in order to ensure security and efficiency for military cargo.²⁴ In giving a stronger voice to employers and the government, the plan signified that the union was willing to alter its staunch radicalism and relinquish certain elements of autonomy to support the war effort. In addition to agreeing to the Bridges Plan, the ILWU also signed a no-strike pledge, which largely prevented work stoppages that created insecurity and inefficiencies in the ports.²⁵ These efforts represent a shift, at least at the level of the union’s leadership, away from radicalism and towards a tamer, more bureaucratic union. While patriotism and support for the war was nearly unanimous within the union, not all members agreed with the extent to which the union was sacrificing in support of the war.²⁶ Although Bridges and the leadership had enough support for their policies to be adopted, they were met with resistance by workers who had all too recently fought a violent struggle to gain the benefits of unionization. For example, the Bridges Plan took three months to get endorsed by some locals in the Pacific Northwest with stronger left-wing traditions.²⁷

²³ Rick Fantasia and Kim Voss, *Hard Work: Remaking the American Labor Movement* (Berkeley; University of California Press, 2004), 46-47.

²⁴ Howard Kimeldorf, “WWII and the Deradicalization of Labor: The ILWU as a Deviant Case,” *Labor History* 33, no. 2 (1992): 255. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00236569200890121>.

²⁵ Nancy L. Quam-Wickham, “Who Controls the Hiring Hall? The Struggle for Job Control in the ILWU during World War II,” in *American Labor in the Era of World War II*, ed. Daniel A. Cornford and Sally M. Miller (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1995), 125.

²⁶ Quam-Wickham, “Who Controls the Hiring Hall?” 125.

²⁷ Kimeldorf, “WWII and the Deradicalization of Labor,” 256.

Bridges was booed and laughed at by members at one meeting where he described his wartime plan, and was told, “Just because your pal Joe Stalin is in trouble, don’t expect us to give up our conditions to help him out.”²⁸

While increasing efficiency and stability was important, the number of workers on the waterfront was not sufficient to meet the labor needs of a nation at war. The increased demand was coupled with the exodus of some dissatisfied longshoremen who took issue with the pro-war, pro-accommodation stance of Bridges and the ILWU, which led to a need for new hiring.²⁹ Initially, new members were found through the “brother-in-law” system, where workers could sponsor family members and get them jobs.³⁰ This system allowed for the make-up of the union to remain fairly constant, as relatives tended to have similar political, cultural and racial backgrounds. However, the demand for labor was higher than the brother-in-law system could fill. Soon, new workers were flooding to the docks in search of work. In San Francisco, the number of workers doubled between 1938 and 1945, and in Seattle, the last three years of the war saw the labor force more than triple.³¹ This influx radically changed the demographics of the union. First, minority populations increased significantly. In the early days of the union, the membership was fairly homogenously European.³² However, as new workers were drawn to the waterfront from across the nation, an increasing number of black and Mexican-American workers came to join the union. More than one in five of the new workers were either black or Mexican-American and by the time the war drew to a close, nearly a third of members of Local

²⁸ Quam-Wickham, “Who Controls the Hiring Hall?” 126.

²⁹ Michael Torigan, “National unity on the Waterfront: Communist Politics and the ILWU during the Second World War,” *Labor History* 30, no. 3 (2007): 417.

³⁰ Kimeldorf, “WWII and the Deradicalization of Labor,” 268.

³¹ Ibid.

³² David Wellman, *The Union Makes Us Strong: Radical Unionism on the San Francisco Waterfront*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 100.

10 in San Francisco, California were black.³³ At the same time, there was an influx of rural whites, called “rednecks” or “Okies,” many of whom were politically conservative and racist.³⁴ While the leadership of the ILWU took a strong stance for racial equality within the union, some rank-and-file members resisted integration. Locals adopted racial equality to different extents; whereas San Francisco was more accepting, locals in Portland and San Pedro were segregated.³⁵ Existing racism was exacerbated when minorities began joining the workforce in greater numbers during the war, even leading to protests in the form of work stoppages and slowdowns.³⁶ As one longshoreman recalled the reaction of the longshore workers to their new co-workers, “old-timers wouldn’t work with a black guy. [They] would turn around and call a replacement.”³⁷ The prominence of the race issue during World War II led to divisions within the union, both between the membership on account of race, and between the leadership and racist members of the union.

Divisions were also created by generation, which plays an important role in the identity of a longshore worker.³⁸ Having gone through 1934 together, there was a sense among some that their sacrifice earned them a measure of respect from the other workers. Not only did the generational gap lead to a feeling of superiority among the veteran members, but differences in experience also led to political divisions between generations. Not having lived under the conditions before the union and having never experienced a major strike, many of the newer members lacked the same left-wing radicalism that had inspired older generations of workers. This was particularly true among the growing number of conservative rural whites who joined

³³ Kimeldorf, “WWII and the Deradicalization of Labor,” 271; Schwartz, *Solidarity Stories*, 79.

³⁴ Kimeldorf, “WWII and the Deradicalization of Labor,” 271; Schwartz, *Solidarity Stories*, 270.

³⁵ Judith Stepan-Norris and Maurice Zeitlin, *Left Out: Reds and America's Industrial Unions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 237; Jake B. Wilson, “Race, Class, and Gender on the Waterfront: Longshore Workers and the Ports of Southern California” (PhD diss., University of California, Riverside, 2008), 87-88.

³⁶ Quam-Wickham, “Who Controls the Hiring Hall?” 133.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 135.

³⁸ Wellman, *The Union Makes Us Strong*, 97.

during the war.³⁹ In response to a letter from a longshoreman's wife critical of Bridges and the union during the 1948 strike, another longshoreman's wife calls her "Mrs. Johnny-come-lately," and accuses her of not knowing, "what it was like in the 'good old days' before the hiring hall, when your man had to lick the employer's boot to work." This letter demonstrates deep generational divisions, as she dismisses the woman's critical opinion as being solely the result of her and her husband's inexperience in the union, even though there was no evidence in the original letter suggesting as much.⁴⁰

The racial, generational and political divisions were not mutually exclusive. Many of those who held negative opinions of racial minorities also disliked those members with left-leaning politics, evident when one such worker in Portland declared, "when the local voted to keep out the 'niggers' they should have voted to kick out the 'commies' also."⁴¹ As a result, many black workers became affiliated with the political left where they found acceptance. Because many of the minority workers were new to the union, a generational bias was often combined with racial discrimination. This intersection of biases is evident in the words of one longshoreman, who said, "I'll tell you, back in '33 and '34...I pounded the bricks for this union, when you all were still back in Africa!"⁴² Because of the way characteristics of the ILWU membership shifted during the course of World War II, factionalism arose that would seemingly weaken the union.⁴³

These divisions were still in existence in the years leading up to 1948, particularly in relation to the left-wing politics of the leadership. Just months before negotiations began, at the

³⁹ Kimeldorf, "WWII and the Deradicalization of Labor," 271.

⁴⁰ Letter to the Editor, *Portland Daily Journal*, October 5, 1948, Newspaper Clippings, Coast Committee Box 22, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

⁴¹ Kimeldorf, "WWII and the Deradicalization of Labor," 271.

⁴² Quam-Wickham, "Who Controls the Hiring Hall?" , 135.

⁴³ Schneider and Siegel, *Industrial Relations*, 8. Factionalism had weakened the ILA locals along the West Coast prior to 1934, making them more susceptible to abuse by employers.

1947 Washington Industrial Union Council Annual Convention, there was dissent amongst the ILWU delegates on the Communist Party's influence over labor's stance on issues, including Henry Wallace's third party candidacy and the Marshall Plan.⁴⁴ Because delegates to a convention are an elected position in the ILWU, their opinions also give a glimpse into the politics of the workers who elected them.⁴⁵ One ILWU delegate from Seattle stated, "But every time I get to our meetings, this issue [supporting Communist Party policies] always comes up, and I know what the majority of the membership feels. ...Let the communists go out and fight for themselves... let them start being American citizens and I won't think anybody will want to kick them out."⁴⁶ From the minutes of the convention, it is clear that neither the ILWU nor the industrial labor movement as a whole was immune to the rhetoric of the Cold War. Since Bridges and the ILWU leadership agreed with many socialist policies, the growing anticommunist sentiment alienated them from the membership, which as a whole was more conservative than its leaders.⁴⁷ The WEA would attempt to capitalize on these political divisions and the growing fear of Communism during the 1948 strike, which represented a broader shift in American organized labor and the political attitudes of the nation as a whole.

