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The rise and fall of the Maritime Federation of the Pacific Coast : 1935-1938

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**THE RISE AND FALL OF THE
MARITIME FEDERATION OF THE PACIFIC COAST: 1935-1938**

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of History

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

by

Mark Gregory Hess

May 2003

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ABSTRACT

THE RISE AND FALL OF THE MARITIME FEDERATION OF THE PACIFIC 1935-1938

by Mark G. Hess

The thesis addresses the topic of the Maritime Federation of the Pacific Coast (MFPC). It examines the internecine struggles within the MFPC officialdom, as well as the relationship of the MFPC with the national labor movement. In addition, the expectations of the maritime workers, their activities, and the success and failure of their actions are also studied.

Research on this subject reveals competing factions within the leadership circle of MFPC existed. While MFPC Officials aligned along on theoretical, political, and craft loyalties, personal affinities and opportunism ensured alliances were in flux. Although their leadership was in a state of disorder, the workers remained united thereby ensuring victory in the maritime strike of 1936-37. Lacking a common foe, the MFPC splintered apart in the strike's aftermath. Many of these divisions have yet to heal.

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Common Union Abbreviations

AFL	American Federation of Labor (Founded 1881 as Federation of Trades and Labor Unions)
CIO	Congress of Industrial Organizations (expelled from AFL in 1936, readmitted in 1955)
CSU	Coast Seamen's Union (AFL affiliated, founded 1885; became SUP in 1887)
ILA	International Longshoremen's Association (AFL affiliated, founded 1892; expelled from AFL in 1953)
ILWU	International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (CIO affiliated, founded 1937, expelled from CIO in 1949)
ISU	International Seamen's Association (AFL affiliated, founded 1892, disbanded 1937)
IWW	Industrial Workers of the World ("Wobblies," founded 1905)
NMU	National Maritime Union (CIO affiliated, founded 1937)
MFGC	Maritime Federation of the Gulf Coast (founded 1936)
MFPC	Maritime Federation of the Pacific Coast (founded 1935)
MTW	Marine Transportation Industrial Union (IWW-affiliated; established c. 1920)
MWIU	Marine Workers' Industrial Union (CP-affiliated, founded 1927, disbanded 1935)
SIU	Seafarer's International Union of North America (AFL affiliated; founded 1938)
SUP	Sailor's Union of the Pacific (AFL affiliated, founded 1887; expelled in 1936, readmitted into AFL in 1938)

Introduction

The decade of the 1930's was an unprecedented period of both growth and militancy for organized labor in America. Though the trade unions were quickly inundated with millions of new members, many of the recently organized workers rejected the conservative leadership of the American Federation of Labor (AFL). Not uncommonly workers rejected the directives of AFL officialdom, entering various disputes in support of their striking brethren. Known as "sympathy strikes," these conflicts often extended for months and expanded to include a wide array of workers. These conflicts would lead to a major split in the labor movement and the founding of the Committee of Industrial Organization (CIO) in 1935, later to be known as the Congress of Industrial Organizations.¹

Long before John L. Lewis and his CIO emerged as the chief proponent of industrial unionism and the chief rival of the AFL, seamen, dockworkers, and other maritime workers espoused the benefits of industrial unionism- a union of all workers in an industry regardless of the kind of work they performed. This philosophy seemed radical in contrast to craft unionism or the advocacy of separate unions for each craft in

¹ Irving Bernstein, *A History of the American Worker, 1933-1941, Turbulent Years* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1970); Gary M. Fink, ed. *Biographical Dictionary of American Labor Leaders* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1974).

the industry. The emergence of industrial unionism as a national force is central to the events along the docks during the 1930's.

Though advocates of industrial unionism permeated the docks, organization of the maritime industry along industrial lines was unusually complicated and difficult for CIO organizers. The complications that emerged for the CIO in the maritime industry can be traced to the long legacy of inter-craft rivalries and jurisdictional conflicts on the waterfront. Baffled CIO organizers, accustomed to the auto, steel, rubber, and coal industries that quickly rallied under the CIO banner, and lacking an understanding of waterfront labor history, discovered the maritime industry to be one of the most challenging industries to organize along industrial lines despite the radical rhetoric of the workforce.

California, and in particular San Francisco, was a hotbed of labor unrest during the 1930's. The state and city experienced a wave of labor conflicts in both agriculture and industry. Conceivably the most significant and unquestionably the most studied strike that occurred in California during the thirties was the San Francisco waterfront strike of 1934, a struggle that culminated in a four-day general strike in the Bay Area. The waterfront and general strike of 1934 signified the reemergence of a militant rank-and-file that repudiated the conservative and docile leadership of the AFL, as workers demanded considerable increases in wages and significant improvements in working conditions.

Several histories of the 1934 strike provide insight into the growth of militancy and radicalism on the waterfront. Years of ineffectual and conservative leadership paved

the way for left-leaning elements to gain sway on the docks. Unsurprisingly, maritime workers during the early years of the Great Depression, primarily concerned with buying groceries and paying rent, generally shunned calls to international revolution. However, as a trickle of rank and file workers gradually allied with members of the Communist Party (CP), the communist agitators altered their tactics, focusing not on political theory, but rather on the genuine concerns of the maritime workforce. The concerted effort of the Party to tone down its revolutionary rhetoric allowed the CP to remain a significant, though low profile, element in a united front that emerged during the 1934 strike.

The communist movement was highly suspect during the decade, however it was not considered the totalitarian threat it seemed after World War II. Any attachments to the CP must be understood in the historical context of the 1930's. Due to the economic conditions of the Great Depression, workers naturally became frustrated with the inability of traditional capitalism to alleviate the mass poverty. The Party provided the backbone of 1934 strike with legal aid, financial support, additional pickets, and energetic and experienced organizers. Given that the 1934 strike resulted in substantial benefits for the maritime workers, workers often backed the CP-affiliated members in union elections.

Even though the 1934 San Francisco waterfront and general strike was certainly a defining moment in American labor history, the conflict did not end when the maritime workers returned to work in August pending government arbitration. The longshore agreement, handed down in October, provided several key gains for the workers, including joint control of hiring, significant wages increases, and the six-hour workday.

Accordingly, labor costs soared, and the employers immediately let it be known they were not satisfied with the terms of the settlement.²

The longshore union was the only maritime union to achieve any substantial gains. For example, an arbitration decision for the seamen was not handed down until April 1935, but they did not get the eight-hour day, let alone the six-hour day. Employers could continue to hire seamen as they pleased and, in some cases, wages were as low as 45 dollars a month. A major reason for this discrepancy in awards was the mobile nature of the merchant marine. In contrast to the dockworkers, the seamen, away from port much of the time, were seemingly far less capable of mounting a serious challenge to the settlement. Another factor that contributed to the inequality of the awards was union leadership. Whereas dynamic, democratically elected rank-and-file leaders led the longshoremen, the seamen continued to be dominated by conservative AFL officials based on the East Coast. Moreover, the seamen retained a great deal of loyalty to their union's founder, Andrew Furuseth. Furuseth continued to be revered by seamen due to his past accomplishments though he relocated to New York by 1936 to lead conservative faction of union leaders.³

Quite likely the arbitrators believed that the longshoremen, having won better conditions, would not be eager to endanger the state of affairs by supporting the seamen. In fact, the longshoremen did not believe the disparity of the awards made for security of

² Mike Quin, *The Big Strike* (New York: Olema Publishing Company, 1949; reprint, New York: International Publishers, 1979), 199, 200: all subsequent citations are to this edition

³ *Ibid.*

for their gains and the West Coast stevedores began to exert efforts to assure reasonable conditions for the seamen. With the longshoremen's support, militant rank-and-file sailors rose to challenge their feeble and traditional union officials for control of the seafaring unions. As a result, battle lines were hastily redrawn, and a second protracted and economically devastating 99-day maritime strike transpired along the San Francisco docks in 1936-37.⁴

Buoyed by the unprecedented success of the 1934 strike, the seamen, longshoremen, and other maritime workers had united under the banner of the Maritime Federation of the Pacific (MFPC). Although few realized it at the time, the founding of the Maritime Federation stood as a forerunner of the CIO, in gestation at that time. While clearly to the political left of the AFL bureaucracy, the MFPC leadership circle contained many adherents to conflicting and opposing political ideologies. Significant elements within the leadership circle were sympathetic to syndicalism; others were communists and Trotskyites. Notwithstanding the predictably intense bickering in the ranks of MFPC officialdom, the leadership remained solidly united behind a position relentlessly critical of the conservatism preached by the AFL bureaucracy.⁵

To the causal observer, the MFPC strike 1936-37 appeared to be an exceptionally nonviolent clash of wits and propaganda between capital and labor. But the conflict was

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Arnold Berwick, *The Abraham Lincoln of the Sea: A Biography of Andrew Furuseth* (Santa Cruz, California: Odin Press, 1993), 149; Bruce Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront, Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988; reprint 1990), 196: all subsequent citations are to this edition.

much more than that: beneath a veneer of solidarity amongst maritime workers, political, personal, and philosophical, differences, combined with age-old jurisdictional disputes between seamen and longshoremen, impeded the ability of the unions to effectively combat the employers. Ironically, the bitter factional fighting within and between Maritime Federation unions representing both seamen and longshoremen was exacerbated, in part, because of the growing success and power of these unions.

In various ways, the MFPC infighting was a harbinger of the bitter jurisdictional disputes that would erupt between AFL and CIO factions. These inter-and intra-union battles would rival concurrent conflicts between workers and employers in their degrees of violence. In the case of the Maritime Federation, there can be little doubt that the differences amongst the elected officials increasingly posed a threat to the success of the strikers, but the rank-and-file refused to fall prey to the squabbling of their respective leaders. Uniting under the slogan "An Injury to One is an Injury to All," the workers managed to achieve arguably their greatest victory in spite of the bitter feuds raging within the leadership circle.

Unfortunately for the rank-and-file, their remarkable solidarity was quickly shattered in the wake of their triumph. As the 1936-37 maritime strike came to its conclusion, the entire labor movement became engulfed in the dispute between the AFL and the CIO. Predictably, Maritime Federation union leaders led the longshoremen and the seamen into opposing camps. Nationwide the maritime labor movement became extremely chaotic. The AFL represented seamen on the West Coast and longshoremen on the East Coast. Conversely, the CIO held sway over the West Coast longshoremen and

the East Coast seamen. Few outsiders could have predicted the resultant AFL-CIO checkerboard during the 1936-37 strike, as momentum appeared to be building towards a national maritime union, inclusive of all maritime workers regardless of craft or geographic location.

It was not the rift between the AFL and CIO that caused divisions within the MFPC. To a significant extent, inter- and intra-union struggles in San Francisco preceded the splits that occurred in the auto, steel, rubber, garment or mine workers' unions in the thirties. But as the epic AFL-CIO conflict erupted into a full-blown war, cleavages within the Maritime Federation expanded, and the splits became lasting. The shifting alliances within the maritime industry between the longshoremen and seamen, the AFL and CIO, and the communists and anticommunists all have origins in the formation of the MFPC and the strike of 1936-37.

The jousting for power within the MFPC and the labor movement at large was jurisdictional, political, and personal. Leading the CIO in its national challenge for the loyalties of the nation's workers against William Green's AFL was mine workers' leader John Llewellyn Lewis. In San Francisco, longshore leader Alfred Renton "Harry" Bridges jockeyed with seamen leader Olaf Harold "Harry" Lundeberg for control of the Maritime Federation. Although events in the maritime industry mirrored developments elsewhere, this industry was marked by its unusually deep communist penetration. CP membership

within the maritime industry constituted a higher percentage of workers in contrast to many of the other of the nation's industries.⁶

In San Francisco, controversy surrounded Bridges' purported affiliation with the CP, but there can be no doubt that, in addition to the Party, many ordinary rank-and-file workers supported Bridges in his ongoing conflict with Lundeberg, who led a conglomerate of forces under an anti-reds banner. However, the conflict for control of the MFPC cannot be viewed simplistically as a conflict between Bridges' communist longshoremen and Lundeberg's anticommunist seamen. Although it is universally acknowledged that communism was an unusually potent force in the maritime industry during the thirties, Bridges' longshore union was not a mere extension of the CP. True, Bridges made no attempt to hide his agreement with many of the CP positions, and Party membership was high among longshore union officials, but a significantly lower percentage of rank and file dockworker formally affiliated with the CP. Decisions in the longshore union were generally not dictated by union officials, but rather, derived from rank-and-file referendums and the rank-and-file's appreciation and admiration for Bridges cannot be mistaken for blind allegiance.⁷

In addition, there were strong anti- and pro- communist elements within both the longshore and various seafaring unions. Bridges was continually battling conservative

⁶ Bruce Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*, 225.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 257.

elements within his longshore union, as was the progressive leadership of the seafaring unions. To a great degree, it was not political allegiances, but rather personal animosities, jealousies, and affinities that dictated the course of events. Alliances between MFPC officials proved tenuous.

The 1936-37 maritime strike was much more than a battle between labor and capital or a struggle for control of the MFPC on the West Coast. The effects of the strike were far beyond the scope of San Francisco, the West Coast, and the maritime industry. Ports along the Pacific, Atlantic, and Gulf Coasts were quickly embroiled with various strikes, directly or indirectly related to the difficulties in San Francisco. International and domestic trade became stifled causing economic consequences to ripple across the globe and endangering efforts to end the Great Depression. In addition, the strike broke out on 29 October, just days before the presidential election. The maritime strike had broad political implications.

The position of the MFPC in regards to the 1936 presidential election is reflective of the intra- and inter-union bickering that continued throughout the Maritime Federation's existence. After a contentious April 1936 MFPC convention debate, the Federation officially endorsed the Democratic candidate Franklin Roosevelt by a slim margin over the Farm-Labor party.⁸ Roosevelt was undeniably a greater friend to labor than Kansas's governor and Republican candidate Alfred Mossman "Alf" Landon. However, Roosevelt's lukewarm support of the trade union movement made for a

⁸ Otilie Markholt, *Maritime Solidarity, Pacific Coast Unionism, 1929-1938* (Tacoma, Washington: Pacific Coast Maritime History Committee, 1998), 225.

tenuous alliance between the Democrats and labor movement. Some workers were becoming less inclined to accept Roosevelt's half-hearted support of labor, opting to join local alternative political movements such as the Progressives in Wisconsin, the American Labor Party in New York, and the Farmer-Labor Party of Minnesota.

There was a general consensus among MFPC convention delegates that organized labor would be better served by a proposed national Farm-Labor Party. However, endorsement of Roosevelt was viewed as a pragmatic necessity, whereas backing of the Labor-Farm party was generally viewed as utopian in 1936. In general, longshore delegates, recipients of tremendous gains in 1934, cast their lot with Roosevelt. Seamen, having failed to achieve any substantial gains under Roosevelt, were understandably less inclined to embrace the Democratic incumbent. Despite its official endorsement of Roosevelt, cooperation with the president's administration became increasingly controversial within the MFPC as the expiration date of the 1934 settlement, 30 September 1936 neared.

