

Longshoremen's + Warehousemen's Union; Int'l.  
(1974)

TROUBLE ON THE WATERFRONT : Is the mob moving in on the ILWU?  
By Bob Levering

From ~

"Harry Bridges definitely wants to end the ILWU," explains an official of the ILWU (International Longshoremen's & Warehousemen's Union). "His thing now is that it was born with him and it will die with him."

That's also the near-unanimous opinion of numerous longshoremen interviewed by the Guardian over the past two months. They cite recent events in San Francisco's Local 10, including the attempted physical takeover of the local's headquarters and the clubbing of an officer. More ominous are the growing links between the ILWU and known elements of organized crime and the hints of a possible merger of a dismembered ILWU into two of the country's most reactionary and corrupt unions: the Teamsters and the ILA (International Longshoremen's Association).

Forty years ago -- in 1934 -- Harry Bridges helped give birth to the ILWU. The delivery had numerous complications: United in opposition to a militant longshore union on the west coast were the shipping companies and their company union (the ILA), and the Chambers of Commerce. The National Guard was brought into San Francisco to break up the great longshore strike of '34. It took the murders by police of two longshoremen, a citywide general strike and the silver-tongued oratory of Harry Bridges to bring the union into existence.

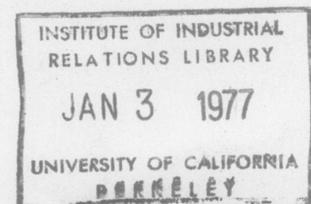
The next 20 years were not much easier: The ILWU weathered two long strikes and Bridges was called on to defend himself at several deportation trials against charges that he belonged to the Communist Party. The union itself was kicked out of the CIO during the McCarthy era because of alleged leftwing influences within the union. Through it all stood Harry Bridges -- symbol of militant unionism defying the capitalist bosses with tough rhetoric.

But now it's 1974. "Harry hasn't worked on the docks in 40 years," an active young longshoreman tells the Guardian. "He can't equate the written word of our contract with what's really happening on the docks." An old timer recalls, "Bridges said years ago that any man who stayed in office more than two terms was a phony. He's never been out of office since 1934."

The result, according to many longshoremen, has been contracts that frequently benefit the shipping companies more than the rank and file. In 1961, the union signed a contract with the employers called M&M (for Mechanization and Modernization) which, in effect, gave the companies a free hand to introduce labor-saving devices on the waterfront. The union exacted a generous bonus (\$13,000 per man) to encourage early retirements. But since the plan went into effect about half of all longshoremen have been replaced by the machines, leaving fewer than 12,000 longshoremen now working on the entire west coast. Although the retirement incentives were good, the employers got the better of the deal: According to the Federal Pay Board in 1972, the companies made some \$900 million as a result of M&M while the union members got a comparatively meager \$63 million in benefits.

SFEC [San Francisco]

[San Francisco Employers Council, 1974]



Most longshoremen feel the mechanization had an even more drastic effect on the morale of the workers. One docker reflected on the change in these terms: "We're no longer the 'lord of the docks' like we once were. Everything is left in the hands of the powers that be. Employers get things as they wish."

At 2:30 pm on Sept. 13, 1974, a dozen longshoremen pushed their way into the Fisherman's Wharf headquarters of ILWU Local 10. They demanded that the officers of the local resign, hand over their keys and leave the building.

Numerous sources described the takeover as part of a series of clashes between the local and the international union officials. The controversy has been brewing since early this year when a slate of anti-Bridges longshoremen won control of Local 10's offices by election. At the time the local was deeply in debt, largely a result of the declining membership caused by mechanization of the docks.

In early August of this year, Local 10 officials offered a plan to get rid of the union's debt by an assessment of \$60 per man and an increase in dues of \$5 per month. A special referendum was scheduled for August 24, but a week before the scheduled vote, International vice-president Bill Chester cancelled the local's referendum and announced that there would be a vote on the same day on a proposal from the International. Chester claimed to have received petitions from 20% of Local 10's members requesting an investigation of the local's finances. He asserted that his actions were based on that investigation, although Local 10's officers strenuously objected to Chester's interpretation of the International constitution.

The International's proposed referendum was virtually identical to the proposal offered by the local -- a \$60 assessment and a \$5 dues increase -- but with one major difference: Chester's proposal included the appointment by the International of "monitors" with vaguely defined duties. By a 2 to 1 margin, Local 10's membership approved the proposal.

The local's officers had campaigned against the proposal, and their worst fears were confirmed in succeeding weeks, especially concerning the local's headquarters building at 400 North Point, in the heart of Fisherman's Wharf.

The value of the property has zoomed in recent years. In 1971 a group of Fisherman's Wharf businessmen, including Mayor Alioto's cousin Frank, offered \$4 million to the Bay Area Longshoremen's Memorial Association, which holds title to the building. BALMA turned down the offer, infuriating the International, which wanted to sell the building. The battle raged back and forth for years until last summer, when the International saw its big chance to get rid of the building.