SETTING THE STAGE: THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CLIMATE, 1947-1948

The 1948 West Coast maritime strike did not happen in a vacuum; rather, changes within America's labor movement and a shift in American politics that business interests found more favorable determined the aggressive approach the WEA would take towards fighting the hiring

⁴⁴ Washington State Industrial Union Council CIO 9th Annual Convention Proceedings, September 26-28, 1947, Ronald Magden Collection, 5185-002, Box 5, Folder 10, Labor Archives of Washington, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

⁴⁵ Seattle Area Local 19 Bulletins, Coast Committee Box 21, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

⁴⁶ Washington State Industrial Union Council CIO 9th Annual Convention Proceedings, September 26-28, 1947, Ronald Magden Collection, 5185-002, Box 5, Folder 10, Labor Archives of Washington, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

⁴⁷ Wellman, *The Union Makes Us Strong*, 10.

hall and the radical leadership of the ILWU. The labor movement, particularly the CIO, experienced a deradicalization after World War II. Although a major strike wave had occurred in 1946 following the end of the war, the CIO under the leadership of Phillip Murray was becoming increasingly conservative.⁴⁸ Part of this conservatism arose out of the accommodation of the war period. Having instituted grievance machinery, any disagreement was taken through the system rather than protested through a work stoppage or other form of job action.⁴⁹ Labor's wartime cooperation gave unions an institutionalized position in the workplace, securing their existence and decreasing the need to fight employers.⁵⁰ With the widespread damage caused by World War II in other leading economies decreasing competition for United States businesses, a new sense of prosperity arose and an increased enjoyment of the "trappings of managerial class" would decrease the union radicalism by eliminating an impetus for change.⁵¹

A political shift had taken place outside labor as well. In November, 1946, the Republican Party had been able to win both the House of Representatives and the Senate.⁵² This congress would later pass the Taft-Hartley Act, which rolled back many of the gains labor had made during the Roosevelt administration. It made it harder to form a union, outlawed the closed shop, allowed states to pass "right to work" legislation that further limited the power of unions, and included a requirement that union leadership must sign anti-communist affidavits in order to use the services of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB).⁵³ This would lead to a purging of communist leaders and raids of radical unions, including the ILWU, by their more

⁴⁸ Fantasia and Voss, *Hard Work*, 53-54; Robert H. Zieger, *The CIO: 1935-1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 212.

⁴⁹ Fantasia and Voss, *Hard Work*, 85.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁵¹ Steven Greenhouse, *The Big Squeeze: Tough Times for the American Worker* (New York; Knopf, 2008), 71; Lawrence Lader, *Power on the Left: American Radical Movements Since 1946* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1979), 57.

⁵² Zieger, *The CIO*, 245.

⁵³ Fantasia and Voss, *Hard Work*, 53; "Taft-Hartley Law- What's in it For You?" October 29, 1947, Pacific Coast Maritime Report, Vol. 1, no. 18, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

conservative counterparts. As anticommunism swept the nation, labor radicalism became the enemy. With the ILWU facing internal divisions and the industrial labor movement weakened, both through the deradicalization of the CIO and the increasing fear of left-wing politics in the United States, the WEA saw an opportunity to make huge gains as the ILWU contract came up for negotiations.

The status of the longshore industry at the outset of the 1948 reveals some underlying conditions that are important to note during the strike. Having transitioned back into the hands of private employers after being under government control during the war, the longshore industry still had in place the numerous wage increases enacted to draw workers to fill the heightened demand during the war.⁵⁴ Increasing costs, a sharp decrease in trade in the years following the war, and a growth in railroads and trucking inland increasing competition for shippers put pressure on the WEA to try to make gains during the next bargaining opportunity.⁵⁵

By 1948, the ILWU, in addition to longshore workers, included other groups like ship clerks, Hawaiian sugar and pineapple workers, and warehouse workers.⁵⁶ ILWU locals were located all along the West Coast in California, Oregon, and Washington, as well as in Hawaii, some southern states, and British Columbia, Canada.⁵⁷ While this paper focuses on the longshore division, it is worth noting that the union continued to expand into other industries during this time. The longshore division was made up of somewhere between 11,000 and 26,000 workers, representing workers in nearly every port on the West Coast of the United States.⁵⁸ The

⁵⁴ Brobeck, Phleger & Harrison, Waterfront Employers Association of the Pacific Coast and Pacific American Shipowners Association, *Statement of Waterfront Employers Association of the Pacific Coast Shipowners Association before Pacific Coast Section, Board of Inquiry*, (San Francisco: Parker Print. Co., 1948).

⁵⁵ Schneider and Siegel, *Industrial Relations*, 45-47.

⁵⁶ Schwartz, *Solidarity Stories*, vi-vii.

⁵⁷ "How Locals Voted for Officers, CIO Delegates, and Labor Committee," *The Dispatcher*, June 13 1947.

⁵⁸ Referendum on Ship Owners' Proposals, September 3-14, 1948, ILWU Strike Ballots, Coast Committee Box 23, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA; Harry Bridges, "On the Beam," *The Dispatcher*, September 3, 1948.

ILWU had conflicts with other unions, such as the Teamsters, who fought the ILWU for jurisdiction over the warehouse work.⁵⁹ More importantly for 1948, another longstanding conflict existed between the Sailors Union of the Pacific (SUP) and their leader Harry Lundeberg, who was often at political odds with Bridges; one worker recalled a saying that “this waterfront isn’t big enough for the two Harrys.”⁶⁰ Lundeberg was more conservative, and had worked with Senator Robert Taft, co-author of the Taft-Hartley Act, in order to “keep reds out of the [SUP].”⁶¹ The conflict between the trade unionism of the AFL-affiliated SUP and the industrial unionism of the ILWU symbolizes a greater conflict in the labor movement between radicalism and conservatism that would grow during the Cold War.

THE 1948 WEST COAST MARITIME STRIKE AND UNION DEMOCRACY

The 1948 West Coast maritime strike effectively shut down the West Coast shipping industry for 95 days, and included a coalition of the ILWU, the Pacific Coast Marine Firemen, Oilers, Watertenders and Wipers Association (MFOW), Marine Engineers Beneficial Association (MEBA), Marine Radio Officers of the American Radio Association (ARA), and the National Union of Marine Cooks and Stewards (NUMCS).⁶² Negotiations on the ILWU’s longshore contract had begun before it came up for renewal in June of 1947, and a vote showed 94.34% of longshore workers favored renewal. The WEA originally asked for a 30-day contract as opposed to the typical one-year contract, but eventually agreed to a renewal, under the condition that either side could give notice of cancellation if done so before the contracts with

⁵⁹ “Teamsters Start Open Raids on ILWU in Two Plants, Aided by T-H Act,” *The Dispatcher*, Nov 28, 1947.

⁶⁰ “Harry Lundeberg: Centennial Tribute 1901-2001,” *West Coast Sailors*, March 30, 2001, <http://www.sailors.org/pdf/newsletter/harrylundebergcentennial.pdf>.

⁶¹ “Fearless Lundy in His Undie Uppers Entrances Press and Shipowners,” *The Dispatcher*, November 14, 1947.

⁶² Statement from Employers, Local 10 Timeline in Seattle Area Local 19 Bulletins, Coast Committee Box 21, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

the other unions were decided.⁶³ With anti-labor legislation in the works, the agreement allowed both sides to wait for Congress before agreeing to a contract.