Seamen across the political spectrum became increasingly disenchanted with the Roosevelt administration due to the passage of the Merchant Marine Act of 1936. In particular, seamen were enraged by a provision known as the Copeland-Bland Act, commonly referred to as simply the Copeland Act in the media, and dubbed the "fink book act" by seamen. Ostensibly passed to prevent the exploitation of seamen, the Copeland Act required seamen to carry personal identification booklets. Sailors viewed personal identification booklets as an employer tool to blacklist union agitators. The Copeland Act was universally condemned throughout labor's ranks, yet the Copeland Act

became the basis for a new conflict within the Maritime Federation as unionists battled over an appropriate course of action to banish the dreaded “fink books.” Predictably, seamen directly affected by the Copeland Act tended to favor far more radical measures to fight it than did the longshoremen.⁹

In addition to domestic issues such as the Copeland Act, the unity of the MFPC was shaken by international events such as fascism in Europe and militarism in Asia. Though the Maritime Federation collectively opposed fascism, the MFPC found it engulfed in controversy as to the level of commitment the Maritime Federation should demonstrate in its stance against fascism. The crux of the debate can be traced to Bridges’ CP ties. As Moscow became more preoccupied with the fascist threat, Party members were instructed to work cooperatively with the Roosevelt administration in hopes of forming a strong anti-fascist coalition in the near future. Accordingly, as Bridges continually compromised the MFPC position to accommodate Roosevelt’s Labor Department, many observers increasingly viewed him as a proxy for the Moscow.

The combination of domestic and international issues and events left Bridges and the San Francisco longshore local in a difficult position after the 1936-37. His longshore union’s non-support of the Farmer-Labor party, its tepid opposition to the Copeland Act, as well as the increasing propensity to adhere to Roosevelt’s position as the Second World War loomed on the horizon allowed left-leaning union elements to label Bridges and his union followers as a reactionary force within the maritime labor movement. At

⁹ Stephen Schwartz, *Brotherhood of the Sea: A History of the Sailors’ Union of the Pacific 1885-1995*, (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1986), 118.

the same time, Bridges' CP ties left the union open to periodic attacks from traditionally conservative AFL officials as well as employers.

Tracing the twists and turns of the official CP line and its influence over Bridges and the longshore union during the later thirties can often be little more than an exercise in conjecture. Certainly Bridges' much ballyhooed alliance with the Party makes it easy to underplay the independence and initiative of the rank-and-file. However, it is critical not to underestimate the longshoremen's humanitarian concerns and political knowledge; thus their affinity towards Bridges. Though consisting largely of non-CP members, the rank-and-file of the longshore union was at the forefront of the antifascist movement in the US, repeatedly demonstrating their commitment to Bridges' political leaning by boycotting cargo on the docks intended to fortify the war capabilities of Germany, Italy, and Japan. Such defiant actions prompted employers to charge the longshoremen of un-American communistic sympathies. In truth, the rank-and-file longshore decision stemmed not from CP directives, but rather from Bridges' leadership qualities, combined with the rank-and-file's prescient view of the fascist threat.¹⁰

Despite their internal philosophical differences, virtually the entire maritime rank and file was concerned with the horrific track record of fascist states in regards to maritime labor. To be sure, the maritime trade envisioned US shippers emulating the fascists' stance towards maritime workers. According to the official newspaper of the

¹⁰ Charles P. Larrowe, *Harry Bridges: the Rise and Fall of Radical Labor in the United States* (New York: Lawrence Hill and Company, 1972), 130, 131.

MFPC, the *Voice of the Federation*, the arrival of fascism in Italy guaranteed the downfall of maritime labor:

Mussolini 'won,' set up his fascist regime, wiped out the union and put nice 'corporate unions' in their place. The ship owners and sailors all belonged to the same 'union' and the shipowner as their official.

Seamen's wages were 1,200 lire a month. Now they are 400 lire....

The seamen and longshoremen...actually owned a number of ships when they had a free union.... The men who owned them in 1924 now sail for one-third the wages. That's fascism at work.¹¹

Though the employer claim that Moscow dictated the policies of the longshore union may have been a gross misstatement, the perception of Bridges as a dangerous force in the American labor movement took root, eventually propelling him into a series of historic pre-Second World War McCarthy-like deportation trials. The government, assisted by the testimony of Bridges' archrival Lundeberg, attempted to deport the longshore leader to his native Australia for entering the US illegally and joining an organization that advocated "the overthrow by force and violence of the government."¹²

Persecution of Bridges ceased temporarily in the wake of the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, as a united front was quickly

¹¹ *Voice of the Federation*, (San Francisco) Anne Rand Research Building, Harry Bridges Building, 1188 Franklin Street, San Francisco, California, 15 September 1938, 2.

¹² Larowe, *Harry Bridges*, 140-141.

forged, and Bridges' longshore union officially embraced a no-strike pledge, despite a barrage of criticism from progressive unionists.¹³ Predictably, as an anticommunist hysteria swept the nation during the post-war years, Bridges and his union were forced to contend with various forms of harassment, climaxing with the expulsion of the West Coast longshore union from the CIO. Hardened by the struggles of the thirties, Bridges refused to buckle, and his International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU) continued on an independent and progressive course, providing leaders, money, and marchers for peace and civil rights demonstrations and vocally opposing American foreign policy.¹⁴

To understand how the ILWU became one of the most powerful and progressive unions in the nation, and how the current maritime labor situation continues to be divided into several distinct geographic entities, a study of the 1936-1937 maritime strike and the rise and fall of the MFPC is essential. Although adversarial relations between maritime unions have eased considerably over past six decades, the scars of the 1936-37 strike and the struggle for control of the MFPC have yet to heal completely. Ideological differences that developed during the 1936-37 strike led West Coast longshoremen to cut their ties to their East Coast brethren. Today, the East Coast-based International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) and the ILWU remain separate entities. The San Francisco-based Sailors' Union of the Pacific (SUP) continues to prosper as it enters its third century of

¹³ Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*, 265.

¹⁴ Larowe, *Harry Bridges*, 380.

existence as an important affiliate of the Seafarers' International Union (SIU). However, the National Maritime Union (NMU), formed in continues to function as a competing body, though there have been recent talks of a SIU-NMU merger. Both the SIU and the NMU were born from the wreckage of the 1936-37 maritime strike.

Review of Maritime Labor Literature

San Francisco's maritime labor historiography continues to be colored by both craft and political biases. Seamen and longshoremen continue to revere Lundeberg and Bridges respectively, and the history of the 1936-37 strike and the MFPC is still debated. Of two things we may be sure. First, the maritime labor movement has stood out historically from the other industrial American labor movements, and second, San Francisco has traditionally provided the heartbeat of the nation's maritime labor movement.

San Francisco's long and storied radical maritime tradition among laborers can be traced in part to its earliest days as a seaport. William Martin Camp's 1947 history of the San Francisco port entitled *San Francisco: Port of Gold* provides a through and complete overview, enabling readers to understand how and why San Francisco emerged at the heart of the maritime labor movement. According to Camp, San Francisco grew exponentially from a remote trading post to a thriving port city shortly after the 1848 discovery of gold. Isolated from the rest of the nation, virtually all staples entered the city via the port. Thus, the importance of the maritime workers, who served as the city's lifeline, was enhanced, prompting them to organize the first unionized seaport in the

world. Though this account pays virtually no attention to the existence of the Maritime Federation, it is perhaps the best general survey of maritime labor in San Francisco.¹⁵

Whereas Camp focuses exclusively on San Francisco, Howard Kimeldorf provides an overview of the national maritime labor movement in his 1988 account *Reds or Rackets: The Making of Radical and Conservative Unions on the Waterfront*. This monograph argues that a host of unique environmental, geographic and ethnic factors shaped a particularly militant and political maritime labor climate in San Francisco. For example, the longshoremen of San Francisco were prone to congregate in the North Beach district, known for its political activists and bohemians during the 1930s. By contrast, San Pedro, encircled by a ring of mountains roughly twenty-five miles south of Los Angeles, was an isolated working-class community in the 1930s, far removed from outside radical and intellectual influences.¹⁶

On the surface, Kimeldorf's argument makes sense; San Francisco's long tradition of maritime labor radicalism was enhanced due to its distinctive geographic location and exceptional cultural and social aspects, yet the twenties were a decade of extreme quiescence for the city's maritime labor movement. Even the onset of the Great Depression failed to generate a revival of the San Francisco's maritime unions. Yet, the

¹⁵ William Martin Camp, *San Francisco: Port of Gold* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Company, 1947).

¹⁶ Howard Kimeldorf, *Reds or Rackets: The Making of Radical and Conservative Unions on the Waterfront* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 13, 14.

city's maritime workers became a leading force in the labor movement during the thirties. The sudden revival of a storied tradition of maritime worker militancy raises the question of organization. Who was the leader of the city's maritime labor renaissance? The revival of the San Francisco maritime labor movement came under the leadership of Harry Bridges.

Charles Larrowe's 1972 biography, *Harry Bridges: The Rise and Fall of Radical Labor in the United States*, provides tremendous insight into arguably the most influential laborite in San Francisco maritime history. Bridges' intelligence, organizational abilities, and charisma were instrumental in the rebuilding of the city's maritime labor movement, and indeed, the national labor movement. Although Larrowe contends that Bridges' persona cannot be underestimated when examining the growth of organized labor in the 1930's, his biography does not portray Bridges as a man without flaws and frailties. This biography an essential read for anyone with a keen interest in labor history, however, this account largely deals with Bridges' ongoing battle against the government's deportation attempts while providing only sketchy details of the Maritime Federation and the strike of 1936-37.¹⁷

Another biography, Hyman Weintraub's *Andrew Furuseth: Emancipator of Seamen* (1959) attributes the rise of maritime unionism in San Francisco to the extraordinarily brutal conditions that existed in the maritime industry, combined with the heroic actions of one man, Andrew Furuseth, the founder of the SUP. Furuseth was an

¹⁷ Charles P. Larrowe, *Harry Bridges*, 76.

eighty-two year old conservative East Coast union official who bitterly opposed the MFPC and its advocacy of industrial unionism during the 1936-37 strike; however, his impact on the maritime movement cannot be understated. Though this biography is thoroughly grounded in archival sources of the SUP and the rich but neglected files of the sailors' union's journal publications, Weintraub's account borders on hagiography. Consequently, those seeking a thorough and objective understanding of Furuseth must look elsewhere.¹⁸

A recent addition to the bibliography on Furuseth is Arnold Berwick's 1993 *The Abraham Lincoln of the Sea: A Biography of Andrew Furuseth*. Once again, however, the SUP founder is treated in a decidedly favorable light. The reluctance of biographers to denigrate Furuseth attests to his revered eminence within the seafaring world. Notwithstanding his reactionary opposition to the MFPC during 1936-37 strike, direct criticism of him was muted; despite his history of disputes with the progressive factions, seamen of all political philosophies mourned his death in 1938. As a result, Furuseth appears to be more of a legendary figure than a real person. Nevertheless, these biographies of the SUP founder provide remarkable understanding of the origins and extent of craft rivalries along the waterfront. Writing on the tenuous alliance formed between longshoremen and sailors, Berwick notes, "Why the last thing Furuseth wanted was unity with the longshoremen. He believed in craft unions, and staked his whole

¹⁸ Hyman Weintraub, *Andrew Furuseth: Emancipator of Seamen* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959).

career on keeping the seamen free of entangling alliances-especially with the longshoremen.”¹⁹

One of the most interesting biographical sources regarding the MFPC and its 1936-37 strike is Bernard “Barney” Mayes’ unpublished, undated, and untitled typewritten autobiography. Even though an avowed Trotskyite and one of Bridges’ primary adversaries, Mayes served as temporary editor of the union organ the *Voice of the Federation*. During his tenure as editor of the *Voice*, Mayes was thrust into the center of the inter- and intra- union bickering. In essence, control of the *Voice* and its editorship was viewed as the key to MFPC control. Obviously, Mayes’ writings are an invaluable asset in understanding not only the events as they unfolded, but the extent of animosity that existed within the higher echelons of the unions’ hierarchy.²⁰

Several oral histories have been exploited to add the essential human quality so often missing in historical monographs. Oral histories and autobiographies have inevitably limitations, as memories fade, and others tend to either embellish or construct utter fabrications. In some instances, there was a necessity to rely upon one person’s account. However, a consistent attempt was made to explore more than one person’s version of any single particular incident in drawing my conclusions.

In contrast to Mayes’ autobiography, Henry Schmidt provides radically different interpretations of many of the same events in *Secondary Leadership in the ILWU, 1933-*

¹⁹ Arnold Berwick, *The Abraham Lincoln of the Sea*, 138.

²⁰ Barnard Mayes, “Autobiography,” Labor Archives and Research Center, San Francisco State University, 480 Winston Drive, San Francisco California, n.d.

1966, an oral history compiled over several interviews conducted by Estolv Ethan Ward and Miriam F. Stein. As a staunch ally of Bridges, Schmidt played a prominent role as the president of the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) San Francisco local during the strike and in all phases of waterfront activity at the time. Unfortunately, the interviews were conducted in 1974, 1975, and 1981, and as a result, Schmidt's recollections are often hazy and incomplete. On the other hand, time has allowed Schmidt to recall his experiences in an unemotional and comparatively objective manner.²¹

Another oral history, provided by Texas Longshoreman Gilbert Mers, is *Working the Waterfront: The Ups and Downs of A Rebel Longshoreman*. San Francisco was undoubtedly the heart of the maritime union movement. However, it is important to note that the 1936-37 maritime conflict touched not only the entire Pacific Coast, but Atlantic and Gulf Coasts as well. During the Gulf Coast conflict, Mers served as head of the Maritime Federation of the Gulf Coast (MFGC). His 1988 oral history provides both an outsiders' and insiders' viewpoint. Far removed from the events in San Francisco during the strike, Mers recalls following the strike with intent interest, yet no first-hand

²¹ Henry Schmidt, *Secondary Leadership in the ILWU, 1933-1966*, interview by Miriam F. Stein and Estolv Ethan Ward, (Berkeley: Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, 1983).

knowledge. However, in the immediate aftermath of the strike, he ventured to San Francisco in an unsuccessful attempt to form a national union of all maritime workers.²²

An oral history providing the employer perspective is entitled *Some Comments on Employer Organizations and Collective Bargaining in Northern California Since 1934*, by J. Paul St. Sure, a lawyer and employer spokesman for the Oakland business community. Historians far removed from the events have often portrayed the hullabaloo over Bridges' alleged CP ties as employer propaganda intended to isolate the strikers. In an interview with Corinne Gilb in 1957, a mild and reflective St. Sure recalled the response of the employers to Bridges was one of genuine fear:

It was not just "labor leaders were agitators and agitators were Communists; therefore all labor leaders were Communists." This was beyond that. "Mr. Bridges, we think, is a communist. He acts like one." And this became a matter of civic concern. It certainly was an emotional thing. The boss went to lunch and somebody said 'When are you going to get rid of that rat Bridges? He'd go to the back to his office and ring the buzzer and say 'lets stop dealing with Bridges' And Bridges was a symbol of all these things, but he went one step further, because he sounded like a Communist.²³

A similar anti-Bridges sentiment can be found in Otilie Markholt's *Maritime Solidarity: Pacific Coast Unionism 1926-1938*. Her work is reflective of the subjective nature of maritime labor historiography. Markholt's perspective evolved largely through her association with SUP business agent Peter B. Gill and, as a result, her writing is

²² Gilbert Mers, *Working the Waterfront: The Ups and Downs of a Rebel Longshoreman* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988).