Once the monitors from the International were in control of Local 10, they began taking steps to dissolve BALMA and assume jurisdiction over the valuable property. BALMA's officers decided to consult the local's membership about whether to sell, lease or stay in the building. A vote was scheduled for Sept. 6. Anxious to prevent the ballot if at all possible, International monitor Leroy King and a representative from the Pacific Maritime Association, the ship owners' organization, informed BALMA they would not permit the election to be held in certain areas of the hiring hall.

Chester tried to use his political clout at City Hall to prevent the City's voting machines from being used for the referendum. But all the efforts failed. The International received a resounding defeat: 832 to lease, 390 to stay and only 263 to sell the property.

Four days later, on Sept. 10, Chester and the International's monitors ordered Local 10's officers to resign from office for having *"refused to accept the orders of the monitors."* The order was unanimously rejected the next day. Two days later came the attack on the Local's headquarters. The reason behind the attack was evident: when the intruders marched into Local 10's offices on Sept. 13, by curious coincidence representatives of both the employers (the PMA) and the International union were present. Had everything gone according to plan, they could have instantly recognized the leaders of the *"coup"*.

But the plot went awry. Local 10 Business Agent Larry Wing, who was not supposed to be in the building at the time, challenged the intruders and was clubbed nearly unconscious. Longshoremen up and down the coast were scandalized by what appeared to many as a *"goon squad"* attack.

After Wing's beating, locals in Southern California and Washington state demanded a special session of the International Union's executive board to investigate the attempted takeover. Local 10's officers brought charges against the union members who participated in the attack and the Local's next business meeting approved a union trial.

Things were not turning out well for Harry Bridges. He reportedly urged Local 10 leaders to drop the charges, and when that didn't work, he started signalling that the campaign against Local 10 was over, at least for now. Significantly, he wrote a letter dated Sept. 18 in which he *"regretted and condemned out of hand"* the violence that took place at Local 10. What's more, he stated that the *"International monitors are and will be strictly limited to working within the constitution of the Local."* An accompanying letter signed by Bill Chester and the three International monitors stated: *"All letters of instruction from the monitors to the officers of Local 10 are hereby withdrawn."*

Why this dramatic backdown? One politically active longshoreman told the Guardian that he thought Bill Chester's future within the union was at stake. Chester faces a stiff challenge for his job as International vice-president at next year's union convention from at least one prominent Southern California longshoreman. After the Sept. 13 incident, the conflict between Local 10 and the International became known throughout the union. For Chester to have continued his up-front role in the controversy would have run the risk of alienating longshoremen concerned with the principles of *"local autonomy"* and strict adherence to the constitution. As this active longshoreman put it, *"They are trying like hell to squash the Executive board meeting to investigate the so-called take-over. Local autonomy is a gut issue among longshoremen."*

But there may be another reason for trying to stop the investigations. Contrary to the Examiner's news report of the Sept. 13 incident, the participants in the attempted *"coup"* were not merely disgruntled rank-and-filers. Included were several of the

Local's elected officials: Chief Dispatcher Joe Mosley (also an Alioto appointee to the Redevelopment Authority), and Local 10 Executive Board or Board of Trustees members Morell Marshall, Charles Pennington and Lawrence Thibeaux, as well as others who had been unsuccessful candidates for Local 10 offices. All have been known within the Local as strong supporters of Bridges and the International Union.

A number of more pessimistic longshoremen feel that the conflicts within Local 10 have been intentionally fostered to help dismember the ILWU. "To smash Local 10 is a very vital element in any strategy to break up the ILWU," one official told the Guardian. "The internal dismantling of the Union, the sowing of disunity and discord among the members all make sense when viewed from this perspective." Another rank-and-file longshoreman agreed: "After things get screwed up bad enough, Harry can come in with a great solution -- join with the ILA."

The ILA, or International Longshoreman's Association, controls the East Coast and Gulf Port docks. It made the headlines in the 1950's for its heavy Mafia influence (remember Brando in "On The Waterfront"?) Like the Teamsters, the ILA was kicked out of the AFL-CIO during the 1950s for corruption. More recently it gained prominence in 1971 for the leadership of the attacks on anti-Vietnam war demonstrators in New York.

It's no secret that Bridges is interested in a merger with the ILA. "The scenario is clear," one longshoreman claims. "Push us into the ILA and let the Teamsters have the warehouse division." At its convention in 1971, the ILWU resoundingly voted down attempts to discuss a merger, despite the appearance at the convention of ILA president Teddy Gleason. There was a similar response to a merger with the Teamsters in 1972. But despite the cool reception from the rank and file, Bridges is pushing ahead. "The ILA is on the front burner now," one union official told the Guardian. But another ILWU official expressed the widespread suspicion of any merger. "We've got our problems, that's for sure," he said, "but the ILA is a whole new ball game."

Another "new ball game" for the ILWU is organized crime, which seems to be making its first inroads into the union via Amalgamated Insurance Agency Service, Inc., a Chicago-based "consultants" outfit hired two years ago to advise the ILWU's trustees on the Welfare Fund administered jointly by the ILWU and the PMA, the ship owners' group.