The Taft Hartley Act, which passed on June 23rd, 1947, altered the *status quo* significantly. One of the provisions of the Taft-Hartley Act outlawed the closed shop, which included the ILWU's hiring hall. On February 13th, 1948, Frank P. Foisie, as President of the WEA, sent a letter to the ILWU expressing his desire to start negotiations earlier than the April 15th deadline for notification to change the contract, in order to allow enough time for the agreements to be brought into conformation with the Taft-Hartley Act before the contract expired on June 15th.⁶⁴ This meant that the hiring hall would no longer be allowed to operate under union authority, specifically that the contract could no longer require preference of employment for union members, a union elected dispatcher, or the ability of the union to deny registration to longshore applicants.⁶⁵

The attack on the hiring hall infuriated the ILWU membership and was immediately equated to a return to pre-1934 conditions in the shape up and fink hall. Harry Bridges received a memo advising, "the most useful thing that we can do in this connection is to dig out analogies between the ship owner proposals and the situation which existed before 1934," and it seems he took the advice.⁶⁶ This framing is evident in a letter sent out from the Coast Negotiating Committee to a local stating, "...we have concluded that the employers' answer leaves little room for doubt that they intend to seek sweeping changes in the hiring hall, which, if successful,

⁶³"Warehouse Settled, Waterfront Still Uncertain," *The Dispatcher*, June 13, 1947.

⁶⁴ Publicity- Employers, Coast Strike Period Sept. 2- Dec. 3, Coast Committee Box 23, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA..

⁶⁵ WEA Public Relations Department, Coast Strike Period Sept. 2- Dec. 3, Coast Committee Box 23, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

⁶⁶ Memo to Bridges from Lincoln Farley, Research Department Prep For June 15, Coast Committee Box 20, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

would leave us with the pre-1934 fink halls, or a roof over the pre-1934 shapeup.”⁶⁷ On March 24th, the ILWU responded, setting forth a position on a jointly operated hiring hall, but not compromising on the hiring hall’s dispatcher being elected by the union.⁶⁸ Joint negotiations began, and quickly reached a stalemate, even when the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service stepped in to help facilitate the talks.⁶⁹ Although there were other issues besides the hiring hall, the union was unwilling to see its hiring hall dismantled. Employers stated, “...discussion of matters other than conforming to the new law [Taft-Hartley] are postponed because no contract can be written that does not conform to the law.”⁷⁰

With no end in sight, and the June 15th deadline for settlement quickly approaching, on May 13th the ILWU took a strike vote in case no agreement could be reached.⁷¹ Following a recommendation of a ‘yes’ vote by the ILWU’s Coastwise Longshore Caucus on the two issues of authorizing a strike if employers insisted on dismantling the hiring hall, and striking with the other maritime unions and staying on strike until all unions reach satisfactory agreements, the membership voted 89.41% ‘yes’ on the first, and 88.95% ‘yes’ on the second.⁷² President Truman appointed a Presidential Board of Inquiry to look into the situation on June 7th and 8th. It determined that a strike would in fact occur, and that the situation constituted a national emergency.⁷³ A series of restraining orders were issued beginning June 14th, and on July 2nd, a

⁶⁷ “Sea Unions Invited To Send Delegates to Action Parley,” *The Dispatcher*, April 2, 1948.

⁶⁸ Chronological Negotiations Feb-Aug, August 18, 1948, Seattle Area Local 19 Bulletins, Coast Committee Box 21, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ WEA Makes Position Clear on Hiring Hall, Issue is Between ILWU and T-H Law Pacific Coast Maritime Report April 12, 1948, Pacific Coast Maritime Report, Vol. 2, no. 5, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

⁷¹ Local 10 Timeline, Dec 7, 1948, Seattle Area Local 19 Bulletins, Coast Committee Box 21, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

⁷² Strike Ballot, May 20, 1948, Coast Committee Box 20, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

⁷³ Chronological Negotiations Feb-Aug, August 18, 1948, Seattle Area Local 19 Bulletins, Coast Committee Box 21, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA; Charles

temporary injunction was issued for the remaining balance of the 80 days, as provided for under the Taft-Hartley Act.⁷⁴

Having already authorized and begun preparations for a strike, the union lobbied against an injunction, viewing it as a tool of the employers to take away their right to strike.⁷⁵ Once the injunction went into effect, a work slowdown began in protest. Employers charged that some northwest ports of operating at half speed or less, and stated before the Pacific Coast Section Board of Inquiry that the union had, “embarked upon a course of conduct designed to disrupt shipping operations and to stultify negotiations, it being their apparent purpose to defeat the injunction and discredit the law under which [the injunction] was issued.”⁷⁶ Although the Attorney General of the United States never stepped in and ruled as such, evidence suggests that the ILWU and other maritime unions did, in fact, conduct a slowdown that constituted an “interference with the orderly continuance of work,” prohibited under the Taft Hartley injunction rules.⁷⁷ Slogans distributed to workers encouraged them to make the period of the injunction difficult on the employers. One such slogan stated, “For eighty days we are in a deep freeze, to cool off, if you please. But when things get cold, they slow up too, so ask yourself, WHO’S SCREWING WHO?”⁷⁸ Another was more directly hostile to employers: “Hear the complaint of Fink-Hall Foisie, work’s slowing down and the party’s getting noisy. Listen to the old Fink groan and wheeze, but while you listen, cool off in the breeze.”⁷⁹ These slogans not only

P. Larrowe, *Harry Bridges: The Rise and Fall of Radical Labor in the United States* (Westport, Connecticut: Lawrence Hill & Co., 1972), 294.

⁷⁴ Chronological Negotiations Feb-Aug, August 18, 1948, Seattle Area Local 19 Bulletins, Coast Committee Box 21, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

⁷⁵ ILWU Local 19 Minutes, Ronald Magden Collection, 5185-001, Box 4, Folders 13-21, Labor Archives of Washington, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

⁷⁶ Brobeck, Phleger & Harrison, *Statement of Waterfront Employers Association*.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Slogans, Coast Committee Box 21, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

demonstrate the existence of an orchestrated slowdown, but also the hostility towards Taft-Hartley and employers. The 80 days, meant to calm the situation and facilitate negotiations, did not go as planned. Although negotiations were being conducted through the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, neither side was moving on the hiring hall issue.

Then, it seemed, there was hope for settlement. On July 29th, the union submitted a proposal for renewing the hiring hall clause as it existed, but with the condition that this could be altered pending determination of legality by court of last resort, which was rejected by the WEA.⁸⁰ However, by August 5th, an agreement was signed by employers independent of the WEA.⁸¹ Pressure increased as the end of the injunction neared and the deadline for strike action on September 2nd approached. After secret meetings between Bridges and Foisie, the negotiations were reopened at the end of August, and an agreement on the hiring hall was within reach.⁸² The proposal submitted on July 29th was modified to change the ‘court of last resort’ to the decision of *any* court on the hiring hall issue, at which point either side could ask to bring the issue up for discussion again.⁸³

With the hiring hall issue put to rest, negotiations turned to wages and conditions, and with additional time, an agreement seemed within reach. However, this would not be the case. When the ILWU membership had voted to go on strike before the intervention of the injunction, they had also voted that the coalition of maritime unions would strike if any one union failed to reach a satisfactory agreement. With the NUMCS still at an impasse with their employers, the

⁸⁰ Chronological Negotiations Feb-Aug, August 18, 1948, Seattle Area Local 19 Bulletins, Coast Committee Box 21, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

⁸¹ ILWU Local 19 Minutes, Ronald Magden Collection, 5185-001, Box 4, Folders 13-21, Labor Archives of Washington, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

⁸² Waterfront Employers of Washington, Correspondence and Minutes, Ronald Magden Collection, 5185-002, Box 10, Labor Archives of Washington, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

⁸³ Schneider and Siegel, *Industrial Relations*, 68.

ILWU delayed agreement by demanding settlement on all issues, making an agreement unattainable.⁸⁴

As the last step in the government's emergency prevention procedure, the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) was to hold an election, and have the membership vote directly on the final offer of the employers, bypassing the leadership of the union.⁸⁵ The last offer by employers was essentially its original demands; its ten points included requiring the hiring hall dispatcher to be chosen by the director of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service rather than elected by the union, no preference for union members in hiring, and a rule that required officers and agents of the union to notify employers before going on the docks to inspect grievances.⁸⁶ Pamphlets and letters were sent to longshoremen trying to convince them to accept the offer and turn on their leadership, saying it was dominated by the Communist Party.⁸⁷ Foisie stated in a news release that "longshore union officials are without power to reject the employers' last offer- that power rests with the longshoremen themselves under the law."⁸⁸ The WEA seemed to hope that by bypassing the leadership, which tended to be more radical than the union membership as a whole, their demands would be met. One brochure reminded longshoremen, "Let's be sure we know what we're doing... [a strike will] cost everybody a lot of money. The very first thing to do is find out exactly why we're in a strike- exactly what the situation was when your union officials put you on the bricks."⁸⁹ Perhaps it was part wishful thinking that the membership would settle for a contract to avoid what was predicted to be a long and difficult strike, or maybe

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Larowe, *Harry Bridges*, 294

⁸⁶ WEA Shoreside Report, Vol. 1, No. 10, August 11, 1948, Publicity Employers Coast Strike Period Sep. 2- Dec. 3, Coast Committee Box 23, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

⁸⁷ Larowe, *Harry Bridges*, 294.