²³ Corinne L. Gilb, "Some Comments on Employer Organizations and Collective Bargaining in Northern California Since 1934," *Oral History Project*, Institute of Industrial Relations, University of California, Berkeley, 1957, typewritten, 657-659, in Graduate Social Science Library, University of California, Berkeley.

unambiguously critical of Bridges. Though her account was involved countless hours of research and was published in 1998, *Maritime Solidarity* constantly conveys the simplistic mindset of SUP business agents in the thirties: communists did not join unions; they "infiltrated" them. Elected officials "dominated" them, and when a trade unionist left the CP, he "defected" to the other side.²⁴

Mike Quin's 1949 account entitled *The Big Strike* offers a startlingly different interpretation of San Francisco maritime labor history in the 1930s. In contrast to Markholt's relentless criticism of Bridges, *The Big Strike* paints Bridges as the idealistic and heroic leader of the proletariat. This should not be surprising given that Quin and Bridges were close personal friends. In fact, the revised 1979 edition contains a foreword written by Bridges acknowledging their friendship.²⁵ In addition, the author was a frequent contributor to the official organ of the San Francisco's CP, the *Western Worker* and, as one would expect, his account continually underscores CP contributions.

The rise and fall of the Maritime Federation is doubtless a persuasive reminder that the final word on history is unattainable. The unqualified truth about such a politically passionate topic can never be known; nobody can discard his or her prejudice adequately. However, Bruce Nelson offers perhaps the most objective and scholarly account of the 1936-37 maritime strike in San Francisco in his 1988 account entitled *Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen and Unionism in the 1930s*.

²⁴ Ottilie Markholt, *Maritime Solidarity*, 17; 103; 271.

²⁵ Harry Bridges, Quin, foreword to *The Big Strike*, xi, xii.

Nelson offers a clear break from so many prior interpretations in which the authors were actual participants or acquaintances of the MFPC. Given that he makes no attempt to resuscitate or denigrate the reputations of high-profile laborites, this account could be considered a cornerstone in waterfront labor historiography. Although Nelson is willing to credit the communists as a major force in the maritime labor movement, he argues that traditional syndicalism stripped of its political overtones, as preached by Lundeberg, combined with the overwhelming effects of the Great Depression, incited workers to engage in various spontaneous militant job actions.²⁶

Though Nelson's interpretation of the 1936-37 maritime strike and the rise and fall of the MFPC is surprisingly condensed, his account provides a clear, objective explanation of the issues and politics dividing the progressive leadership of the Maritime Federation. Whereas Bridges strategies were purportedly intertwined with Moscow's political agenda, Lundeberg's philosophy was predicated on a rejection of politics in the pursuit of worker's demands, with an emphasis on spontaneous job action at the expense of labor negotiations. Nelson unmistakably demonstrates that differing unionist philosophies, as opposed to personal animosity, and jealousy doomed the Lundeberg-Bridges relationship from its inception.²⁷

Although Nelson managed to view matters with greater objectivity, he presents an all too abbreviated description of the rise and fall of the Maritime Federation and the

²⁶ Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*.

²⁷ *Ibid.* , Markholt, *Maritime Solidarity*; Quin, *The Big Strike*.

events in San Francisco during the 1936-1937 strike. In part, this is due to Nelson's attempt to interpret the maritime movement across the nation during the entire decade. Due to Markholt's acquaintances with many of the participants, her account suffers from a lack of objectivity, though it is by far the most detailed explanation of the MFPC and the 1936-37 strike. Likewise, Quin's *The Big Strike* lack the objectivity needed to properly access the history of the MFPC and the maritime strike of 1936-37. Moreover, while *The Big Strike* offers a panoramic view of the 1934 strike in San Francisco, the monograph includes only a brief chapter on the MFPC and the strike of 1936-37.²⁸

Stephen Schwartz offers a brief account of the MFPC and the 1936-37 labor dispute in his 1986 history of the SUP, entitled *Brotherhood of the Sea: A History of the Sailors' Union of the Pacific 1885-1985*. Schwartz's account is by design celebrationist and self-congratulatory in content. On the other hand, Schwartz does provide perhaps the most chronologically comprehensive treatment of the maritime history on the Pacific Ocean, offering glimpses of the past by tracing seamen's history back to the Polynesians of 1,100 years ago.²⁹

San Francisco's Union-backed and pro-union newspapers that abounded during the 1930's, such as the *Waterfront Worker*, the *Western Worker*, *West Coast Sailors*, and the *Voice of the Federation*, are invaluable in any examination of the MFPC and the 1936-

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Markholt, *Maritime Solidarity*; Quin, *The Big Strike*.

²⁹ Schwartz, *Brotherhood of the Sea*.

37 strike and the MFPC. Although these sources were heavily exploited in the crafting of this account, these newspapers have inevitable limitations. These organs were inevitably pro- or anti-Bridges, or conversely pro- or anti-Lundeberg. With the exception of the SUP organ, *West Coast Sailors*, a common three-stage pattern emerged within the various newspapers. During the first stage, their journalists generally ignored the internal squabbling of the union's hierarchy, opting to give a harmonious picture of a united MFPC front during the early days of the strike. During the second stage, as the bickering among factions increased, the papers showed obvious strain in attempting to convey a depiction of a united leadership. As the Maritime Federation's infighting reached a crescendo, the third stage witnessed leaders' factions blatantly exploiting their respective newspapers to explicitly attack opponents within the MFPC.

The establishment of the *Waterfront Worker* in the early thirties was a cornerstone in the city's maritime labor history. Purportedly written by rank-and-file longshoremen, the *Waterfront Worker* consistently adopted militant and aggressive tones in an attempt to convey its unflinching support of Bridges and his longshoremen followers. Originally, the mimeographed and amateurish *Waterfront Worker* was loosely affiliated with the CP, and as a result, the *Waterfront Worker* was believed by many to be a mouthpiece for the CP throughout its existence. Although the *Waterfront Worker* and the official organ of the MFPC, the *Voice of the Federation* were clearly backed by opposing factions within the MFPC during the midst of the 1936-37 strike, maritime workers devotedly read both journals. Both organs contain a significant number of

pages of rank-and-file letters expressing a broad range of political opinion, thus providing one of the best sources to gauge the striking workers' sentiments.³⁰

The official CP organ, the *Western Worker*, mirrored the *Waterfront Worker* in its fierce supporter of Bridges. In contrast to the *Waterfront Worker's* muted support of the CP program, the *Western Worker's* support of the Party's revolutionary doctrine was enthusiastic. The organ regularly devoted a full page to the maritime strike, leading many to conclude the strike was directed by Moscow. Although technically not a labor union, the CP and the *Western Worker* certainly played a major role on the San Francisco waterfront. When confronted with the charge of using the 1936-37 strike to push Moscow's revolutionary agenda, the *Western Worker* responded, "The only close connection between unionism and the Communist Party is the communists... consider it their sacred duty to help in the building of unions so that the conditions of the workers may be improved."³¹

It is undeniable that the CP was a major force in San Francisco maritime labor during the thirties. Yet, the role of the San Francisco CP and the extent of its ties to Moscow remain highly debated. On one hand, the employers' tactic of branding left-leaning radicals as "reds" caused many labor officials and rank and filers to downplay their communistic sympathies. On the other hand, the employers' red baiting campaign

³⁰ *Waterfront Worker*, (San Francisco) 1933-36, San Francisco, Anne Rand Research Library, Harry Bridges Building, 1188 Franklin Street, San Francisco, CA.

³¹ *Western Worker* (San Francisco), 18 January 1937, 3, Labor Archives and Research Center, San Francisco State University, 480 Winston Drive, San Francisco, CA.

may have led historians to exaggerate the strength of the Party in San Francisco. It does appear that the San Francisco CP, especially its membership within the longshore union's hierarchy, was unusually independent of Moscow in formulating its strategy. Indeed, one could argue that the San Francisco CP actually led the Moscow in de-emphasizing a program of revolutionary sloganeering in favor of a united front that was far more in tune with the aspirations and sentiments of the rank-and-file.

The *Voice of the Federation*, the Maritime Federation's official organ, provided extensive coverage of the strike and MFPC politics. In contrast to the staunch support of Bridges given by both the *Waterfront Worker* and the *Western Worker*, the *Voice* unequivocally was aligned with Harry Lundeberg and his clique of supporters during the reign of Barney Mayes. As had been mentioned, Mayes, the "temporary" editor, became a central figure in the conflict between Lundeberg and Bridges. Given that Mayes and the editorial staff of the *Voice* unquestionably became a pawn in the Federation's factional struggle, the *Voice* itself is a key source for understanding both the rise and fall of the MFPC and the events of the 1936-37 strike.³²

The eventual ability of the Bridge's forces to dispose of Mayes compelled Lundeberg to publish an official organ of the SUP entitled *West Coast Sailors* in aftermath of the 1936-37 strike. Despite the biases of the *Voice* under the editorship of Mayes, its intended audience of the entire Maritime Federation, as well as an ongoing strike situation, compelled the *Voice* to reign in its attack on Bridges. In contrast, *West*

³² *Voice of the Federation*, (San Francisco), 1936-1938.

Coast Sailors was established in the immediate post-strike period, which saw the two central labor leaders step up their attacks upon each other, and the paper was intended solely for the consumption of SUP rank and file. Therefore, *West Coast Sailors* consistently adopted an unambiguous anti-Bridges, anti-longshore union perspective.³³

In addition to a host of other union-backed publications, the mainstream newspapers contained regular updates of the strike as it unfolded. Publisher William Randolph Hearst controlled the *San Francisco Examiner*. Union animosity towards Hearst stemmed in part from his concerted anti-union smear campaign during the 1934 maritime and general strikes.³⁴ In addition to the Hearst publication, the *San Francisco Chronicle* leaned heavily towards the employers.³⁵ In contrast to the *Examiner*, its slanderous remarks directed towards union leadership in were toned down considerable during the 1936-37 strike.³⁶

In evaluating the MFPC and the labor dispute of 1936-37, I have drawn upon a host of other primary sources to a lesser degree including a wide array of union convention proceedings, inter-union correspondences, bulletins and pamphlets published

³³ *West Coast Sailors*, (San Francisco), 1937-1938, Anne Rand Research Library, Harry Bridges Building, 1188 Franklin Street, San Francisco California.

³⁴ Charles P Larrowe, *Harry Bridges*, 80.

³⁵ Quin, *The Big Strike*, 69.

³⁶ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1934-1938.

by union activists and employers alike have been extracted from the vast archives of the ILWU and the MFPC files at the Labor Archives and Research Center at San Francisco State University. Given that the MFPC consisted of over 40,000 members, these archival sources obviously represent only a fraction of the Maritime Federation's viewpoints. It appears, however, that the rank-and-file were far less interested in the intra- and inter-MFPC factional fighting in contrast to the various journalists. Ultimately, the decision of the rank-and-file majority to forsake inter- and intra union squabbling in favor of pursuing improved working conditions and increased wages resulted in a tremendous victory for the MFPC in the 1936-37 maritime strike.

In assessing the literature of the MFPC and the 1936-37 strike, a detailed and objective account has yet to be published. This account will not give us the last word on the MFPC and the strike of 1936-37. Relatively little attention has been paid to the strike on ports such as San Pedro, Seattle, and Portland. Archives of the Sailor's Union have not been examined. Nevertheless, given the magnitude and historical significance of the events in San Francisco during 1936-37-the folly of inter- and intra- union bickering and its profound after effects-it is surprising that historians have failed to address fully the rise and fall of the MFPC and the strike of 1936-37. Hopefully, this examination of the events in San Francisco will assist in laying the groundwork for a closer exploration of maritime unionism during the 1930's.

I Roots of the MFPC

San Francisco's rank-and file-maritime unionists of the 1930's were undoubtedly aware why past waterfront uprisings had failed: lack of unity. The struggle of the city's maritime workers to correct this heritage of defeat dated to the very beginnings of San Francisco history, as the city's first maritime labor union, the Riggers' and Stevedores' Union Association, pitted workers against workers. Established on 5 July 1853, the Riggers and Stevedores' Union Association maintained an exclusive nature by charging a high initiation fee that hampered its own growth. Consequently, longshore unionism remained confined to the skilled few who could afford the fees until the 1880's.¹

In the meantime, seamen made several unsuccessful attempts to unionize their ranks. Little is known about the first three seamen's unions. The first, established in January 1866 as the Seamen's Friendly Union and Protective Society on Bush Street, lacked sufficient membership to pay permanent officers, and the union quietly disbanded. A second unsuccessful seamen's union, the Seamen's Protective Union, was established on Steuart Street in January 1878. It dissolved before the end of the year due in part to

¹ International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, *The ILWU Story: Three Decades of Militant Unionism*, 2nd ed., rev. (San Francisco: International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, 1963), 12; all subsequent citations are to this edition.

internal squabbling.² In August 1880, the Seamen's Protective Association was founded under the auspices of Frank Roney and Dennis Kearney of the virulently anti-Asian Workingmen's Party of California. The final meeting of Seamen's Protective Association occurred in November 1882 shortly after Roney was forced to contend with charges of embezzlement.³

It was not until the 1880's that effectual efforts were made to organize large numbers of maritime workers in San Francisco. In an effort to thwart the exclusive craft unionism of the Riggers and Stevedores' Union Association, two rival longshoremen's unions were formed; the Longshore Lumberman's Protective Association in 1880 and the Stevedores Protective Union in 1886.⁴ As jurisdictional disputes raged between the three rival longshore unions, mistrust germinated within the dockworkers' ranks. Jurisdictional disputes have continually plagued the maritime workers, as rival factions compete for the right to work along various docks, aboard various types of ships, and over the assignment of various tasks. Eventually this problem would crystallize around the sailors and longshoremen, as labor attempted to define exactly where the seamen's work stopped and the longshoremen's work began. However, while maritime unionism was in gestation, disputes tended to reign within, rather than between crafts.

² Camp, *San Francisco*, 282, 283.

³ *Ibid.* 288- 290.

⁴ International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, *The ILWU Story*, 12, 13.