Amalgamated is headed by Mike Breen and Sol Schwartz, a longtime business partner of Allen Dorfman, who was convicted and imprisoned in 1973 on six counts of fraud involving a loan of the Teamsters Pension Fund, to which he had been a consultant for many years. Soon after his release from federal prison last year, Dorfman was indicted again on Feb. 19, 1974, for a \$1.4 million pension fund fraud. (Two weeks ago, the star witness in his upcoming trial was gunned down Al Capone-style on a Chicago street.) Dorfman is a former partner in Amalgamated; Amalgamated's address in Chicago (8550 West Bryn Mawr Ave.) is the same address used by Dorfman and the Teamsters' Central States Pension Fund. Amalgamated's phone number (312-693-8550) is the same as Dorfman's. The independent truckers' magazine Overdrive states that Dorfman "does receive an income" from Amalgamated even though he is no longer listed as a partner.

Another interesting individual who entered the picture along with Amalgamated is Abe Chapman, real name Chalupowitz, who is identified by Overdrive as a former enforcer

for Murder, Inc. He still retains the nicknames "Trigger Abe," or "Killer Abe".

Abe's new profession is "dental health consultant" for an outfit called the National Foundation for Health Care. Gus Brown, the president of the foundation, told the Guardian, "He (Chapman) does not work for us. He's not on our payroll. We have a lot of people beat the bushes for us trying to find new business. He's sort of freelance. We don't look into the background of everyone who works for us."

Overdrive published Chapman's business card. It give the LA address and phone number of Brown's company. And it gives the Chicago address and phone number of Allen Dorfman and Amalgamated Insurance Agency.

One of Amalgamated's first acts as consultant to the ILWU was to recommend the National Foundation for Health Care for running the union's dental plan. The trustees of the Welfare Fund, who include both union and management, had signed a contract with Brown when Longshoremen in Southern California -- mostly from Local 13 in San Pedro -- demanded that they be given some reason for the switch in plans. International VP Bill Chester met with them to explain the merits of the new plan but was unable to convince the longshoremen, and the contract was cancelled.

Gus Brown acknowledges without hesitation, "Amalgamated recommended us to the ILWU fund." But he adds, "Our proposal to the fund was highly recommended by Bridges and Bill Chester, who is also a trustee of the fund." Brown says he's never met Allen Dorfman. "I only know him by reputation," he told the Guardian. "I'd heard he had been convicted. We did not select him for their (ILWU's) trust fund. They selected him. If he brings us business, we are not going to turn it down."

John Dee, administrator of the Welfare Fund, referred all questions about Amalgamated Insurance Services to the trustees of the fund, none of whom were willing to comment to the Guardian.

It would be the height of naivete to assume that Bridges and Chester, two of the Fund's trustees, were unaware of Dorfman's involvement with Amalgamated. But the thousands of longshoremen whose financial security is at stake have been told nothing of whose fingers are now in their welfare fund.

Getting involved with the likes of Allen Dorfman is a far cry from Harry Bridges's image of an honest, incorruptible trade unionist. And longshoremen interviewed by the Guardian, including long-time political opponents, insist without exception that Bridges himself is not corrupted by money. "As far as I know, Harry would not touch a bribe," one longshoreman who has known Bridges for more than 20 years told the Guardian. "What Harry wants is power..Having Alioto call him up for advice on city appointments, that's power to Bridges. He has a nice home, a car, and can take trips anywhere he wants to go in the world. He doesn't need money. Power is what is tearing him apart and corrupting him."

A younger union official agreed: "I don't think Harry is involved in the corruption. He just tolerates it. It's one of the ways to destroy a union."

Numerous longshoremen insist that Bridges has been known to look the other way on corruption involving subordinates. One instance mentioned by several dockers occurred several years ago when a hiring hall dispatcher was allegedly caught red-handed selling jobs. Bridges intervened to save the dispatcher's job, according to these sources.

*"It's difficult to accept a little amount of corruption," one long-time docker reflects philosophically. "It has a way of growing bigger and bigger until you get yourself messed up with people like the Mafia."*

Will the ILWU survive despite the apparent corruption at the top? Many dockers point out that the union still has a considerable amount of internal democracy, and local autonomy remains a strong principle. One dock worker also pointed out that the union retains considerable economic clout: *"We stand astride a major artery of the economy even though there are only 12,000 longshoremen left on the West Coast. Somehow the economy can stand a strike of several months in the auto industry easier than it can take a longshore strike."*

An open letter from some rank-and-file ILA members to the ILWU states the problem eloquently: *"For many years some of us in the ILA have looked to the ILWU as a beacon light in our own darkness. We have been beaten and sometimes killed for trying to exercise the democracy you have enjoyed. Your locals have autonomy, our constitution allows our locals to be taken over any time. . . .But now we see that in your paper The Dispatcher your president Brother Bridges is calling for a merger of ILA and ILWU. Brothers, think about what you are doing."*

SOURCE: *SAN FRANCISCO BAY GUARDIAN, OCTOBER 19 THROUGH NOVEMBER 1, 1974*  
BY BOB LEVERING

SFEC