⁸⁸ WEA Public Relations Department News Release, August 11, 1948, Publicity- Employers, Coast Committee Box 22, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA..

⁸⁹ Employers' Last Offer Brochure, Coast Committee Box 21, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA..

the WEA recognized the political dissention within the ILWU in recent years, and, when coupled with the growing conservatism of the Cold War political climate, saw weakness and an opportunity to secure a very self-beneficial contract.⁹⁰ Whatever the case, it was a miscalculation on the part of the WEA. The NLRB held voting August 30th and 31st, and in an act of protest, not a single ballot was cast by any of the 26,695 eligible workers along the entire West Coast.⁹¹ Posters (Fig. 1) had been posted at every polling place, and an editorial in the union's newsletter, *The Dispatcher*, described the NLRB as being "subverted to [employers'] favor and purpose."⁹² A second vote on the shipowners' proposals was then taken, this time by the ILWU. The two items on the ballot included a vote to accept the employers' proposal, which was rejected by 96.8% of the membership, and a vote on whether the leadership of the union should sign anti-communist affidavits, another provision of Taft-Hartley, which was rejected by 94.39% of the membership.⁹³ The strike officially began on September 2nd at midnight, with the expiration of the 80-day injunction, and was confirmed by the vote rejecting the contract and affidavits soon after.⁹⁴

While the Bridges and Foisie faced off in the negotiating room, the ILWU membership walked off the job and picketed docks all along the West Coast. Conflicts quickly emerged between the strikers and unions affiliated with the AFL who did not respect the picket lines. One such union was the SUP, which began unloading struck cargo immediately after the strike went into effect.⁹⁵ This led to violence between the two unions, as was the case in Wilmington, California, where several men were injured after fights broke out when the SUP attempted to

⁹⁰ ILWU Local 19 Minutes, April 22 1948, Ronald Magden Collection, 5185-001, Box 4, Folders 13-21, Labor Archives of Washington, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

⁹¹ Larowe, *Harry Bridges*, 294.

⁹² "Taft Hartley Fraud," *The Dispatcher*, August 20, 1948; "No Suckers," *The Dispatcher*, September 3, 1948.

⁹³ Referendum on Ship Owners' Proposals, September 3-14, 1948, ILWU Strike Ballots, Coast Committee Box 23, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

⁹⁴ Charles Regal, "Seattle Port Feels Full Strike Effect," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, September 3, 1948.

⁹⁵ "Strike Violence- Sailors Fight Longshoremen on Calif. Pier," *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, September 4, 1948.

unload a lumber ship.⁹⁶ Another AFL union accused of acting as a strike breaker was the ILA local in Tacoma. The situation became especially problematic when the U.S. Army required workers to unload vessels. Although the ILWU had offered to work the cargo under the old contract provisions, the WEA had refused, stating that it was not in the long term interests of the Army to support communists within the United States.⁹⁷ Needing the cargo unloaded, the army hired workers without going through the ILWU. Many of these vessels were diverted to the Port of Tacoma, where the ILA local was willing to work the cargo, despite having told the ILWU that it would not.⁹⁸ The hostility between the Tacoma ILA and the ILWU is evident in the lyrics of a song written for the strike:

Did someone dump you on your pratt because you're such a fink?
Or did they diaper you with fly paper on account of how you stink?
Isn't there enough work in Tacoma to keep all you girls together?
... Cause by then you'll know what a strike is
And you'll know where a fink comes in
And you'll go your way and you will say
Nevermore will I ever sin.⁹⁹

The Army's hiring of strikebreaking workers known as "scabs" was met with violence and picketing; in San Francisco, a fight over Army work resulted in both a scab and a striker being stabbed and hospitalized.¹⁰⁰ After picketing by the ILWU, the Army eventually began hiring union members through employers not affiliated with the WEA.¹⁰¹ The press's reaction to violence during the strike varied. For example, while the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* titled an

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ WEA Shoreside Report, August 10, 1948, Publicity Employers Coast Strike Period Sep. 2- Dec. 3, Coast Committee Box 23, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

⁹⁸ ILWU Local 19 Minutes, September 13, 1948, Ronald Magden Collection, 5185-001, Box 4, Folders 13-21, Labor Archives of Washington, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.; "Army May Use Docks in Tacoma," *Tacoma News Tribune*, September 10, 1948.

⁹⁹ Coast Committee Box 21, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

¹⁰⁰ "Army Shifts Longshore Hiring Site," *Los Angeles Times*, September 18, 1948.

¹⁰¹ Schneider and Siegel, *Industrial Relations*, 70-71.

article, “Sailors Fight Longshoremen on Calif. Pier,” implying that the SUP instigated the violence by engaging in strikebreaking, The Los Angeles Times coverage of the longshore presence at a CIO oil workers strike that erupted in violence was much more negative, describing them as a mob, and later, in an opinion piece as “intruding,” “rowdy,” and communists trying to take control of the oil industry.¹⁰² Regardless of which way the coverage leaned, most focused on the length and the impact of the strike on the public.¹⁰³

It is important to note that much of the strikebreaking was done by workers within organized labor. Towards the end of the strike, the SUP would threaten the WEA with demands to gain control over jurisdiction over unloading certain cargoes that traditionally belonged to the ILWU.¹⁰⁴ Although they were ultimately unsuccessful, the attack represented that U.S. labor was increasingly fractured. Having to not only fight employers, but unions with different, more conservative organizational philosophies foreshadows the attacks the ILWU would face in the years of the Cold War.

The growth of Cold War political sentiments would be reflected in the WEA’s strategy during the 1948 strike. It staunchly proclaimed it “[could not] do business with irresponsible Communist Party line leadership,” and that negotiations would not happen with an ILWU leadership that refused to sign the anti-communist affidavits.¹⁰⁵ With the most recent vote of the union supporting his refusal to sign the anti-communist affidavit, Bridges was unwilling to back down. Once negotiations were off, the strike, once about working conditions, quickly became a political war between employers and the leaders of the ILWU.

¹⁰² “Richmond Strike Riot is Without Excuse,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 16, 1948.

¹⁰³ “Harbor Strike Stalemated in Fourth Week,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 23, 1948; “Strikers Will Unload Animal,” *Tacoma News Tribune*, September 23, 1948.

¹⁰⁴ “Unions Hit Jackpot in Victories,” *The Dispatcher*, December 10, 1948.

¹⁰⁵ WEA Public Relations Department News Release, September 25, 1948, Publicity- Employers, Coast Committee Box 22, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

Due to the political nature of the strike, there were large amounts of publicity work done by both sides in order to win the public's opinion. The strategy used by the WEA was to paint Bridges and other leaders as "reds," to highlight the hardships the strike was causing, and to paint the union's leadership as dictatorial. According to the ILWU, the employers spent thousands of dollars in propaganda via mediums such as newspapers, fliers, and radio.¹⁰⁶ The red-baiting done on the behalf of the WEA was meant to play up the growing Cold War political sentiments, including the fear of communism. One advertisement put out by the employers was entitled, "Which Flag Do We Fly?," and showed two flags, a Soviet flag and an American flag, implying that the employers represented American interests while the ILWU represented the interests of communism and the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁷ Another showed a photograph of Bridges drinking with Soviet official Vyacheslav Molotov, and included quotes from Bridges that painted him in a radical and totalitarian light, despite the fact that employers had been present at the event as well.¹⁰⁸ With the hiring hall issue tabled pending a court ruling, the issue in the strike that mattered most to the employers was the removal of the radical left-wing leadership, and therefore red-baiting influenced most of the publicity the WEA put out.