The decade of the 1880's also witnessed the emergence of the first successful seamen's union. Several characteristics of seafaring had previously discouraged the unionization of seamen. Their occupation was highly mobile by nature. Seamen with years of experience rarely spent prolonged periods of time on one particular vessel or with one particular crew. Moreover, seamen working along the Pacific Coast during the 1880's spoke a variety of languages. Of the three thousand sailors working along the Pacific Coast, fifty-one percent were Scandinavian, ten percent German, and eight percent American. The remainder of the workforce consisted of a variety of European nationalities.⁵

Life at sea was difficult during the nineteenth century. Lacking union protection, the sailors worked protracted shifts ranging from twelve to fourteen hours in fair and foul weather. Due to their damp, dark, ill-ventilated quarters, jam packed with bunks, tuberculosis was widespread. Lacking refrigeration, food was notoriously poor, and as a result the sailors frequently contracted scurvy. Voyages could last for months. In contrast to the laborer on land, the sailor could not simply quit, for his ship was not only his place of work, but also his home. What is more, there was no guarantee the vessel would stay afloat; inspection for seaworthiness was unheard of. The ships, often overloaded with cargo by profit-driven employers, were prone to sinking upon encountering exceptionally heavy weather.⁶

⁵ Schwartz, *Brotherhood of the Sea*, 6.

⁶ Berwick, *Abraham Lincoln of the Sea*, 4, 5.

Given the conditions at sea, recruitment of crewmembers became difficult and sailors often deserted their ships once ashore. A technique of hiring seamen, called “crimping,” became widespread to combat these problems. Boardinghouse owners, commonly known as crimps, served as intermediaries in arranging employment between shipowners, ship captains, and the sailors. The crimping system was simple. Once onshore, sailors were offered liquor, housing, and food on credit by the crimps. To gain control over the seamen, crimps simply refrained from obtaining employment for the sailor until he incurred a sufficient debt. Thus, the seaman forced to forfeit his wages in advance for employment, entered the next port dependent upon the services of another crimp. Consequently, the typical sailor spent his entire career in perpetual debt to the crimps.⁷

Without doubt, the far-flung nature of seafaring reinforced the crimping system and hampered the ability of seamen to unionize prior to the 1880's. However, the expansion of the lumber trade after the American Civil War transformed the nature of seafaring along the Pacific Coast, making unionization more feasible. Due to the rapid settlement of California, demand for construction materials boomed, and consequently, there was a tremendous expansion of the lumber trade. The hauling of lumber along the coast led to voyages of shorter duration. As a result, seamen increasingly had the ability to develop ties and coordinate activities that would benefit their joint interests.⁸

⁷ Camp, *San Francisco*, 220.

⁸ Schwartz, *Brotherhood of the Sea*, 6.

The first successful sailors' union, the Coast Seamen's Union (CSU) was established in 1885 on a legendary foggy March evening in a lumberyard near the Folsom Street Wharf in San Francisco. Following the announcement of a new pay scale by the ship owners that reduced seamen's wages to twenty-five dollars a month, members of San Francisco-based International Workingmen's Association (IWA), a radical labor organization inspired by the First International, initiated a meeting of nearly three hundred merchant sailors near the wharf and proclaimed the establishment of the CSU. Given the oppressive working conditions of merchant sailors, the membership rolls of the radical new union mushroomed. Within weeks the membership had grown to roughly seven hundred, and within a few months the membership of the CSU numbered two thousand.⁹

Shortly after its 1885 inception, the CSU conducted its first strike and emerged victorious. During the following year, the marine firemen followed the seamen's example and walked off the ships. A general strike was sought, but only the CSU responded by striking in sympathy with the marine firemen.¹⁰ In response to the threat of inter-craft solidarity, the employers formed the Shipowners Association of the Pacific Coast, established a hiring hall, and proceeded to hire non-union workers to man the ships. The better-funded employers managed to break the strike within a few months as

⁹ David F. Selvin, *Sky Full of Storm, A Brief History of California Labor*, Rev. ed. (San Francisco: California Historical Society, 1975), 13; all subsequent citations are to this edition.

¹⁰ International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, *The ILWU Story*, 12.

sailors, desperate for work, left the union in droves. Membership was reduced by one-third, while wages fell to as low as fifteen dollars a month in the strike's aftermath.¹¹

The decision of the left-leaning leadership of the CSU to engage in a disastrous sympathy strike paved the way in 1887 for the conservative leadership of Andrew "Andy" Furuseth. As a member of the union's Finance Committee, he emerged as the union's secretary, the most powerful position within a CSU hierarchy that lacked a president.¹² Few individuals have rivaled Furuseth in influencing maritime labor history. Born Anders Andreassen Furuseth in 1854 in Norway, he grew up the fifth of ten children in an impoverished rural family about fifty miles north of present day Oslo. As an eight-year-old child, Furuseth found employment on the farm of Jonas S. Schjotz. Although he spent many of his childhood hours laboring on the farm, Schjotz managed to get Furuseth admitted to a private religious school, which emphasized Bible study, as well as history, arithmetic, and geography.¹³

Furuseth's religious educational experience seems to have impressed him with a philosophy that neatly divided the world into two distinct camps--one of good, one of evil--and a lifelong love of reading. Despite his literacy, he was rejected from a maritime school as a teenager. Nevertheless, after briefly working as a clerk, Furuseth managed to gain employment as a sailor in 1873 in the crew of the *Marie*, sailing from the port of

¹¹ Berwick, *Abraham Lincoln of the Sea*, 32,33.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.* 1-12.

Draman. Eventually Furuseth would sail on Norwegian, Swedish, British, French, and American vessels before settling in San Francisco in August 1880, where he joined the CSU shortly after its 1885 birth.¹⁴

Furuseth would attain the status as of a living legend among sailors due in part to his prominent role in the passage of the La Follette Seamen's Bill in 1915, a bill that successfully ended the crimping system. His invaluable work on this legislation earned him the title "Abraham Lincoln of the Sea." Furuseth was a traditional craft unionist, bitterly opposed to forming alliances with other crafts, especially longshoremen. He realized that the work of longshoremen was always uncertain as its employment depended upon the arrival of ships. For this reason, Furuseth believed longshoremen would eventually seek to minimize the aspect of uncertainty in their employment by attempting to enlarge their jurisdiction at the seamen's expense. For all intents and purposes, he believed longshoremen's gains were dependent upon seamen's losses.¹⁵

After Furuseth assumed command of the CSU, he successfully managed to thwart an 1888 attempt to form a broad intra-craft maritime organization known as the Council of Wharf and Waves Unions. Lacking Furuseth's approval, this early attempt to form inter-craft federation quickly folded.¹⁶ In lieu of forming alliances with longshoremen, he opted to forge alliances with other sailors. Although the men of the CSU manned

¹⁴ Schwartz, *Brotherhood of the Sea*, 16.

¹⁵ Berwick, *Abraham Lincoln of the Sea*, 79, 138.

¹⁶ International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, *The ILWU Story*, 12.

traditional sailing vessels and often looked upon the seamen of the steamships, members of the Steamships Protective Union with contempt, Furuseth negotiated a merger with the steamship union in 1891. The expanded CSU became known as the Sailors' Union of the Pacific (SUP). The following year, the SUP, the Lake Seamen's Union, and the Gulf Seamen's Union, united in Chicago to establish the International Seamen's Union (ISU), which then affiliated with the AFL.¹⁷

In the intervening time, the first definite West Coast jurisdictional dispute between sailors and longshoremen occurred in 1891. Centered on the handling of lumber, the quarrel was eventually settled by the San Francisco Federal Trades Council. As we shall see, although the disagreement may have been resolved, the seeds of distrust sown during the 1890's would periodically reemerge in the future. The seamen, however, soon found themselves preoccupied on another front as the shipowners embarked on a concerted effort to break their union as the economic depression of the 1890's took hold.¹⁸

The Rise of the City Front Federation

At the turn of the century, labor managed to reassert itself in San Francisco as business conditions revived. In the closing days of 1900, the majority of California unions formed the State Federation of Labor. As a result, the old friction that had burdened the city's longshoremen was brought to an end as the Longshoremen's

¹⁷ Schwartz, *Brotherhood of the Sea*, 21, 22.

¹⁸ Weintraub, *Andrew Furuseth*, 21- 28.

Protective Association, the Riggers and Stevedores Union and the International Longshoremen's Association reached a mutual agreement concerning the jurisdiction of cargo handling.¹⁹ The ability of the longshoremen to settle their differences possibly convinced Furuseth to expand his control over the waterfront as well as the San Francisco labor movement as a whole.

Despite Furuseth's deep-seated convictions about the dangers of forming entangling alliances with workers in other trades, the sailors united with the San Francisco's longshoremen, teamsters, mates, engineers, marine firemen, freight handlers, and lumbermen to form the City Front Federation in January 1901. His staunch backing of the City Front Federation was not the result of a sudden change in his basic craft unionist philosophy, but rather stemmed from Furuseth's desire, as the leader of the largest and most powerful union, to control younger, less-organized unions, and in particular, the longshore unions.²⁰ Just as the waterfront unions united under the banner of the City Front Federation, the uptown unions rallied to form the Central Labor Council.²¹ The swift and unexpected appearance of inter-craft labor federations in San Francisco rattled both employers and experienced conservative unionists. In March, *Organized Labor*, the official organ of the State Federation of Labor, warned:

Our faithful and energetic organizers are to be commended for their untiring and self-sacrificing work, but we believe that at this time a word of warning is not out of place.... It is with a sad heart we behold the embryo labor union tumble out

¹⁹ Camp, *San Francisco*, 378, 381.

²⁰ Berwick, *Abraham Lincoln of the Sea*, 62.

²¹ Camp, *San Francisco* 381.

of its cradle and make an endeavor to carry away the earth and the planets on top of it.... San Francisco has experienced a union Pentecost breeze; the air is charged with union electricity, but beware of the storm...May the... older organizations realize their grave responsibilities that labor's cause may not suffer.²²

In response to the rising tide of unionism sweeping the city's workers, nearly all the wholesale merchants and manufactures, as well as many of the larger retailers in San Francisco, united to form the Employers' Association, an organization that would become a central player in the San Francisco's labor history. In its initial stages, a list of the Employers' Association membership was carefully concealed in order to prevent effective boycotts in a city where labor was seemingly so strong. All communications with the public, newspapers, and municipal authorities were conducted via the Employers' Association's attorney.²³

Due to the conflicting and diverse interests that were represented in the mysterious Employers' Association, its effectiveness remained questionable until challenged in May 1901 by a strike of culinary workers. The strategy of the Employers' Association was simple. Restaurateurs who signed with the union quickly discovered wholesalers were unwilling to deliver meat and produce to their eateries. In June, the same tactic was used in a butcher's strike. Once again, retailers agreeing to unionization

²² Thomas Walker Page, "The San Francisco Labor Movement in 1901," *Political Science Quarterly*, 17, (Winter, 1902): 666-667.

²³ *Ibid.*, 668-669

in their shops discovered their wholesalers, seemingly under the thumb of the Employers' Association unwilling to deliver supplies.²⁴

The battle lines had been drawn. The clash came to a head in July as a group of 6,400 teamsters refused to handle non-union cargo in mid-July. This tactic prompted the Teamsters' Union's employers, the Drayman's Association, an organization that, unbeknownst to the Teamsters, belonged to the Employers Association, to demand an end to the Teamsters' affiliation with the City Front Federation.²⁵ In response to the Teamsters' Unions' refusal, the employers locked out the uncooperative unionists, and shortly thereafter, on 29 July 1901, the entire membership of the City Front Federation, numbering an additional 13,000 workers, struck in support of the Teamsters' Union.²⁶

Furuset, emerging as the City Front Federation's strike leader, after his election to the position "strike manager," adopted an understanding, almost conciliatory posture towards employers. He consistently disavowed violence and ensured that coal supplies for hospitals and lighting systems were not discontinued.²⁷ The laborite's soft stance towards employers that would become his trademark was best conveyed in an address to a labor rally in the midst of the strike: "Let me say to the Employers' Association that if

²⁴ *Ibid.* , 674.

²⁵ Kazin, *Barons of Labor Barons of Labor: The San Francisco Building Trades and Union Power in the Progressive Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 54.

²⁶ Schwartz, *Brotherhood of the Sea*, 30, 31

²⁷ Joseph P. Goldberg, *The Maritime Story: A Study in Labor-Management Relations* (Cambridge, Mass.: 1958), 27, 28.

three of their number would meet three of our side, it would be easy to reach an understanding. They are not hard-hearted men, but they do not understand us.”²⁸

Despite Furuseth’s stance against violence and his conciliatory attitude, the 1901 strike exacted a heavy toll in economic terms as well as in human lives. Five men were killed, and 336 assaults recorded, 225 requiring medical attention, before a settlement was reached.²⁹ In addition to the violence, the strike had a devastating economic impact as it spread to Oakland and several towns along the Sacramento River. Due to the Bay Area’s links to the regional economy, workers from Eureka to Los Angeles in a wide assortment of occupations suffered economic losses. Many jobs were lost. Produce lay rotting along the San Francisco waterfront. Finally, with the two sides at an apparent impasse, a desperate Governor Henry T. Gage took action.³⁰

The strike ended abruptly shortly after Gage arranged a secret agreement with the employers and the Teamsters’ Union. The details of the settlement were never revealed. However, according to one Teamster official attending the meeting between the Drayman’s Association and the Teamsters, Gage had threatened to declare martial law in San Francisco, a move that would have curtailed all economic activity within the city. Although the settlement was hailed as a draw, the unions had clearly won recognition,

²⁸ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 9 August 1901, Sec. 1, p.5.

²⁹ Schwartz, *Brotherhood of the Sea*, 35.

³⁰ Kazin, *Barons of Labor*, 54.

and San Francisco became the first city in the world to be known as a “closed-shop” city.³¹

Perhaps even more impressive from the perspective of labor was the 1901 mayoral election in which the victor was Eugene Schmitz, a member of the newly formed Labor Union Party (ULP).³² Despite Furuseth’s initial reluctance to engage in politics, the SUP founder threw his support behind the ULP candidate slate. Michael Casey, the president of the Teamster’s Union, and other City Front Federation leaders joined Furuseth in their support of the ULP. A state senator and seven assemblymen running under the ULP banner were also elected. With labor seemingly holding undisputed sway in San Francisco, Casey served Grand Marshall in the city’s elaborate Labor Day Parade of 1902, as 40,000 laborers, more than ten percent of the city’s population, marched down Market Street.³³

The Demise of the City Front Federation

The powerful position San Francisco labor achieved in 1901 was dealt a significant defeat shortly after the 1906 earthquake shook the city, when the seamen voted to strike the Pacific Coast Steamship Company. Although the SUP contract had expired weeks prior to the earthquake, and a SUP strike had been widely expected, the seamen were viewed by the public opinion as exploiting the devastation of the earthquake

³¹ *Ibid*, 55, 56.

