

A SHARE of the MACHINE!

MEET HARRY BRIDGES. HE FOUNDED THE INTERNATIONAL LONGSHORE AND WAREHOUSE UNION (ILWU) BACK IN 1934, AND LED IT UNTIL HE RETIRED IN 1977. HE WAS A SMART AND DETERMINED GUY, AND WHEN HE SAW THAT NEW TECHNOLOGY WAS BRINGING BIG CHANGES TO HIS INDUSTRY, HE TOOK ACTION TO GET HIS MEMBERS...

IN THE 1930S, WORKING CONDITIONS ON THE DOCKS WERE TOUGH. THE ECONOMY WAS IN RUINS AND THE BOSSES CALLED ALL THE SHOTS. WORKERS HAD TO REQUEST WORK DAILY, AND WORK DAYS COULD LAST 36 HOURS OR MORE. TO KEEP CONTROL OVER THE WORKERS, THE BOSSES CREATED A COMPANY-RUN "UNION" AND REQUIRED WORKERS TO CARRY "BLUE BOOKS," WHICH THE WORKERS REFERRED TO AS FINK BOOKS.

IN 1933 A GROUP OF LONGSHORE WORKERS DECIDED THEY'D HAD ENOUGH. THEY WALKED OFF THE JOB IN SAN FRANCISCO AND DESTROYED THEIR FINK BOOKS IN PROTEST.

SOON ALL THE PORTS ON THE WEST COAST WERE INVOLVED IN A LONG, BRUTAL STRIKE. IT ENDED WITH A FEDERAL SETTLEMENT THAT GAVE ILWU THE RIGHT TO ORGANIZE THE DOCKS ON THE WEST COAST.

FOR A GENERATION, THE UNION MANAGED THE HIRING AND TRAINING OF DOCK WORKERS, EQUALIZED WORK OPPORTUNITIES, FORMALIZED A REGULAR WORKFORCE, AND INITIATED A 6-HOUR WORK SHIFT WHICH HELPED SPREAD THE WORK MORE EQUITABLY AMONG THE WORKERS. THE UNION AND ITS MILITANT WORK STOPPAGES WERE INSTRUMENTAL IN IMPROVING WAGES AND WORKING CONDITIONS. BUT WHEN THE NEW MACHINES, SUCH AS THE FORKLIFT, CAME TO THE DOCKS, EVERYTHING CHANGED.

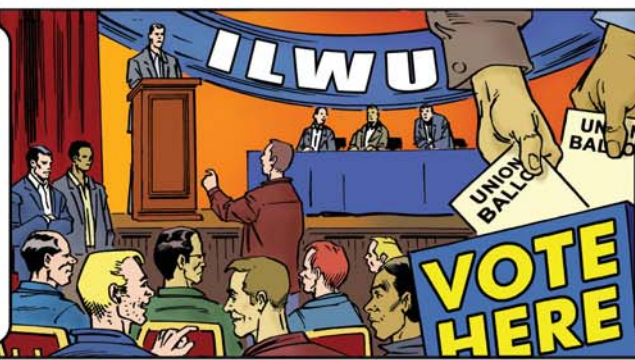


FOR LONGSHOREMEN, THE MECHANIZATION OF THEIR INDUSTRY WAS A DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD. FORKLIFTS DID THE HEAVY LIFTING AND MADE JOBS SAFER, BUT THEY ALSO REPLACED MANY OF THEM ALTOGETHER.



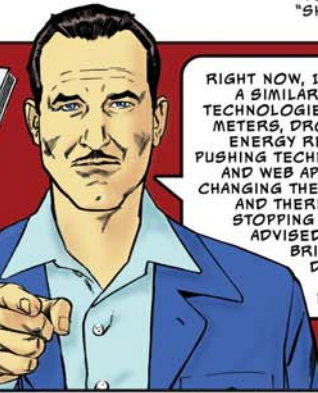
THE UNION WAS AT A CROSSROADS. WHILE BRIDGES RECOGNIZED THAT THERE WAS NO WAY TO STOP THIS NEW TECHNOLOGY, MANY MEMBERS OF THE ILWU WANTED TO TRY AND FIGHT OFF THE MECHANIZATION. THEY STILL BELIEVED MILITANT WORK STOPPAGES WERE THE BEST APPROACH, BUT BRIDGES HAD A MORE FORWARD-THINKING PERSPECTIVE-- HE KNEW THOSE MACHINES WERE HERE TO STAY, AND HE THOUGHT THE BEST COURSE OF ACTION WAS TO NEGOTIATE A SETTLEMENT FOR HIS MEMBERS--A "SHARE OF THE MACHINE."

IN THE LATE 1950S, DELEGATES FROM ALL OF THE LONGSHORE LOCALS MET TO DEBATE THE MERITS OF EACH APPROACH AND EVENTUALLY CONCLUDED THAT THEIR GUERRILLA RESISTANCE WOULD NEVER BE ABLE TO STAVE OFF THE TECHNOLOGY. THEY CAME UP WITH A NEW MECHANIZATION AND MODERNIZATION AGREEMENT WHICH ALLOWED THE EMPLOYERS TO INCORPORATE NEW MACHINERY INTO THE WORKPLACE AND CHANGE WORK RULES ACCORDINGLY. IN EXCHANGE THE UNION WOULD SECURE FINANCIAL COMPENSATION FOR WORKERS WHO WERE DISPLACED BY THE MACHINES, AND ENSURE THAT THE JOBS THAT REMAINED WERE BETTER, SAFER, AND HIGHER-PAYING.



MECHANIZATION & MODERNIZATION AGREEMENT OF 1960

IN THE WINTER OF 1960, WORKERS VOTED TO APPROVE THE REVOLUTIONARY AGREEMENT BY A MARGIN OF 2-TO-1. THE DEAL SPARKED CONTROVERSY-- SOME SAID THE UNION MEMBERS GOT TOO MUCH, WHILE OTHERS BELIEVED THEY SHOULD HAVE FOUGHT FOR MORE. REGARDLESS, BRIDGES SAW THERE WAS NO STOPPING THE MACHINES, AND TOOK THE FIGHT TO THE NEGOTIATING TABLE TO DO ALL HE COULD TO PROTECT HIS MEMBERS' LIVELIHOODS.



RIGHT NOW, IBEW 1245 IS FACING A SIMILAR SITUATION. NEW TECHNOLOGIES--SUCH AS SMART METERS, DRONES, DISTRIBUTED ENERGY RESOURCES, LOAD PUSHING TECHNOLOGY, COMPUTERS AND WEB APPS--ARE ALREADY CHANGING THE FACE OF OUR WORK AND THERE IS CLEARLY NO STOPPING IT. WE'D BE WELL ADVISED TO STUDY WHAT BRIDGES AND THE ILWU DID, AND MAKE THE MOST OF OUR NEGOTIATING POWER.