The longshore industry's location in global and national trade caused a work stoppage to impact the public in a drastic way. Employers hoped to use this against the ILWU when the public began feeling the effects of goods not coming in or going out of the ports.¹⁰⁹ Playing up the fear of shortages, an employer news release stated, not even a month into the strike, that there

¹⁰⁶ Publicity-Employers, Strike Period Sep. 2-Dec. 3, Coast Committee Box 23, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

¹⁰⁷ "Which Flag Do We Fly?" September 16, 1948, *San Francisco Chronicle*, Publicity- Employers, Strike Period Sep. 2-Dec. 3, Coast Committee Box 23, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

¹⁰⁸ Molotov Advertisement, Publicity- Employers, Strike Period Sep. 2-Dec. 3, ILWU Coast Committee Box 23, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

¹⁰⁹ Beverly J. Silver, *Forces of Labor: Workers Movements and Globalization Since 1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 13.

was already a shortage of “imported essentials.”¹¹⁰ An advertisement run by the WEA compared the disruption of shipping to a phone service going dead or a grocery store being closed.

Blaming the disruption on the irresponsible leadership of the ILWU, the employers encouraged the public to exercise their rights as Americans and demand improved service.¹¹¹ There was also a fear that Alaska and Hawaii, which employers’ described as “entirely dependent” on West Coast shipping for supplies, would be hurt by the strike. A cartoon of Joseph Stalin and Bridges sitting atop barrels of supplies, while surrounded by starving Berliners and Hawaiians, shows how the fear of shortages converged with the fear of communism. This intersection, also seen in a flier entitled “This is our Berlin, Mr. Truman,” connected the strike to the Berlin Blockade, which was contemporaneous with the strike, and provided a convenient comparison between the communists keeping supplies from Berlin, and the ILWU leadership keeping supplies from the West Coast.¹¹² By tying in the fear of communism with the public desire for consumer goods, the publicity campaign hoped to blame the union for any shortages, and consequently turn public opinion against the union.

Of course, the ILWU countered these publicity drives with its own campaigns. Many of the advertisements done by the employers were met with a counter-advertisement by the union. For example, in response to the “Which Flag do We Fly?” flier, the union countered with its own version, but instead of having the American and Soviet flags, it showed a flag with a dollar sign and the American flag. Below the flags, a description listed the actions taken by maritime unions

¹¹⁰ PASA Public Relations Department News Release, September 28, 1948, Publicity- Employers, Coast Committee Box 22, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA..

¹¹¹ “How Would You Like It...” Flier, Publicity-Employers, Strike Period Sep. 2-Dec. 3, ILWU Coast Committee Box 23, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

¹¹² “This is Our Berlin, Mr. Truman,” September 23, 1948, *San Francisco Chronicle*, Publicity- Employers, Strike Period Sep. 2-Dec. 3, Coast Committee Box 23, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

to support the war effort, contrasted with the ways in which the employers profited from the war.¹¹³ In addition to the counter-advertisements, the Joint Action Committee, comprised of members from the various maritime unions on strike, ran an offensive publicity campaign focusing on the unions' willingness to negotiate and the employers' failure to meet them halfway.¹¹⁴ Non-printed publicity was used widely. An evening radio program was used by the unions to get their message out to the general public.¹¹⁵ Rank-and-file union members also went to speaking engagements at community gatherings, such as business associations, political groups, and church services.¹¹⁶ Demonstrations were another important part of creating publicity. Aside from the standard picketing that occurs during a strike, these actions allowed the unions to raise public awareness, spread their message and increase the visibility of the strike. On one occasion in San Francisco, union members marched to the WEA headquarters and demanded to negotiate. When they found the building guarded by police, the union members passed out fliers and used a loudspeaker to argue their case before the hundreds of onlookers, creating an image of an obstinate employer unwilling to compromise, and therefore effectively placing the blame for the closed ports on the WEA.¹¹⁷

By the end of October, following two months of red-baiting and heated disputes, the situation on the waterfront had reached a stalemate. Bridges had predicted a long and difficult strike when he stated, "when the smoke clears away we might have a union and they won't have

¹¹³ "Which Flag Do We Fly," Northwest Joint Action Committee, Coast Committee Box 21, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

¹¹⁴ Ray Irvine and Joe Johnson, "A Report on the Activities of the Joint Action Committee of San Francisco in the 1948 West Coast Maritime Strike," 2.

¹¹⁵ Radio Program K.O.L. 8:45 pm, 8/16- 11/29 Union Publicity, ILWU Coast Committee Box 21, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA..

¹¹⁶ Public Correspondence, Leaflets, etc., Speakers Bureau Committee, Coast Committee Box 23, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

¹¹⁷ Irvine and Johnson, "A Report on the Activities of the Joint Action Committee," 5.

an association. Or vice versa.”¹¹⁸ As time passed, the pressure increased for a settlement. Then, on November 6th, four days after the Presidential election in which Truman, to the nation’s surprise, defeated both Dewey and Bridges’s favored Wallace, negotiations restarted.¹¹⁹

Openness to negotiations signaled a “new look” from employers, and a willingness for mutual cooperation that had not existed on the waterfront in over fourteen years. In late October, a union advertisement had noted that the “directors of the WEA are having one hell of a time keeping their own people in line with the lousy policy they are following.”¹²⁰ A quote from Randolph Sevier of the Matson Navigation Company, a member of the WEA, confirms infighting within the organization as the strike dragged on; “I couldn’t stomach it any more... ‘I said to Cushing [President of Matson], ‘...Regardless of what we may think of Bridges and his crowd, the law says we’ve got to business with them. Why don’t we cut out the flag-waving and start doing so?’”¹²¹ The WEA turned on Foisie and its other seasoned leaders, and talks commenced with a new, fresh set of negotiators willing to cooperate with the ILWU. According to a union radio program, the “atmosphere in the preliminary meeting was excellent. The employers are pledged to good faith negotiations, and no cute tricks. Foisie, Harrison, and Plant...are most conspicuous by their absence.”¹²² Under what was known as the “Roth Formula,” the CIO and the San Francisco Employers Council would participate, in order to help facilitate talks and to assure that both sides abided by the agreement reached.¹²³ By the 11th of November, the hiring hall issue had been laid to rest. It would remain a union-controlled closed

¹¹⁸ “Shipowners’ Final Offer Spells Drastic Wage Cut,” *The Dispatcher*, August 20, 1948, pg. 4.

¹¹⁹ Minutes of Negotiating Committee, November 6, 1948, Coast Negotiations sept 2-Dec 3, Coast Committee Box 24, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

¹²⁰ “By Their Own Words,” October 29, 1948, Coast Committee Box 21, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

¹²¹ Larowe, *Harry Bridges*, 298

¹²² Radio Program, 8:45 pm K.O.L., November 12, 1948, Coast Committee Box 21, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

¹²³ Minutes of Negotiating Committee, November 6, 1948, Coast Negotiations sept 2-Dec 3, Coast Committee Box 24, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

shop, unless a court of last resort found it illegal, and while employers got to have representatives in the hall, the dispatcher would remain solely elected by the union.¹²⁴

After 95 days on strike, a final agreement was reached on November 26th.¹²⁵ The agreement signaled that “after years of trying to break the union, [the WEA] had resolved to try living with [the union] in peace.”¹²⁶ Lasting for three years rather than the typical one meant that both sides were comfortable enough with the tenets of the agreement to sign for an extended period of time, representing a new level of cooperation and security within the industry that had not existed in over fourteen years.¹²⁷ Additionally, there was a provision that there were to be no strikes or work stoppages under the contract. Grievances would instead be addressed by a new, comprehensive system of arbitration, with a coast wide arbitrator who would be jointly chosen and have the power to make a final decision on any conflict.¹²⁸ Other contract provisions included annual wage adjustment opportunities, a 16 cent wage increase, decreased shift lengths from ten to nine hours, and earned vacations.¹²⁹ When the contract went to the membership for approval, all but four locals unanimously voted in favor of accepting the contract.¹³⁰

The 1948 strike was not so much a loss for employers as it was a shift in policy. What elicited such a complete reversal from the WEA policy early in the strike of not negotiating with

¹²⁴ Minutes of Longshore and Shipclerks Negotiations Committee, November 11, 1948, Coast Negotiations Sept 2-Dec 3, Coast Committee Box 24, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA; Return to Work Agreement, November 26, 1948, Coast Negotiations Sept 2-Dec 3, Coast Committee Box 24, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

¹²⁵ Return to Work Agreement, November 26, 1948, Coast Negotiations Sept 2-Dec 3, Coast Committee Box 24, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

¹²⁶ Timeline, ILWU Case Briefs, Correspondence, Publicity etc., Coast Committee Box 21, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

¹²⁷ “Winches Are Turning Again along West Coast Piers: What Unions Gained from their Long Strike,” *People’s World*, December 6, 1948.