³² Camp, *San Francisco*, 406.

³³ Kazin, *Barons of Labor*, 56-58.

to gain better wages. In an attempt to temper public opinion, Furuseth disassembled the powerful City Front Federation by withdrawing his SUP from the organization.³⁴

Although the Pacific Coast Steamship Company, feeling the economic impact of the 1906 strike, quickly capitulated and granted the wage increase to the SUP, it was a Pyrrhic victory, for the once powerful City Front Federation, unable to recover from the loss of the SUP, slowly withered away. The demise of the City Front Federation was a devastating blow for labor; however, Furuseth was not done undermining the powerful union movement he had helped to build. In 1910, he, along with Casey joined Captain William Matson, one of the leading shipowners in San Francisco, and other employers in forming the nation's first arbitration board to handle maritime labor disputes.³⁵

After the disintegration of the City Front Federation, the longshoremen of San Francisco would distinguish themselves as the extraordinarily militant faction among the city's maritime workers. Their Riggers and Stevedores Union would adopt a program that was strongly influenced by the International Workers of the World (IWW) or the "Wobblies." The IWW, formed in 1905, preached a doctrine that revolved around the concept of industrial unionism. Known in Wobbly circles as one big union, or "OBU," the radical IWW dogma stood in stark contrast to the conservative AFL policy of craft unionism.

In the meantime, longshoremen in several other Pacific Coast ports had united under the banner of the Longshoremen's Union of the Pacific, which in 1909, affiliated

³⁴ Camp, *San Francisco*, 408.

³⁵ *Ibid.* , 412

with the East Coast-based International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) of the AFL. Under the terms of affiliation, the Pacific Coast longshoremen, collectively classified as District 38, were given a sweeping grant of autonomy; an important factor in the future of West Coast maritime unionism. Finally, in 1914, the San Francisco Riggers and Stevedores Union of San Francisco joined District 38, cementing an affiliation between San Francisco's longshoremen with the dockworkers of twenty-six other West Coast ports.³⁶

Although the year 1914 was seemingly a year of industrial peace along the San Francisco Waterfront, beneath the surface battle lines were once again being drawn as both labor and management sought to strengthen their positions through various alliances and new associations. The city's longshoremen assumed the lead in an attempted revival of the City Front Federation, under the banner of the Waterfront Workers' Federation, which the SUP joined over the protests of Furuseth.³⁷ In response, to labor's move towards inter-union unity, the employers established the Waterfront Employers' Association of San Francisco. Among the thirteen founders of the Waterfront Employers' Association were representatives of three companies that would be known as the "Big Three" due to their extraordinarily important and dominate roles in the future of maritime labor relations; Captain Robert Dollar of Dollar Steamship Company, William Matson of the Matson Navigation Company, and C.W. Cook of American-Hawaiian Steamship

³⁶ David F. Selvin, *A Terrible Anger: The 1934 Waterfront and General Strikes in San Francisco* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996), 25-27.

³⁷ Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*, 52

Company.³⁸ The employers' strategy was a startling simple plan intended to divide isolate the longshoremen. The Waterfront Employers would offer to bargain exclusively with the longshoremen. Negotiations with seagoing unions were to be exclusively handled by a separate association of shipowners.³⁹

The sudden appearance of distinct employers associations was an obvious counteroffensive to impede intra-craft solidarity demonstrated by the recent formation of the Waterfront Workers Federation. Yet, as long as the strongest body of labor, the conservative AFL, exerted its control over the waterfront the shipowners could rest assured that a threat akin to the 1901 City Front Federation was not likely to recur, the AFL embraced craft unionism and rejected the concept of industrial unionism. However, in 1916, a majority of the San Francisco longshoremen voted overwhelmingly in a member referendum to withdraw from the AFL-affiliated ILA. The dockworkers favored diverting their funds towards advocating broader local maritime unity via the Waterfront Worker's Federation in lieu of sending their union dues to the AFL international.⁴⁰

The 1916 San Francisco Longshore Strike

Once again, the battle lines were drawn along the San Francisco waterfront, and in the summer of 1916 a violent and bitter longshoremen's strike broke out. Unfortunately for the Riggers and Stevedores' Union, it did not coordinate strategies with

³⁸ Selvin, *A Terrible Anger*, 25.

³⁹ Camp, *San Francisco*, 414.

⁴⁰ Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*, 52.

its Waterfront Workers' Federation allies. Ignoring a clause stipulating a sixty-day notice to be given by either side wishing alterations in the contract terms, the longshore union brazenly issued a two-week notice before walking off the job. The dockworkers' actions alienated a public that was increasingly concerned over the possibility of American participation in the World War I. More significantly, the longshore union's allies in the Waterfront Workers Federation, as well as the Teamsters' Union, already wary of radical IWW influence within the longshore rank-and-file, refused to support the poorly planned strike, and it was eventually defeated.⁴¹

Perhaps the most important development of the 1916 strike was the ability of the Waterfront Employers' Association to recruit several other leading business firms, including Pacific Gas and Electric and Standard Oil into the newly-established Law and Order Committee. Arguably, the longshoremen's strike was as good as lost with the establishment of the Law and Order Committee. Within minutes of its founding, the Law and Order Committee had managed to raise a war chest of 200,000 dollars, within a week, 600,000 dollars, and before long over one million dollars was subscribed to combat unionism in the city. This organization, fusing an agenda that included violently pummeling strikers, working with the city's Chamber of Commerce to pass an anti-picketing ordinance, and orchestrating an open shop campaign, mushroomed into a well-financed anti-union violent vigilante organization of 5,000 members. The Law and Order

⁴¹ Selvin, *A Terrible Anger*, 26, 27.

Committee would eventually evolve into the Industrial Association, a powerfully backed, well-financed, anti-union organization.⁴²

The reputation of organized labor took a blow due to a growing concern among Americans over US entry into the World War I. Several otherwise conservative leaders of the SUP, including Furuseth, were opponents of American participation in the First World War. Thus, San Francisco's business interests depicted organized labor in the city as unpatriotic. Paul Scharrenberg, editor of the official ISU journal, the *Seamen's Journal*, was amongst the most vocal in his antiwar stance. Speaking at a mass peace rally at San Francisco's Dreamland Auditorium in July of 1916 he stated:

This great republic may have foes abroad but some of its most deadly enemies are right here at home.... They are the industrial vampires who undermine the nation's vitality by cruel and merciless exploitation.... Special privilege, monopoly and greed are rampant.... The babies of the poor die three times as fast as those of the rich. Yet they have the nerve to ask organized labor to take part...to intimidate some unknown foreign foes of the nation.... Shall we teach our children military ideas, blind obedience and an unquestioning patriotism in the schools? A thousand times no. Let us protest tonight."⁴³

Scharrenberg's unusually strong denunciation of possible American participation in the First World War can be possibly attributed to his German heritage. Although his 1916 speech had radical overtones, Scharrenberg would emerge during the post-war years as a major proponent of SUP conservatism and as Furuseth's right-hand man and possible successor. The two would engage in an internal struggle within the SUP to purge the union of its radical members during the early 1920s. Notwithstanding the seemingly

⁴² Camp, *San Francisco*, 417-432.

⁴³ Schwartz, *Brotherhood of the Sea*, 46.

radical stance of Scharrenberg and Furuseth in regards to American participation in World War I, from their perspective, radicalism could only lead to the disaster.

The war years had brought a temporary lull in the waterfront battles. However the whole world had utterly been transformed. An important event that inevitably influenced the future of maritime unionism transpired thousands of miles away in 1917 as the Bolsheviks seized power in Petrograd. Communism and the fear of communism would play a major role in international labor movements, and in particular, the maritime labor movement along the Pacific Coast. In the United States, William Haywood along with other Wobblies had been imprisoned under the Espionage Act. Nevertheless, the IWW continued to prosper along the San Francisco waterfront.

The 1919 Longshore Strike

The longshoremen were the first of San Francisco's maritime unions to strike in the post-war years. An IWW-influenced strike in 1919 led to disaster as the Riggers and Stevedores Union promoted an agenda that shocked conservative labor leaders and employers alike with its demands for worker participation in ownership and profit sharing. The Waterfront Employers Association responded by organizing a well-coordinated anti-union campaign, facilitated by the concentration of capital by the so-called "Big Three" shipping lines of Dollar, American-Hawaiian, and Matson.⁴⁴ Lacking the support of the Teamsters' Union and the seamen, the bitter and violent longshore strike lasted nearly three months. The strike ended as minority of dockworkers

⁴⁴ Camp, *San Francisco*, 436; Kimeldorf, *Reds or Rackets*, 60.

undermined the strike by resigning from the Riggers and Stevedores' Union and negotiating separately as the Longshoremen's Association. The Longshoremen's Association would become commonly known as the "Blue Book Union."⁴⁵

The longshoremen's defeat in the IWW-inspired 1919 strike was a devastating blow to the workers on the San Francisco wharfs as the demoralized longshoremen were subsequently forced into the company-controlled "Blue Book Union." Its establishment effectively reduced the longshoremen's role to that of a casual laborer, as men were forced to gather on the docks daily in search of temporary employment, an exercise known as the "daily shape-up." This entailed trudging from dock to dock for hours merely looking work, lining up in front of bosses who did the hiring, and hoping to be selected. The longshore workers could not tell from one week to the next how much they would be working or if they would be working at all. To make matters worse, the bosses habitually supplemented their own incomes with bribes from longshoremen seeking to gain preferential treatment.⁴⁶

In the aftermath of the waterfront strike of 1919, California passed the infamous "Criminal Syndicalism Law." Criminal syndicalism was defined as promoting "any doctrine or precept advocating, teaching, or aiding and abetting the commission of crime, sabotage, ... or unlawful acts or force and violence or unlawful methods of terrorism as a means of accomplishing a change in industrial ownership or control, or effecting any

⁴⁵ Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*, 52, 53.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

political change.” There can be little doubt that the law was an effective strikebreaker.

Its first test came during the 1921 Seamen’s strike.⁴⁷

The 1921 Seamen’s Strike

In the intervening time, Furuseth had been attempting to rid his SUP of its radical elements, as SUP members were increasingly also members of IWW-affiliated Marine Transport Industrial Workers Union (MTW). These SUP members, known as “two-card men,” maintained high profiles and were openly critical of the conservatism within the AFL. In January 1921, the SUP membership elected J. Vance Thompson editor of the official SUP organ, the *Seamen’s Journal* who Furuseth wrongly suspected to be an IWW sympathizer.⁴⁸

Though Furuseth viewed Thompson as an IWW radical, In actual fact, the new editor of the *Seamen’s Journal* was representative of yet another faction within the SUP, seamen seeking a middle ground between the strict craft philosophy of Furuseth and the doctrine of the Wobblies. Nonetheless, as editor, Thomson was an outspoken opponent of Scharrenberg and a proponent of increasing the ties between seamen and longshoremen, warehousemen, and other transport workers to create a federation. Furuseth was determined to remove any editor deviating from his conservative philosophical beliefs.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Camp, *San Francisco*, 433, 434.

⁴⁸ Schwartz, *Brotherhood of the Sea*, 58.

⁴⁹ Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*, 56-59.

As it became increasingly known that Furuseth was focused on purging his union of his perceived opponents, the open schism within the seamen's union proved inviting to employers determined to crush whatever maritime unionism remained in San Francisco. Thus, in April 1921 the SUP was forced to strike after employers offered the union a proposal that included lower wages and a return to open-shop conditions.⁵⁰ Despite the employers' declaration of war, Furuseth's energies remained focused on eliminating the perceived radical threat of the IWW, rather than defeating the employers. In fact, Furuseth openly admitted that he was working in concert with the shipowners to rid his union of radical elements during the midst of the 1921 strike.⁵¹

In November, Furuseth finally gained the upper hand and managed to secure the expulsion of Thompson while purging the of SUP members with alleged IWW sympathies.⁵² However, the seamen's union had already conceded defeat to the employers in July and Furuseth's union had been transformed into a shell of its former self. Although he had cooperatively worked with the employers in ridding his SUP of its radical elements, the employers showed no mercy towards Furuseth or his union. Thus, his victory over the radicals within the SUP would prove to be hollow. Just as the longshoremen bowed to the "Blue Book" and were forced to endure the daily shape-up system in the aftermath of the 1919 strike, the West Coast seamen were forced to seek

⁵⁰ Schwartz, *Brotherhood of the Sea*, 55.

⁵¹ Camp, *San Francisco*, 436.

⁵² Schwartz, *Brotherhood of the Sea*, 55

employment through the shipowners' Marine Service Bureau or seek employment directly on the piers in the aftermath of the 1921 strike.⁵³

Furuseth's inability to tolerate opposition within his ranks left his once proud union practically defunct. On the other hand, the ranks of the IWW-affiliated MTW swelled during the post-strike period. However, the MTW was forced to contend with vigilante raids by the American Legion, and Ku Klux Klan on the IWW hall in which women and children were brutalized. Rather than protect the MTW members from vigilantism, law enforcement began rigorous prosecution of the 1919 criminal syndicalism law, and as its leaders were imprisoned for up to fourteen years in California. Under the strain of reactionary prosecution and harassment, combined with the emergence of CP supported unions later in the decade, the MTW would slowly withered away, becoming an insignificant force on the waterfront.⁵⁴

The Lean Years of the 1920's

Contributing to the demise of labor on the waterfront during the 1920's was the formal establishment of the Industrial Association 1921, by the Waterfront Employers Union, remnants of the Law and Order Committee, major newspapers, the police department, and the American Legion. The Industrial Association conducted a campaign known as the "American Plan." This strategy was immensely successful as the employers portrayed the concept of a closed shop as "un-American." In 1920, over ninety percent

⁵³ Goldberg, *The Maritime Story*, 116.

⁵⁴ Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*, 62.

of the city's manual laborers worked under closed shop conditions. By 1923, eighty-five percent of the city's laborers worked in open-shop environments.⁵⁵

As the 1920's wore on, the efforts of the MTW to organize were increasingly hampered by competition from the communist-influenced Marine Workers' Progressive League (MWPL) and its affiliated labor organizations. By 1928, the MWPL had established communist workers' halls, in Philadelphia, Baltimore, New Orleans, New York, San Pedro, Seattle, and San Francisco. The MWPL would shorten its name to the Marine Workers' League the following year before renaming itself the Marine Workers Industrial Union (MWIU) in 1930.⁵⁶

Despite the presence of radical Wobbly and communist-supported unions along the waterfront, working conditions in San Francisco deteriorated during the remainder of the 1920's. Unbeknownst to San Francisco's waterfront employers, a seemingly insignificant rank-and-file Australian longshoreman named Harry Bridges, who endured the daily "shape-ups" during the twenties, would emerge from total obscurity to lead a revival of the city's maritime labor movement in the thirties. Though he candidly questioned the tactics and philosophies of the AFL, Bridges did not seek independence from the AFL. In fact, his first major goal was to bring the longshoremen out of the "Blue Book" and back into the AFL.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁵⁶ Schwartz, *Brotherhood of the Sea*, 72-75.