¹²⁸ Return to Work Agreement, November 26, 1948, Coast Negotiations Sept 2-Dec 3, Coast Committee Box 24, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

¹²⁹ “Winches Are Turning Again along West Coast Piers.”

¹³⁰ Balloting Agreements, Coast Negotiations Sept 2-Dec 2 1948, Coast Committee Box 24, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

communists to a completely new, cooperative approach? The most immediate cause was Truman's victory over Dewey. Since Dewey had been favored in the polls, the employers were hoping having a conservative in the White House who had identified Bridges as a communist would aid their cause.¹³¹ His loss was a sign that the political climate in the United States had not shifted as far right as they had anticipated. The employers found also themselves losing the battle for public opinion.¹³² Because the union had publicly advertised its willingness to negotiate, the strike was easily blamed on the WEA for refusing to meet it halfway. The public's sympathy towards the union is evident in donations and financial support made to the union during the strike. In the San Francisco area alone, over \$20,000 worth of food contributions and \$4,813.12 in monetary contributions, ranging from \$.10 to \$150, were made by members of the public to striking workers to help ease the financial difficulties imposed by the strike.¹³³ Leeway in paying bills and rents was another way the public showed support, and one car dealer even put out an advertisement stating, "It's been tough going... 'Buy your car now and make no payments until 30 days after you go back to work!'"¹³⁴

The economic pressures on the shipping industry also played a role in the decision of the WEA to change its course of action to be more accommodating to the ILWU. Decline in the amount of trade traveling through the ports was a major problem, and the WEA had traditionally taken the stance that the solution was to decrease labor costs.¹³⁵ Several months after the signing of the contract, a panel of employers and union members got together to discuss how to increase the health of West Coast shipping. At the meeting, Maitland Pennington of Pacific Transport Lines stated, "An unfortunate industrial relationship of the parties existed in the past. This is no

¹³¹ Larowe, *Harry Bridges*, 296-297.

¹³² Schneider and Siegel, *Industrial Relations*, 70.

¹³³ Irvine and Johnson, "A Report on the Activities of the Joint Action Committee," 7.

¹³⁴ "Attention Longshoremen!" Molander Advertisement, *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 10, 1948.

¹³⁵ Brobeck, Phleger & Harrison, *Statement of Waterfront Employers Association*.

longer true, and shippers must be made aware of this fact. Shippers must be assured that there will be no work stoppages....”¹³⁶ If strikes and work stoppages were driving away business, prolonging a bitter strike would only worsen the situation. Cooperation ultimately did help turn around trade; the years after the strike saw a steady increase in trade, in part due to the increased reliability of the West Coast ports.¹³⁷

The most important factor that led to the change in strategy was the inability of the WEA to get the rank-and-file membership to turn on Bridges. Solidarity remained strong throughout the strike, with an average of less than two percent of the membership defecting during the strike (Table 1).¹³⁸ With large political divisions within the union and a union membership increasingly critical of Bridges, 1948 must have seemed the most opportune time for the employers to get rid of the man they had been fighting for the past fourteen years. Bridges’ home Local 10 of San Francisco had even elected an anti-communist president.¹³⁹ If there was so much dissension within the union, why, then, did the WEA find it so hard to exploit this? The answer lies with the ILWU’s form of exceptionally strong and active union democracy.

In *Union Democracy Reexamined*, Margaret Levi, David Olson, Jon Agnone, and Devin Kelly argue that the ILWU has a strong rank-and-file participatory democracy. Looking at the procedural requirements (direct voting on contracts and strikes, low threshold for recall of elected leaders, and local autonomy) and the presence of an organizational culture (rank-and-file participation, inclusion and fairness as values of the organization, membership defeating leadership on determining policy, and access to information) as criteria, we can examine the

¹³⁶ Summary of Panel Discussion, WEA & ILWU, March 3, 1949, Coast Committee Box 21, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

¹³⁷ Schneider and Siegel, *Industrial Relations*, 84-85.

¹³⁸ Letters from Various Locals: Coast Members Failing to Report for Strike Duty, Coast Committee Box 23, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

¹³⁹ Kimeldorf, “WWII and the Deradicalization of Labor,” 262.

strength of ILWU democracy in 1948 and then determine what role it played in maintaining union solidarity throughout the strike.¹⁴⁰

The procedural requirements of a participatory democracy were quite evident in the 1948 strike. First, the union had a tradition of voting on all decisions to go on strike or to accept a new contract, and each member got one vote, as provided for in the 1937 constitution.¹⁴¹ This was seen in 1948 when the union voted to strike in May, rejected the final offer in September, and accepted the contract agreement in November. The ability to recall elected officials was also in the union's constitution, and was used in the strike publicity as a counterpoint to the employers' accusations that Bridges and the communists were ruling the waterfront like dictators.¹⁴² Additionally, each local had institutional autonomy from the international union. For example, in 1943 the Portland, Oregon local refused to accept black workers into its union, and by doing so it contradicted the international's policy of racial equality.¹⁴³ While this created a heterogeneous international when locals directed their own policy, the autonomy gave workers a sense of ownership in their union, and increased loyalty. This is evident in Portland, where not pressing the desegregation issue allowed the ILWU to maintain the local's allegiance.¹⁴⁴ While autonomy allowed the locals to enact policies reflecting the beliefs of their members, the Portland example reflects how this could result in a tyranny of the majority. The leadership of the union chose to preserve the loyalty of the white workers and their exclusionary democracy at the cost of permitting racism to persist within union governance.

¹⁴⁰ Margaret Levi et al., "Union Democracy Reexamined," 207.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 212.

¹⁴² Radio Program, 8:45 pm K.O.L., October 25, 1948, Coast Committee Box 21, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

¹⁴³ Stepan-Norris, *Left Out*, 237.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

An organizational culture was also present in 1948. According to *Union Democracy Reexamined*, the period between the passage of Taft-Hartley in 1947 and the expulsion of the ILWU from the CIO in 1950 experienced significantly high levels of rank-and-file participation due to the external threats the union was facing.¹⁴⁵ Election turnout for union leadership spiked during this period, and, as an indicator of rank-and-file participation, this suggests that the ILWU democracy was particularly strong during the period of the 1948 strike.

A second measure of organizational culture is the importance placed on inclusion and fairness, as was seen in the battle for the hiring hall. The resistance to the open shop was caused by a fear of returning to the old hiring systems, under which those workers favored by the employers got as much work as they wanted, while others were left wanting. A hiring hall meant an end to bribery, favoritism and arbitrary hiring through the introduction of job rotation and wage equalization. All workers were “dispatched from one hall and everything had to be worked fairly and squarely.”¹⁴⁶

Another feature of the organizational culture found in the ILWU’s participatory democracy was that the membership was able to overpower the leadership and direct policy if it chose to do so. This is what happened during World War II, when Bridges had followed the Communist Party’s policy of increasing productivity and labor sacrifice in order to aid the war effort. The membership, unwilling to be completely accommodating, effectively changed the union’s policy. Productivity did not increase and in some cases decreased.¹⁴⁷ The reaction represented that, in the words of sociologist Howard Kimeldorf, “the workers, not the union or Bridges, ‘owned’ their jobs, and they were the ones who, torn by the conflicting loyalties of

¹⁴⁵ Margaret Levi et al., “Union Democracy Reexamined,” 214.

¹⁴⁶ Frank Jenkins, interview by R.C. Berner, June 6 and 28, 1972, Labor Archives of Washington, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

¹⁴⁷ Kimeldorf, “WWII and the Deradicalization of Labor,” 261.

nationalism and class, ultimately determined the proper mix of accommodation and resistance on the docks during the war.”¹⁴⁸

The final component of an organizational culture is communication of information to the membership. One obvious method used throughout the 1948 strike was *The Dispatcher*, created in 1942, and the strike bulletins published to keep workers informed on what was going on.¹⁴⁹ Additionally, the ILWU had won the right in 1934 to stop work meetings, which also facilitated the sharing of ideas and information amongst members.¹⁵⁰ These regular meetings were important because all workers were given time off to attend, to ensure that all who wished to speak their mind could do so. During the 1948 strike, these meetings allowed for things such as organizing pickets, discussing agreements, and encouraging solidarity.¹⁵¹

The ILWU’s strong, participatory democracy as it existed in 1948 helps to explain why the attacks on Bridges and the leadership by the WEA were unsuccessful, despite growing divisions within the union. Rather than being seen as attacks on an individual’s political beliefs, were taken as attacks on the union autonomy, and united the union behind a defense of the union’s democracy and its right to determine its own internal affairs. Employers needed to alienate the leadership of the ILWU from the rank-and-file membership if they were going to be successful in bringing about a change of command. To do this, they ran a publicity campaign portraying Bridges as a dictator who shamelessly exploited the rank-and-file membership in order to operate the union according to the Communist Party line. For example, the WEA’s publicity office encouraged ILWU wives and families to write letters to the press recounting the

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 262.

¹⁴⁹ Margaret Levi et al., “Union Democracy Reexamined,” 211.

¹⁵⁰ ILWU Local 19 Minutes, March 18, 1948, Ronald Magden Collection, 5185-001, Box 4, Folders 13-21, Labor Archives of Washington, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

¹⁵¹ ILWU Local 19 Minutes, September 2- November 27, 1948, Ronald Magden Collection, 5185-001, Box 4, Folders 13-21, Labor Archives of Washington, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

hardships the strike was causing and urging the union to comply with Taft-Hartley and the employers' demands.¹⁵² One letter to the editor of the *Portland Daily Journal* from a longshoreman's wife stated did just this, stating that workers' wives do not like Bridges, and neither did most of their husbands, but that they kept quiet for fear of being beaten up.¹⁵³ Since the letter is anonymous, there is no way to verify the author as a union member's wife, but regardless of authenticity it demonstrates the discourse designed to convince members that Bridges and the leadership did not have their best interests at heart. In a letter accompanying a white paper sent out to longshoremen, Foisie writes,

We want to do business with you and a leadership that truly represents your interests and the interests of the public at large. Our records and your records show that for 14 years the main concern of your present leadership has been primarily a political interest that closely follows the Communist Party line. Your long-range welfare has been considered of secondary importance.¹⁵⁴

The words sound strikingly similar to the critiques made of Bridges by union members during World War II, when Bridges wanted to follow the Communist Party's policy of accommodation, the membership was guarded against giving up so easily its hard fought gains for the sake of the war effort.¹⁵⁵ Playing up these existing divisions between rank-and-file members and the leadership was important because, as a democratic union, the only way to get rid of Bridges was for the membership to vote him out.

The membership, however, held a deep affection for Bridges. Despite his political leanings being to the left of his union, he was able to maintain his position for over four

¹⁵² ILWU Coast Committee Union Publicity: Seattle Area, Coast Committee Box 21, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

¹⁵³ Newspaper Clippings, September 30, 1948, Coast Committee Box 22, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

¹⁵⁴ Frank Foisie to Longshoremen, letter with white paper, October 12, 1948, Publicity–Employers, Coast Committee Box 23, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

¹⁵⁵ Kimeldorf, "WWII and the Deradicalization of Labor," 261.

decades.¹⁵⁶ Much of this loyalty comes from his leadership during the 1934 strike and his role in the foundation of the union; Bridges became the union's hero and came to symbolize the ILWU itself.¹⁵⁷ On a more pragmatic level, the loyalty to Bridges was the result of his ability to deliver gains from employers. While Howard Kimeldorf suggests that this success was a result of the militancy of the ILWU membership rather than Bridges' ability alone, the prosperity of the union under his leadership certainly added to his popularity. While the rank-and-file members often disagreed with Bridges, his success as a negotiator and role as a symbol of the ILWU helped him maintain popularity. As a Seattle banker stated, "He's the most radical labor leader in the country. Yet those longshoremen would follow him into a fiery furnace."¹⁵⁸ Despite the growing political conservatism of the Cold War, the union was able to distance Bridges from his leftist politics because his popularity was derived not from shared political philosophies but instead from a deeply engrained loyalty to their president. Attacks on Bridges were ultimately unsuccessful as they were interpreted as an attack on the union itself, which rallied the membership to Bridges' defense.¹⁵⁹

The attempts to get rid of Bridges were not new, but in 1948 the attacks could no longer simply be ignored as red-baiting since the continuation of negotiations seemed to require a change in leadership. By demanding that a "responsible leadership" be installed instead of the one the union members had deemed fit, the attacks shifted from being about Bridges to being about union autonomy. As one strike bulletin stated, "we decide union policies...not the ship owners."¹⁶⁰ The right to choose who represented the union was especially important with the

¹⁵⁶ Margaret Levi et al., "Union Democracy Reexamined," 214.

¹⁵⁷ Kimeldorf, *Reds & Rackets*, 164-165.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 164.

¹⁶⁰ Local 10 Strike Bulletins, September 7, 1948, Coast Committee Box, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

revival of the argument over the hiring hall. Fears of a return to the open shop systems seen before the 1934 strike were fresh in the workers' minds, since the hiring hall was made the primary issue of negotiations from February until September. The unions under the hiring hall and shapeup were weak, ineffective, and had a leadership of company-favored men.¹⁶¹ This fear of return to the pre-1934 company unions is evident in the language used in an advertisement saying, "Our officials are elected by secret ballot from the ranks- they are persecuted because they refuse to sell out."¹⁶² The WEA's attempt to dictate who could and who could not run the ILWU was interpreted as yet another threat to the union's autonomy.

The ILWU took great pride in their democracy, and the WEA's attacks therefore threatened something they held dear. In a response to a report from the employers, the union explained, "If they are not satisfied with the way things are going between themselves and the union, they will have to change the membership not the leadership. After all, the union is not controlled by a board of directors sitting in an ivory tower."¹⁶³ This quote represents the strong faith that the ILWU's democracy produced leaders who were completely reflective of the membership's wishes. Radio programs and fliers touted the level of democracy in the ranks of the union, as did the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), who stated that it was one of the most democratic unions in the country.¹⁶⁴ This faith in the democracy of the union enabled the union to maintain a high level of solidarity through the

¹⁶¹ Markholt, *Maritime Solidarity*, 20, 30-31; Schneider and Siegel, *Industrial Relations*, 8.

¹⁶² "We Protest the Witch Hunt", Union Publicity San Francisco Bay Area, Coast Committee Box 22, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

¹⁶³ "ILWU Answers Latest 'Short Sighted Report,'" Union Publicity Seattle Area, Coast Committee Box 21, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

¹⁶⁴ Radio Program, 8:45 pm K.O.L., October 25, 1948, Coast Committee Box 21, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA; NAACP Press Release, September 15, 1948, Public Correspondence, Coast Committee Box 24, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.

strike; even though there were people who disliked Bridges, they accepted him because he was elected through a legitimate and respected process.

LOOKING FORWARD: 1950 AND BEYOND

As relations between the ILWU and the employers were finally reaching a period of cooperation, the union found a new conflict from within the American labor movement. The ILWU's support of Wallace rather than Truman and their lack of support for the Marshall Plan caused problems with the CIO, which insisted on conformity of its member unions to the organization's more conservative national policies.¹⁶⁵ The tension had existed during the 1948 strike, when it took until late October for Murray and the CIO to come out in support of the ILWU.¹⁶⁶ The CIO, following its post-war path of growing conservatism, would purge the left-led unions, such as the United Electrical Workers, the Union of Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers, the NUMCS, and the ILWU, from within their ranks. Although there were trials, the outcome was a foregone conclusion.¹⁶⁷ In 1950, the ILWU was kicked out of the CIO. Of the eleven unions purged, only the ILWU was able to maintain its strength; the others were raided by rival unions and many were dissolved.¹⁶⁸

As the United States entered a period of prosperity in the 1950s, the American labor movement seemed content. An era of labor peace was born out of this prosperity, as the growth in wealth satisfied workers, many of whom were now becoming part of a rising middle class.¹⁶⁹ This decline in militancy, caused by complacency and the purges of the radical left, would characterize American labor unions for decades to come. This raises the issue of ILWU

¹⁶⁵ Lawrence Lader, *Power on the Left: American Radical Movements Since 1946* (New York: Norton, 1979), 56-66.