II Rebirth of Maritime Unionism

The revival of the maritime labor movement in San Francisco is synonymous with Harry Bridges; the first-born son of a prosperous, suburban Australian realtor who assumed he would enter the family's firm. After graduating from Melbourne's St. Brennan's Parochial school at the age of fourteen, Bridges was expected to collect rents for his father. Confronted with the reality of collecting rents from impoverished tenants, he resorted to collecting money from tenants able to pay. Subsequently, he would lend this money to those who could not pay their rent. In all probability, Bridges' short-lived career as a rent collector contributed to his openly acknowledged Marxist sympathies, yet he consistently disavowed Party membership. Bridges explained his political views to a prosecutor while facing a deportation hearing in 1939 for alleged CP ties by stating, "Sometimes I get a little irritated when my views are ascribed to the Communist Party because I because I had them before the Communist Party came into being... Communist teachings...are mostly theory, and I generally stay with practical matters."¹

His imagination fueled by the adventure stories of Jack London, he rejected the comfortable life of a suburban realtor. Bridges proceeded to loiter about the docks of

¹ Larowe, *Harry Bridges*, 3-37; The Harry Bridges Collection, Anne Rand Research Library, 1188 Franklin Street San Francisco, Box 5, Publicity file (2), *Time*, "National Affairs, Immigration" 14 August 1939, 16.

Melbourne, where he associated with Australian members of the IWW. His father allowed Bridges to accept employment as a seamen in the belief that exposure to the miserable and humiliating conditions of seafaring would dispel his son's idealistic illusions. Bridges would spend the next six years at sea. In 1920 he found employment in the United States as a member of the SUP after jumping ship in San Francisco. After joining the IWW American branch for a brief period of time and participating in a 1921 strike in New Orleans, Bridges settled in San Francisco as a longshoreman in 1922.²

As a dues-paying member of the "Blue Book" union, Bridges established a reputation as a rebellious yet proficient dockworker during labor's lean years of the 1920's. Although he participated in a failed 1924 attempt to revive the ILA on the city docks, Bridges' competency as a winch driver, an operator of equipment that hoists cargo to and from the dock and the ship's hold, earned him membership in the employers' "star gangs." The term "star gang" was used to describe workers whose skills earned them far more consistent employment in contrast to the ordinary "casual gangs." Given preferential hiring status by the "Blue Book," he obtained greater financial security and endured the daily shape-ups far less often than the members of the "casual gangs."³ On the other hand, membership in a "star gang" insured a greater exposure to all the abuses of company unionism; the prolonged, seemingly endless shifts; the breakneck competition between gangs; and the appalling absence of safety devices that led to frequent accidents.

² Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*, 112.

³ *Ibid.*, 113.

It was in this atmosphere that the CP-affiliated MWIU published the *Waterfront Worker*, edited by the Australian Harry Hynes. The appearance *Waterfront Worker* was a cornerstone of San Francisco's maritime union movement. Although the *Waterfront Worker's* direct criticism of the conditions on the waterfront enabled the MWIU to gain the sympathy of the maritime workers, the union's reputation as a revolutionary union with communistic ties inhibited recruitment.⁴ The revolutionary flame failed to catch the loyalties of the workers. The nation was in the throes of the Great Depression. Confronted with squalor and underemployment, workers were more concerned with feeding their families and paying rent rather than leading an international revolution.

The Transformation of the Waterfront Worker and the CP

The MWIU had earned itself outsider status on the docks of San Francisco. Moscow had ordered the union to adopt a hostile approach towards all progressive factions to the right of Communism. Samuel Darcy, as leader of the Communist Party's District 13, recognized the problematic situation of the MWIU. Lacking significant membership, the MWIU consisted primarily of union officials schooled in CP ideology with little if any rank and file experience. Rather than continue to exist as a weak rival to the ILA, MWIU members were encouraged by Darcy to join the existing seagoing and shore-based unions.⁵

⁴ Harvey Schwartz, ed. *Harry Bridges: A Centennial Retrospective, An Oral History of the ILWU and the 1934 Strike* (San Pedro: The Harry Bridges Institute, 2001), 8.

⁵ Kimeldorf, *Reds or Rackets*, 84-87

Darcy's willingness to shun the official CP line in favor of the pragmatic strategy of working within the more established and accepted unions coincided with Bridges' philosophy. Bridges seems to have trusted Darcy, and he welcomed the CP's revenue, ideas, and publicity, despite the forces of xenophobia and the tremendous controversy that accompanied its aid. In addition, Darcy had a long history steeped in labor agitation, including recent activities in a cotton strike in California's Imperial Valley. The CP offered additional pickets, provided relief and food through its affiliate, the Workers' International Relief, offered legal advice and put up bond for arrested strikers via its legal agency, the International Labor Defense.⁶

Darcy also recruited roughly fifteen rank and file longshoremen into a Sunday morning study group that met at San Francisco's Albion Hall to form a CP-indoctrinated radical sect within the ILA. Among the pupils at Albion Hall was Ben Jones, who recalled Bridges' participation:

He has a lot of good ideas, he was always there when meetings were called, and most important, he had more experience than most of us had.... That goes for us who were in the party too. We used to study a lot, and we had a pretty good theoretical grasp of what it was all about, but when it came to practical knowledge and what to do from one day to the next, we just naturally turned to Harry. He always had an answer.⁷

In 1933, *The Waterfront Worker* underwent a significant change as Bridges and a group of longshoremen took control of the paper away from Hynes and changed the direction of the publication. The change in the editorial policy became evident with the

⁶ Larowe, *Harry Bridges*, 35, 36.

⁷ Kimeldorf, *Reds or Rackets*, 87.

initial printing, as the publication suddenly denounced the MWIU strategy of forming one union of longshoremen and seamen, instead urging the longshoremen to join the ILA. Bridges recalled the *Waterfront Worker's* change, "We used to read it, too. But it was mostly concerned with seamen and international affairs, like revolutions overseas... (the) decision was made to concentrate on the longshoremen."⁸

The *Waterfront Worker's* new position in favor of affiliation with the ILA contradicted the old position of the MWIU. Although the CP condemned Darcy's daring strategy, as well as the new direction of the *Waterfront Worker*, for deviating from the official line, the decision of Darcy to embrace the ILA continued to gain momentum. The integration of MWIU members into the SUP and ILA obviously was not embraced by the conservative old time trade unionists, who recalled their unhappy experiences with the radicals during the twenties.⁹ In the eyes of the conservatives, these men were guilty of belonging to a "dual union," or a rival union covering the same jurisdiction as that claimed by an already established union. Their previous collaboration with the MWIU made them suspect, for these "dual unionists" had tarred themselves with the CP brush.

The sudden absorption of the MWIU left the maritime unions open to "red-baiting" by employers, and the ILA elements along the city's waterfront quickly formed rival factions. Bridges, along with Schmidt, Henry Scrimph, Eugene "Dutch" Dietrich, and others, who later became ILA stalwarts on the docks, formed the Committee of 500.

⁸ Schwartz, *Harry Bridges*, 8.

⁹ Phillip Taft, "Strife in the Maritime Industry," *Political Science Quarterly* 54 (1939): 221.

The Committee of 500 criticized the ILA's conservative nature, and worked to incorporate a broad spectrum of allies, including the CP, into the ILA cause.

Leading a competing faction was Lee Holman, who had been expelled from the "Blue Book" in 1924 for his support of the AFL. Primarily motivated by his aversion to communism and the radicalism of the MWIU, Holman played a leading role in initiating contact with Joseph P. Ryan, president of the ILA in New York in 1931. He subsequently served as a chief liaison between Ryan and the San Francisco longshoremen in negotiations leading to the eventual charter.¹⁰

The Revival of the AFL on the San Francisco Waterfront

The unionization of the maritime industry along the West Coast received considerable momentum towards due to the passage of the NIRA Section 7 (a) in June 1933 that specified employees had the right to organize and bargain collectively with representatives of their own choosing. In July 1933, Ryan and the New York-based ILA offered a charter, a large engraved certificate of affiliation issued by a national union to a local union or council, to the San Francisco longshoremen. The San Francisco local was designated as Local 38-79 of the ILA.¹¹

Leadership of the longshore local had to be established. With the new local's elections on the horizon, Bridges' Committee of 500 and Holman's faction began jockeying for power. In November, the ILA held its first election; Holman captured the

¹⁰ Schwartz, *Harry Bridges*, 8; Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*, 119.

¹¹ Larowe, *Harry Bridges*, 15.

union presidency. However, he did not have a mandate. The Committee of 500 was represented with the election of two out of three business agents. Moreover, a majority of the executive board were members of the Committee of 500. As an elected member of the ILA executive board, Bridges immediately began to influence ILA strategy by advocating a program that emphasized unity among the West Coast ILA locals. He had studied the past histories of the 1916 and 1919 longshoremen's strikes and realized that a strike at only one port would merely require the employers to direct their business to nearby ports. Despite initial resistance to inter-port solidarity, Bridges' strategy eventually took hold within the ILA.¹²

A convention of 14,000 Pacific Coast longshoremen was held in San Francisco in February 1934. They quickly reached a consensus. Demands, including an ILA-controlled union hall in every port, and an increase to a dollar an hour in wages, were presented to the shipowners by a delegation of roughly twenty longshoremen. The shipowners, led by the "Big Three" employers, Matson, American-Hawaiian, and Dollar, that controlled the bulk of the shipping trade in the Bay Area, responded by voluntarily raising wages from seventy-five cents to eighty-five cents an hour. But this gesture failed to address the employers' hiring practices and the issue of a coastwide agreement, two of the main grievances of the stevedores. When news of the employers' stance reached the

¹² Schwartz, *Harry Bridges*, 9-10.

convention, an overwhelming majority of the delegates agreed to strike in every port if an agreement was not reached by March 23, 1934.¹³

It did not take long for the first rupture in ILA solidarity to appear. Despite the overwhelming sentiment in favor of a strike, Holman urged Ryan to intervene on the “side of the conservative element of the ILA here... there is every indication that this majority will leave the ILA and start an independent longshoremen’s union able to settle its differences with the employers.” In response, to Holman’s divisive actions, the union’s membership suspended him from the presidency for one year. An angered Holman then left the longshore union, only to announce during the middle of the 1934 maritime strike that he had formed an independent union of men who wanted to “get back to work.”¹⁴ The apparent ease with which the membership suspended its president was an ominous sign for conservative unionists. As we shall see, maritime workers would continue to show little hesitation in repudiating their leadership over the next several years.

The original strike date of 23 March was postponed due to a plea from the Roosevelt White House urging an attempt to resolve the strike through a federal mediation board led by the sixty-four-year-old Assistant Secretary of Labor, Edward Francis McGrady. When the mediation hearings were completed on 3 April, ILA Pacific

¹³ Quin, *The Big Strike*, 41, 42.

¹⁴ Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*, 125.

Coast District President Bill Lewis, appointed head of the negotiating team, accepted the employers' proposal without consulting Bridges and the rank-and-file.¹⁵

At this junction, Bridges would emerge as *de facto* leader of the dockworkers; he would continue lead the dockworkers in both unofficially and officially for several decades. Under Bridges' unauthorized leadership, the dockworkers' membership refused to accept the Lewis-employers agreement. Negotiations continued fruitlessly for weeks. In late April, the rank-and-file set a strike deadline of 9 May. The workers' patience had been exhausted, and they were convinced that stalling would only provide the employers with more time to prepare for the inevitable strike. In response to the pugnacious stance of rank-and-file longshoremen in the midst of the Great Depression, employers adopted a confrontational attitude. Thomas G. Plant, president of the Waterfront Employers' Union and a corporate vice president of American-Hawaiian asserted, "Thousands of men now unemployed will be glad to get their jobs."¹⁶

The Waterfront Strike of 1934

With neither side willing to blink, the longshoremen manned the picket lines on 9 May. The men quickly found allies as the strike unfolded up and down the Pacific Coast. Within days the membership of the Teamsters' Union voted overwhelmingly to boycott the waterfront despite pleas to the contrary from Casey and other Teamster officials. The following day, the Oakland Teamsters followed suit, followed by the Seattle Teamsters.

¹⁵ Quin, *The Big Strike*, 43.

¹⁶ Kimeldorf, *Reds or Rackets*, 60, 61.

Consequently, there was only one link of transportation left between the San Francisco docks and the warehouses, that of the Belt Line Railroad, a state-owned line whose employees were bound by a “yellow dog” contract.¹⁷

On 11 May the SUP entered the fracas, not in sympathy with the ILA, but rather, with a separate list of demands. The decision of the seamen’s union to enter the scuffle is worthy of examination. Given the fact that union’s parent organization, the ISU, offered lukewarm support for the SUP action, many labor historians have claimed that conservative ISU officials were pressured by radical elements, namely former MWIU and to a lesser degree, former MTW members within the SUP rank-and-file, to enter the fray. It is impossible to ascertain the degree in which the radical elements influenced the SUP decision to strike. ISU officials would never admit being pressured by outside elements into allowing their membership to strike. According to SUP historians Stephen Schwartz and Otilie Markholt, the theory that MWIU pressure forced the ISU to authorize a strike seems to rest largely with employer propaganda that blamed the sailors’ participation on “professional agitators” and MWIU claims that it forced a reluctant SUP leadership to strike.¹⁸

However, it is untenable to maintain that the ISU leadership, in the face of years of passivity, would suddenly authorize a strike had there not been outside influences such as the MWIU, the *Waterfront Worker*, and most importantly, the leadership of Harry

¹⁷ Quin, *The Big Strike*, 48, 49.

¹⁸ Schwartz, *Brotherhood of the Sea*, 91; Markholt, *Maritime Solidarity*, 93.

Bridges. The *Waterfront Worker*, although tilted towards longshoremen, might have been a significant factor in leading the SUP rank and file into the dispute. Under Bridges' editorship, the organ served as a vehicle to organize and unify members of all crafts and in all ports. The paper's 26 February 1934 editorial, pushing for a united front between crafts, declared, "In the past, seamen have been used to break strikes of the longshoremen, and the longshoremen have been used for the same purposes in seamen's strikes."¹⁹

In addition, the rank and file distribution system of Bridges' *Waterfront Worker*, instrumental in developing the longshoremen solidarity, insured that various seamen gained access to the organ's call to action. Years later the longshore leader recalled the distribution system:

The *Waterfront Worker* was clumsy and amateurish, but it had an important role in organizing the waterfront. And it played an important role in organizing.... The guys that were in cahoots with us would watch for the papers.... See, the *Waterfront Worker* was loaded aboard vessels. You'd put bundles aboard the ships. We'd just leave them in the hull. There'd be a bundle for the guys in other ports to read. There was a handful of guys in the other ports that knew the score.... Then they would distribute them (sic).²⁰

Even though Bridges' editorship of the *Waterfront Worker* proved invaluable in rallying maritime workers to action after years of repression and submissiveness, his greatest asset may have been his theatrics, an uncanny ability to deliver blistering analyses of agreements, and attacks on conservative leaders. Bridges' persona cannot be

¹⁹ *Waterfront Worker*, 26 February 1934, 2.