¹⁶⁶ "Murray Denounces Shipowners: CIO's Full Weight Thrown Behind Maritime Strike," *The Dispatcher*, October 29, 1948.

¹⁶⁷ Zieger, *The CIO*, 289.

¹⁶⁸ Lader, *Power on the Left*, 65.

¹⁶⁹ Fantasia and Voss, *Hard Work*, 56-57.

exceptionalism. Many scholars have identified the ILWU as an outlier in the history of American labor, and the 1948 strike and its aftermath support this conclusion. However, it is important to first recognize the ways in which it was not exceptional. Like other unions in the post-war period, the union's leadership was fairly static.¹⁷⁰ Bridges remained in power for 43 years, until his retirement in 1977.¹⁷¹ More importantly, after the 1948 strike it would be another 23 years before the longshoremen would have another major strike. The system for arbitration set forth under the 1948 agreement was essentially a bureaucratization of labor and led to industry-wide peace, the same force which had caused deradicalization in the CIO. It would appear that the ILWU too experienced a labor peace during the Cold War, however, its survival outside of the CIO and resistance to anticommunist pressures indicates that something differentiated the ILWU from the rest of American labor.

To complicate the issue, while the ILWU's strong participatory democracy separates it from the majority of unions in both the AFL and CIO, many of the purged left-wing unions were also characterized by strong democracies.¹⁷² If a strong democracy is a characteristic that helps explain the ILWU's survival, why were these other democratic unions unable to do so as well? To explore this a bit further, the National Union of Marine Cooks & Stewards (NUMCS) provides a convenient comparison because like the ILWU, it too was a highly democratic, left-wing CIO maritime union, but unlike the ILWU, it did not survive the Cold War. It was described by employers as the ILWU's satellite during the 1948 strike, and the NUMCS membership held their left-wing president Hugh Bryson in high regard.¹⁷³ After expulsion from

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 87-92.

¹⁷¹ Margaret Levi et al., "Union Democracy Reexamined," 214.

¹⁷² Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin, *Left Out*, 89, table 3.3.

¹⁷³ Frank P. Foisie, "The Strike on the Pacific Coast," speech to the National Propeller Club, October 14, 1948, Publicity Employers Coast Strike Period Sep. 2-Dec. 3, Coast Committee Box 23, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA; Kimeldorf, *Reds and Rackets*, 168.

the CIO, the union's affiliation would be fought over by the SUP, criticized by the NUMCS's large minority membership for racism, and the ILWU. However, dissention was growing regarding leftist politics within the NUMCS, which led to the AFL-affiliated SUP gaining control of the union.¹⁷⁴ In a 1955 NLRB vote, the Seafarers International Union (SIU), a compilation of the SUP, NUMCS, and MFOW, won the NUMCS affiliation by 3,931 votes to the ILWU's 1,064.¹⁷⁵

So what does the case of the NUMCS tell us? While the SUP used electoral tactics to edge the vote in their favor, the takeover was ultimately made possible because an internal shift in politics had taken place within the NUMCS, enabling the once leftist organization to be taken over by conservatives. It was not so much a failure of the NUMCS democracy, but a reflection of the membership whose views reflected the growing conservatism of the Cold War. The ILWU, on the other hand, was able to resist these pressures, maintaining their rank-and-file culture of democracy and radicalism.

It would appear that the mere presence of a democracy was not sufficient for survival. The ILWU democracy was not just a system of union governance however; it was rooted in and epitomized a larger workplace culture rooted in solidarity and union militancy. While it is true that the longshore division of the ILWU experienced a labor peace after 1948, this period of cooperation with employers did not result in a decline in radical unionism. Instead, the militancy of the ILWU led it to continue to both organize and diversify the workers under its control. For example, during the 1940s and 50s, it worked to organize Hawaiian sugar and pineapple plantation workers, creating a union amongst ethnic divisions and enabling political

¹⁷⁴ Jane Cassels Record, "The Rise and Fall of a Maritime Union," *Industrial & Labor Relations Review* 10, no. 1 (October 1956), 87.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 90.

empowerment, enthusiasm for democracy and unionization among workers.¹⁷⁶ The ILWU also grew through its acceptance of new, diversified workers into its ranks, such as fishermen and cannery workers.¹⁷⁷ This resiliency was also demonstrated when the Tacoma ILA local finally joined the ILWU in 1957.¹⁷⁸ Continuing organizing both reinforced and grew the organizational culture of the ILWU, and although the longshore division remained the strongest, the act of spreading the participatory culture to new industries reinforced the ideals of the union as the ILWU used them to organize those outside of the longshore industry. This continued militancy and reinforcement of workplace culture and democracy enabled the ILWU to survive where other democratic leftist unions failed.

For the ILWU, a lack of strikes did not mean an end to radical unionism. The strong, participatory democracy that had been historically engrained in the occupational culture of the longshoremen and was so important throughout the 1948 strike prevented workers from becoming detached from the inner workings of their union. Although it would be another 23 years before the ILWU would have another major strike, it was able to maintain high level of membership participation as it continued organizing efforts, as evidenced by the consistently high voter turnout rates in both national and union elections.¹⁷⁹ The ILWU is a clear example of the importance of a strong participatory democracy in maintaining a strong, liberal union.

¹⁷⁶ Schwartz, *Solidarity Stories*, 244, 273

¹⁷⁷ Preliminary Guide to the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union Fishermen and Allied Workers Division, Local 3 Records, Labor Archives of Washington, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA; Preliminary Guide to the Cannery Workers and Farm Laborers Union Local 7 Records, Labor Archives of Washington, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

¹⁷⁸ "AFL or CIO: Why did the Tacoma longshoremen choose to remain outside the ILWU for Twenty Years," Ronald Magden Collection, 5185-002, Box 10, Folder 36, Labor Archives of Washington, University of Washington Special Collections, Seattle, WA.

¹⁷⁹ Margaret Levi et al., "Union Democracy Reexamined," 214-216.

APPENDIX

WE'RE NOT SUCKERS!



WE'RE NOT VOTING!

INTERNATIONAL LONGSHOREMEN'S & WAREHOUSEMEN'S UNION-CIO

Figure 1. ILWU fliers posted at NLRB polling stations encouraging union members to abstain from voting in protest. *The Dispatcher*, September 3, 1948.

Number of Defecting Members from Reporting Longshore Locals During the 1948 Strike				
LOCAL#		# OF MEMBERS DEFECTING	TOTAL MEMBERSHIP (APPROXIMATE)	% DEFECTING
10	San Francisco, CA	93	4,829	1.93%
46	Port Hueneme, CA	7	187	3.74%
32	Everett, WA	8	111	7.21%
31	Bandon, OR	0	18	0%
29	San Diego, CA	0	65	0%
63	Wilmington, CA	0	238	0%
8	Portland, OR	53	1104	4.8%
53	Newport, OR	0	39	0%
7	Bellingham, WA	6	55	10.9%
21	Longview, WA	5	124	2.58
19	Seattle, WA	6	1483	0.40%
13	San Pedro, CA	15	2200	0.68%
47	Olympia, WA	9	121	7.44%
TOTAL		202	10,574	1.91%

Table 1. Number of Defecting Members from Reporting Locals During the 1948 Strike.

The number of defecting members was calculated from letters reporting numbers of union members defecting from the union during the course of the 1948 strike (Letters from Various Locals: Coast Members Failing to Report for Strike Duty, Coast Committee Box 23, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA.). Defecting is defined as leaving the union for any reason, including working struck cargo, not paying dues, etc. Totals for membership within each local were calculated from the voting records on the shipowners’ proposals from September 3-12, 1948 at the beginning of the strike (Referendum on Ship Owners’ Proposals, September 3-14, 1948, ILWU Strike Ballots, Coast Committee Box 23, International Longshore and Warehouse Union Archives, Anne Rand Memorial Library, San Francisco, CA).

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