²⁰ Schwartz, *Harry Bridges*, 8.

overlooked in examining the radical transformation among San Francisco longshoremen and to some degree, the entire union movement in the city. In a matter of only a few months, Bridges' mastery of the rank-and-file longshoremen became unquestionable as the longshoremen repudiated in quick succession the "Blue Book," Holman, and finally, the Lewis agreement.

Bridges' *de facto* leadership of the workers did not go unchallenged after the rejection of the Lewis agreement. On 24 May, as the maritime strike was approaching its third week, ILA president Ryan, arrived in San Francisco from New York. The longshore president bargained with the Waterfront Employers' Association on the pretence of arguing on behalf of the ILA. Four days later, on Memorial Day, an "agreement" was announced. Although the employers agreed to establish hiring halls in every port, the hiring halls were to be employer-controlled. Ryan, seemingly oblivious to or uninterested in the opinions of the rank-and-file, proclaimed the strike over. Bridges, however, had other ideas. He responded by leading a closed meeting of rank-and-file longshoremen in which Ryan's agreement was rejected. A short time later, the seamen and longshoremen conducted a mass picket line, the first episode of widespread violence in the 1934 strike swept the San Francisco waterfront as the police decided to enforce the largely ignored anti-picketing ordinance that was passed in 1916.²¹

Ryan, still apparently incognizant of the rank and file's commitment to control the strike, continued to try and hammer out a settlement through mid-June. He emerged once more with another agreement commonly known both as the June Sixteenth agreement

²¹ *Ibid*, 12; Quin, *The Big Strike*, 61.

and the Ryan-Plant agreement. In contrast to the proposed settlement of May, terms for the longshoremen in the Ryan-Plant accord were considerably more attractive for the longshoremen. On the other hand, the employers refused to address the grievances of the seamen. By this time, it was too late for the employers to offer merely an attractive settlement aimed solely one craft, for the seamen and longshoremen had agreed not to return to work unless all grievances were addressed. Seamen of all ideologies pleaded with their longshore brethren to reject the Ryan-Plant agreement. Selim Silver of the SUP, a prominent representative of the seamen's union's conservative wing stated to the *Chronicle*, "We agreed verbally not to return to work until the demands of all unions have been met. We expect the longshoremen to keep their end of the bargain."²²

The seamen's call for unity did not go unheeded. The following day, the ILA held a meeting at the Golden Eagles Hall on Golden Gate Avenue in which militant San Francisco longshoremen shouted down a proposal for a secret ballot before rejecting the proposal unanimously. In other ports, more conventional procedures were enacted, but nevertheless, the Ryan-Plant treaty went down in defeat. Despite employer efforts to portray such a rejection as radical, even Mike Casey, the Teamsters' rock-ribbed conservative, seemed to agree with the rank-and-file, stating, "Ryan had no power to sign any agreement, but merely assumed that power. We will make no move until the situation

²² Markholt, *Maritime Solidarity*, 116-122.

clarifies.... But sending teamsters to the waterfront today would only result in confusion and possibly worse.”²³

Agitated and puzzled, San Francisco Mayor Angelo Rossi called Washington for help. Edward McGrady, assistant secretary of labor in the US Department of Labor was sent to arbitrate the dispute. Joining him on the arbitration board was Archbishop Edward Hanna along with Oscar K. Cushing, a Bay Area lawyer. According to McGrady, the main stumbling block was the daunting challenge of hammering out simultaneous agreements with the seamen and the longshoremen. Ryan left San Francisco for New York in frustration. However, Ryan’s departure coincided with the arrival of the eighty-year-old Furuseth, who had flown into the city from New York to attend the arbitration proceedings. In a shocking development, the generally accommodating Furuseth, citing complete seamen opposition to an employer-controlled hiring hall, led a walkout of the unions from a session with the board on 29 June.²⁴

Arbitration was unable to break the stalemate. As a result, the frustrated employers announced they would open the port on 3 July despite the likelihood of violence. On July 3, San Francisco Police Chief Quinn issued a general warning to the public:

STAY AWAY from the waterfront unless you have business there!
This appeal was made to San Franciscans yesterday by Police Chief Quinn. He said: ‘the police Department will have its hands full on Tuesday preventing violence on the waterfront. We do not want innocent bystanders hurt.’

²³ Selvin, *A Terrible Anger*, 126.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 138-140.

‘Public spirited citizens should do their part and aid the police, not only by staying away from the troubled area, but by observing the peace rigidly in other sections of the city.’

‘Stay away from the waterfront.’²⁵

Predictably, Quinn’s warning merely drew an array of the strikers’ sympathizers as well as curious onlookers, and widespread violence broke out as strikebreakers attempted to reopen the port. After the strikers attempted to block the trucks rolling off Pier 38, the police, equipped with gas masks, released tear gas canisters into the surging crowd of pickets, sending the men scurrying. The strikers then regrouped. The fighting lasted roughly four hours. The count of the injured remains murky. Several strikers sought private medical treatment rather than face arrest. Reportedly, one man was found dead some distance from the scene.²⁶

San Franciscans were given a reprieve from the violence over the Independence Day holiday. The following day, Thursday 5 July 1934, however, has been dubbed “Bloody Thursday” as two unionists, Howard S Sperry and Nicholas Bordoise, were killed in the day’s violence.²⁷ At the end of the day, Governor Frank Merriam ordered the National Guard to the waterfront. An elaborate show of force, including 1,700 soldiers, mounted machine guns, and patrol boats were employed to decrease the likelihood of additional bloodshed. National Guard Captain Bedford Boyes was quoted

²⁵ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 3 July 1934, Sec. 1, 1.

²⁶ Selvin, *A Terrible Anger*, 146.

²⁷ Quin, *The Big Strike*, 116.

as saying “ We regret the necessity of killing anybody. But if it becomes necessary, we will use the equipment.”²⁸

Due to the imposition of martial law, picketing was no longer a viable option for the rank-and-file. The steel doors on the docks were flung open. Trucks could roll to and fro with impunity. Consequently, the unions’ strategy shifted towards a final option, that of a general strike. Although the idea of a general strike, a sympathetic strike of all workers in the geographic area in support of the demands of a group of workers already on strike, had been periodically bandied about in union circles, the deaths of union men and the presence of the National Guard pushed the tactic to the forefront. The striking maritime unions had been understandably hesitant to appeal to labor as a body to assist them in a sympathy strike. After all, a defeat would undoubtedly carry grave long-term consequences for the city’s labor movement as a whole. However, at this stage, with the maritime unionists facing near certain destruction, the city’s labor movement as a whole had little choice.

The General Strike

Thus, the maritime workers’ call to their fellow unionists did not go unheeded. On 8 July the Teamsters’ San Francisco and Oakland locals voted heavily in favor of striking on 12 July if the strike was not settled. The Teamsters had refrained from handling waterfront cargo, a gesture that crippled the shipowners; a sympathy strike

²⁸ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 6 July 1934, Sec. 1, p. 1; sec. Extra. p. C.

would effectively sever the transport of all goods into the Bay Area.²⁹ The affirmative vote of the Teamsters on 8 July was obviously vital to the general strike strategy but it was not until the following day that the maritime workers were all but guaranteed support from numerous other unions as labor buried its two martyrs in an elaborate funeral procession of 15,000 down Market Street.

There have been several written accounts of the funeral procession down Market Street, and regardless of political persuasion, the demonstration did not fail to impress witnesses. Although public sympathy is difficult to gage, there can be little doubt that the funeral procession served to sway opinions and perceptions in the Bay Area. Even the city's *San Francisco Chronicle* departed from its staunch anti-union rhetoric:

In life they wouldn't have commanded a second glance on the streets of San Francisco, but in death they borne the length of Market Street in a stupendous and reverent procession that astounded the city....

While the entire city gasped in amazement yesterday, these two men who were killed in the bloody riots of last Thursday on the waterfront were given the most amazing funeral the city has ever seen....

Not only striking maritime workers' unions but union sympathizers from all trades, crafts and industries were among the silent marchers....

And any who had doubted the solid sympathy of the labor movement with the striking unions were shamed by that demonstration.³⁰

The funeral procession galvanized the momentum towards a general strike, virtually pushing the San Francisco Labor Council, a voluntary association of local unions for mutual protection and advancement and a traditional domain of conservative

²⁹ Larowe, *Harry Bridges*, 73.

³⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 10 July 1934, Sec.1, 1.

trade unionists, into calling for a vote on the general strike. Due to the anti-union basis of the mainstream press, as well genuine fears that the city would run out of perishable foodstuffs and eventually canned goods, the unions were forced to contend with charges of revolution and overthrowing the government. The central issue of union-controlled hiring halls seemingly became lost. The employers, failing to sense that the unions had little choice, truly feared that the general strike was a precursor to a much broader social revolution. According to Paul St. Sure, an attorney who represented Oakland business interests that maintained close ties to the business community of San Francisco, "We were...convinced ...that there was a revolution in progress, something that was going far beyond the strike situation.... This they... felt... might be an actual class struggle."³¹

Reluctance on the part of the San Francisco Labor Council to support such a move was understandable. Plainly, a mass sympathy strike by a wide assortment of laborers with nothing to gain and much to lose was a difficult proposition. The organizational problems in conducting a general strike were infinitely complex. There needed to be provisions made to allow for essential commerce. In addition, there needed to be open communication and cooperation among members of a General Strike Committee. On the other hand, if labor stood still, the power of the employers would grow.

Despite the fears of a seemingly radical general strike, the sudden inclusion of traditional AFL labor officialdom veered the entire ordeal into a decidedly conservative

³¹ Corinne L. Gilb, *St. Sure, Oral History*, 73.

direction as they seized control of General Strike Committee tempering the power of Bridges and other militants.³² Consequently, the general strike in San Francisco, beginning on 16 July 1934, fell apart after only four days. In essence, the conservative leadership of the General Strike Committee forced the seamen and the longshoremen to accept an offer of federal arbitration. The ILA voted to return to work, pending arbitration. In San Francisco, the vote was three to one in favor of accepting arbitration, despite the longshoremen's former stance that the hiring hall issue could not be arbitrated.³³

The ILA decision to accept arbitration was unilateral, effective regardless of the wishes of the seamen. At a subsequent SUP meeting, Furuseth seized the occasion to disengage his SUP from its alliance with the ILA. Appealing to old craft rivalries, he proceeded to fire up the sailors' pride and imagination with a rambling speech in which he occasionally quoted Scriptures, while urging the men to restore the integrity and strength of the SUP and its parent organization, the ISU. The seamen, he noted, had struck not in sympathy with the ILA, but had struck independently with their own

³² Larowe, *Harry Bridges*, 78,79.

³³ Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*, 151.

demands. The longshoremen's decision to "crawl back" to work did not require the seamen to follow the ILA lead. In concluding he proposed a mass demonstration of sailor power, a "fink book" bonfire. The "fink books" were the hated registration cards of the employer-controlled sailors' hiring hall. Even if the seamen ceremoniously burned their books amid much ballyhoo at the corner of Clay and the Embarcadero, the SUP quickly followed the ILA lead and accepted arbitration, bringing the maritime strike to a conclusion.³⁴

The Strike's Aftermath

Furuseth's claim that the SUP had conducted a separate and distinct strike from the ILA seems to have been embraced by the mediation board as the settlements were announced months apart. The first decision, proclaimed on 12 October 1934, was specifically tailored to the ILA. The longshore union was granted a six-hour workday and ninety-five cents an hour, time and a half for overtime. An apparent compromise settled the central issue of the hiring hall. The hiring hall was established in the ILA headquarters, with a union dispatcher as well as an employer representative. In reality, the employers subsidized an employee-run the hiring hall.³⁵

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 153.

³⁵ Quin, *The Big Strike*, 198.

As could be expected, the employers were dissatisfied with the jointly controlled hiring hall. Union control effectively prevented employers from securing relief gangs for gangs that had worked for six hours, thereby forcing the employers to bear considerably higher overtime cost. Paul Eliel, frequently quoted director of the Industrial Association, noted a sudden rise in labor costs caused by a combination of the six-hour workday and union control of the hiring, "The effect of these two factors is shown by the average earnings of longshoremen ...prevailing before the 1934 strike and shortly thereafter. The 120 hours per man would produce theoretically \$114... for each four-week period.... In San Francisco, the average earnings for the period...preceding the strike were \$182."³⁶

Months dragged on before the seamen's decision was released. While the SUP was still awaiting formal recognition from the employers, the MWIU mounted a challenge attempting to win recognition as the seamen's official representative on the West Coast. To make matters more difficult, employers, attempting to gain recognition for a company-sponsored union, were slow to discharge their strikebreakers, leading to several violent clashes aboard steamers and at least one murder.³⁷ Finally, when the SUP decision was announced on 10 April 1935, it provided few gains for the seamen. In contrast to the ILA settlement, the seamen's union did not win the eight-hour day, let alone a six-hour day. Wages represented another discrepancy, with sailors' wages as low as forty-five dollars a month. Although a SUP hiring hall was established, shipowners

³⁶ Eliel, "Labor Problems in Our Steamship Business," *Yale Review*, vol. 26 (1937): 522, 523.

³⁷ Markholt, *Maritime Solidarity*, 215, 216.

were permitted to hire off the pier. There was one critical similarity. In both instances, the award would be renewed automatically on 30 September, unless a forty-day notice was given by either party of its desire to terminate or modify the agreement.³⁸

If the arbitrators assumed an unfavorable settlement would discourage SUP militancy, and divide the maritime laborers, they were wrong. Despite the conservative SUP leadership exemplified by Furuseth and the mobile nature of seamen's work that made the coordination of organizational activities difficult, militant seamen refused to abide by the arbitrators' decision. An insurgent group of SUP militants demanded that hiring be conducted through the union. Rather than push the issue, the shipowners individually began to cooperate with the rebellious seamen. Eliel noted:

Action of the seagoing unions closely paralleled that of the longshoremen. In the case of the sailors, an arbitration board had definitely refused to accede to a request from the union that all hiring should be done from the union hall. The award contained a provision that sailors could be hired either at the union hall or at the deck. Disciplinary action by the union shortly eliminated all hiring from the decks, and the dispatching of men from the union hall became capricious and arbitrary, with employers having to take incompetents, malcontents...or be left crewless.³⁹

As we shall see, the seamen responded to the employer-friendly settlement in an extremely militant manner, engaging in a several short unauthorized work stoppages.

³⁸ Quin, *The Big Strike*, 197, 198.

³⁹ Eliel, "Labor Problems in Our Steamship Business," *Yale Review* 26 (1937): 522, 523.

Although longshoremen received a favorable resolution, they responded to the sailors' plight by engaging in similar work stoppages in a display of solidarity. In addition, the ILA sought further organization, incorporating the workers of warehouse after warehouse into an auxiliary unit of the ILA. Originating in the waterfront warehouses in 1933, the ILA warehouse campaign spread inland; hence the organization of warehousemen became known by unionists and employers alike as the "March Inland." In the aftermath of the 1934 strike, Bridges and the longshore militants began to campaign for the establishment of a maritime federation run by the rank and file that would include not only maritime workers and warehousemen, but also a broad spectrum of transportation related craft unions.⁴⁰

While problems between management and labor were plentiful and the gains of the seamen were limited largely to recognition, the unprecedented solidarity and mutual trust displayed by the workers gave the maritime workers a new sense of their power. The needs of the two crafts diverged, providing for a less than ideal ending to a long struggle, yet it is clear that the seamen and the longshoremen learned the value of solidarity. Given that the terms of the contract were only valid for a year, the seamen and longshoremen wasted no time in attempting to reassert the solidarity that proved so vital in 1934. In doing so, the workers sought the inclusion of a third large and powerful

⁴⁰ Harvey Schwartz, *The March Inland: Origins of the ILWU Warehouse Division, 1934-1938* (Los Angeles: University of California at Los Angeles, Institute of Industrial Relations 1979; reprint 2000), 106; all subsequent citations are to this edition.

transportation union, the Teamsters' Union, at the first convention of the Maritime Federation of the Pacific Coast (MFPC) in April 1935 in Seattle.

The Labor Movement Elsewhere in America

The year 1934 was marked by two other major strikes that occurred concurrently with the West Coast maritime strike, the Minneapolis Teamsters' strike and the Toledo electric auto light workers' strike. As in San Francisco, violence, the deaths of unionists, and the use of National Guard troops and left-leaning union leaders marked the labor disputes in Minneapolis and Toledo.⁴¹ Although few could have realized it at the time, both strikes would eventually affect the West Coast maritime labor movement.

Leading the striking Minneapolis Teamsters Local 574 was a small band of Trotskyites who had been expelled from the CP for opposing Stalinism. As in San Francisco, the strike leaders emerged from the rank and file. These leaders mirrored strategies used in San Francisco by relying heavily on public opinion to attain victory. Central to this tactic was the martyrdom of strikers killed by authorities on 20 July, "Bloody Friday." Among the leading Trotskyite agitators was Barney Mayes who would become a controversial figure in the West Coast maritime labor movement.⁴²

The Toledo strikers were also dependent upon public sympathy. Their call to the public did not go unheeded, and the arrival of 10,000 sympathetic pickets proved to be a turning point in their victorious struggle. Moreover, the Toledo strike was arguably the birthplace of the United Auto Workers (UAW), a union that would become central in the

⁴¹ Schwartz, *Brotherhood of the Sea*, 93.

⁴² *Ibid.*

future conflict between the AFL and CIO. True enough, the UAW was formally declared one year later in Detroit, but the Toledo strike clearly demonstrated that the majority of autoworkers wanted to form unions and fight collectively.⁴³

The AFL held its annual convention in San Francisco in the aftermath of the three big strikes of 1934. United Mine Workers' (UMW) president John L. Lewis and his supporters entered the October convention determined to extract a level of commitment from the AFL towards industrial unionism. Twelve resolutions favoring industrial unionism were introduced on the floor. It appeared that the San Francisco convention would be a contentious affair, but the delegates compromised and temporarily maintained a semblance of peace within the labor movement as proponents of craft and industrial unionism managed to hash out their differences. Surprisingly, the convention's resolution committee was able to agree on a single report stating that the AFL should formulate a policy in which the jurisdictional rights of the craft unions would be "fully protected" while allowing for the new unions in mass-production industries to be issued charters.⁴⁴ Labor's civil war between advocates of exclusive craft unionism and inclusive industrial unionism had been averted for the time being.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Craig Phelan, *William Green: Biography of a Labor Leader*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 122.

III

The Birth of the MFPC

In many ways, the differences that would emerge within the MFPC reflected the jurisdictional conflicts and philosophical differences that would characterize the national labor movement. The Maritime Federation favored industrial unionism akin to the philosophy favored by Lewis and the yet to be founded CIO, but the MFPC did not favor a break with the conservative unionists of the AFL. On the contrary, the Maritime Federation attempted to woo the Teamsters Unions, led by the conservative Casey, into the MFPC fold. However, as the Maritime Federation continued to gain momentum, as evidenced by the longshoremen's "March Inland" campaign that successfully incorporated inland warehouse workers into their longshore union, Casey increasingly viewed the success of the MFPC as a threat to the economic security of his teamsters.

During his reign of almost forty years as the teamsters' president, Casey never attempted to organize the warehousemen; he viewed the incorporation of these traditionally lowly paid workers as a potential economic burden. In other words, Casey did not believe he could bargain on behalf of for the warehouse workers without bearing economic losses for his teamsters. By contrast, Bridges and the militant longshoremen viewed unionization of all crafts related to the maritime transportation industry as a necessary step towards lasting success. The success of the ILA in organizing the warehouse industry eventually led the Teamsters to claim jurisdiction over the

warehousemen. As a San Pedro ILA bulletin from 1937 attests, the longshore union preferred to avoid a jurisdictional conflict and, true to the philosophy of industrial unionism, leaned towards the inclusion of warehousemen and Teamsters in a grand federation of transportation workers:

In the 1934 strike, after the docks were tied up by the cooperation of the rank and file Teamsters with the longshoremen and other seafaring groups, we found a weak link in our chain... After the 1934 strike was settled, we began spending time and money organizing the inland warehouses... In organizing the Inland Warehousemen, we are fully aware of the fact the longshoremen would go to a numerical strength of 100,000 to 200,000.... The longshoremen have no fear of being submerged and losing their identity, we are interested in better clothes, better food, better housing, more leisure time that only such an organization can get for us. In fact we would have no objection in including 100,000 to 200,000 Teamsters, then we would really be assured more of the good things in life.¹

Despite the conservative leadership of Casey, the Teamsters' rank-and-file showed a consistent willingness to assist the maritime workers in 1934. Their decision to boycott waterfront cargo in May, along with the distinction of being the first union to support overwhelmingly the general strike in July, made the ILA militants optimistic about incorporating the Teamsters' Union within the proposed maritime federation. With the Teamsters' election scheduled in December 1934, the 28 August 1934 *Waterfront Worker* issued "An Open Letter to All Teamsters from the *Waterfront Worker*," suggesting that the incorporation of teamsters into a federation of all maritime unions would require the rank and file to reject their conservative leaders:

¹ MFPC Records, Box 32, ILWU local 21, file (no. 13), ILA bulletin dated 26 August 1937, Labor Archives and Research Center, 480 Winston Drive, San Francisco State University, San Francisco, California.

Set up on the Coast a Maritime Federation, which will include all teamsters in all ports. When one strikes, we all strike. Not a federation of union officials, but a federation of men of men who are working on the job. A Federation Rank and File controlled (sic).

The first step in that direction is the rank and file control of the teamster union. Brothers.... Take control, kick out Casey and the rest of the Fakers, elect leaders from the floor who will do what the membership tells them to do (sic).²

For the next several months the *Waterfront Worker* continued its campaign to include the teamsters in the proposed federation of transportation workers. However, in December 1934 the *Waterfront Worker's* campaign to include teamsters was given a severe setback as the teamster rank-and-file reelected Casey. With the founding convention of a proposed maritime federation scheduled for April 1935 in Seattle, the ILA militants refused to give up, asserting in the front page of the 4 February 1935

Waterfront Worker:

At last the framework of a marine federation has been formed.... 'Czar' Casey of the Teamsters has been unable to stop all discussions of the Federation in the (Teamsters' Union's) meetings but this can be overcome by employing the same methods that were used during the (1934) strike and that is for every longshoremen, (sic) every marine worker must talk Federation to every teamster he sees... only by appealing to each Teamster can enough Rank and File sentiment be aroused to crush any opposition that Faker Casey and his pack of rats may try to build against it.³

The Teamsters' Union never did join the MFPC; the optimistic hope of luring them into the fold may have steered the Maritime Federation towards a more

² *Waterfront Worker*, 28 August 1934, 8; reprinted in Schwartz, *The March Inland*, 108.

³ *Ibid*, 4 February 1935, 1; reprinted in Schwartz, *The March Inland*, 110.

conservative constitution. A subtle, yet vitally important difference between the MFPC vision of unity and the definite partnership between crafts advocated earlier by the MWIU emerged. The constitution conceptualized a federation that would embark on joint strikes, but joint strikes that did not necessarily embrace intra-craft unity. Accordingly, the Maritime Federation allotted a great deal of autonomy to individual unions while simultaneously inserting constitutional provisions to insure unity during strikes. The MFPC was not an industrial union in the strictest sense. On the other hand, if all of its unions acted together, the results would be the same as if an industrial union existed, since a complete tie-up could be made effective.⁴

In addition to the SUP, the seafaring unions of the MFPC consisted of the Masters, Mates, and Pilots, the Marine Cooks and Stewards, the Marine Engineers Beneficial Association, the American Radio Telegraphists Association, and the Marine Firemen, Oilers, Watertenders, and Wipers Association. The smaller seafaring craft unions received equal representation within the MFPC, and each affiliate was given complete autonomy on the right to strike. Even if separate ballots for each union would hinder the ability of the MFPC to convey speedily their positions and give the Federation a confused and divided appearance, the decision of the individual unions to conduct separate ballots in each union supposedly would prevent disputes between the individual

⁴ Markholt, *Maritime Solidarity*, 229-231.

unions and their internationals as to which body was in control, the parent AFL International, or the MFPC.⁵

As a result of the makeup of its constitution, the MFPC was never officially in charge, either in name or in official action. In addition, the Maritime Federation's constitution did not grant the MFPC the power to settle disputes between individual member unions, unless both conflicting unions agreed to voluntarily refer the matter to Maritime Federation authority. Even though the individual unions were given a great deal of autonomy, the constitution of the MFPC contained an important provision to insure unity during labor disputes as Article 9 sec. 2 stated, "A serious dispute or strike involving the whole membership of the federation shall be finally ended only by a majority vote of the full federation membership."⁶

Lundeberg Assumes Power

In a move that would have far reaching consequences in the future, Bridges and his faction threw their support towards the *de facto* leader of the Seattle sailors, business agent Olaf Harold "Harry" Lundeberg, for the position of MFPC President. Although Bridges' support ensured that Lundeberg would defeat two conservative candidates, and capture the presidency, he would eventually emerge as one of Bridges' primary adversaries, and with the possible exception of Bridges, the most influential member of the Maritime Federation.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ MFPC Records, Box 1, First Convention, Resolutions and Reports file, (no. 8).

Born in Oslo in 1901, Lundeberg was a product of a devoted socialist and feminist mother and an ardent syndicalist father. Although two of his brothers had perished at sea, he shipped out at the age of fourteen. Prior to his 1923 arrival in Seattle, Lundeberg had sailed under the flags of a half-dozen nationalities, joined a Latin American syndicalist union, and became a member of the Australian Seaman's Union. Though Lundeberg often expressed admiration for the IWW, he opted to join the SUP rather than the MTW affiliate of the IWW upon his initial arrival in Seattle during the early 1920s. Departing Seattle once again for Australia, Lundeberg would eventually resettle in Seattle in 1927 and become a naturalized US citizen in 1933.⁷

At the time of the Maritime Federation's founding Lundeberg's selection as MFPC president seemed to make sense. Philosophically, Lundeberg maintained a healthy disregard for AFL bureaucracy, yet his lack of CP affiliation eased the fears of the conservatives. In addition, the selection of a sailor appeared to be a gesture to the seamen who were understandably disgruntled with the outcome of the 1934 strike. However, as Lundeberg's career as a union leader progressed, he became widely associated with fanatical opposition to Bridges and communism. When he died of a heart attack the *Chronicle* said of him: "One of his earlier companions was Harry Bridges, with whom Lundeberg worked with in the Maritime Federation of the Pacific

⁷ Larowe, *Harry Bridges*, 115; Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*, 171.

until the two had a falling out. That set the key for the next twenty years-anticommunism.”⁸

The Bridges-Lundeberg Schism Debate

Lundeberg’s relationship with Bridges as well as his anticommunist fervor continues to be a subject of debate amongst waterfront historians. For example, Bridges’ biographer, Charles Larrowe and SUP historian Stephen Schwarz offer two startling different analyses of Lundeberg’s political beliefs. Larrowe contends that doctrinal differences were used by Lundeberg to mask his jealousy of Bridges:

When the longshoremen chose Bridges... he became, *de facto*, the spokesman for all maritime workers on the Coast for a dozen or so unions... only one had produced a leader to rival him. It was Harry Lundeberg... Bridges tapped him for the presidency of the Maritime Federation.... Ultimately, Lundeberg became a sworn enemy of Bridges, a collaborator in efforts to deport him.

What went wrong? The poison in the relationship was Lundeberg’s resentment over having to play second fiddle to Bridges. Lundeberg, a six-foot, two-inch muscular two hundred pounder was an ambitious, effective labor leader of the old two-fisted-we’ll-settle-this-out-in-the-alley type, but he was no match for Bridges either as a strategists or on a public platform, and it rankled him.⁹

Schwartz in his blatantly anti-Bridges account, “*Brotherhood of the Sea*,” claims demise of the Lundeberg-Bridges relationship can be traced to Lundeberg’s anti-communist Norwegian roots:

They could be seen as representatives, on the West Coast, of two major exemplars of world socialism: The Australian and Norwegian Labor parties, both of which drew their inspiration from the IWW and both of which served as political extensions of powerful labor movements. But the Norwegian Labor

⁸ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 29 January 1957, Sec. 1, 6.

⁹ Larrowe, *Harry Bridges*, 109.

Party, and Harry Lundeberg, had a characteristic that set them at odds with Bridges and the Australians. The latter had always been pro-Soviet: The Norwegians...encounter with Bolshevism made them extremely anti-Communist, although they remained extremely radical in their Socialism. Because of this “cultural” difference, Harry Lundeberg was the only labor leader on the West Coast more sophisticated than Harry Bridges, though few perceived it at the time.¹⁰

Schwartz and Larrowe perceive the Lundberg-Bridges relationship in radically different ways. Whereas the former argues Lundeberg managed to conceal his staunch anti-communism prior to his rise to prominence, the latter implies that Lundeberg’s anticommunism evolved as an effective tactic to combat his Australian rival’s alliance with the CP. Yet, both historians agree that Lundeberg’s anticommunism became progressively more pronounced throughout his career as a labor leader. As a result, it is difficult to ascertain the degree to which Lundeberg was truly motivated by theory as opposed to age-old craft jealousies and/or mere resentment over Bridges’ lofty status within militant circles.

It should be noted that Lundeberg appears initially to have maintained a friendly relationship with Bridges and the CP. In June 1935, during the early days of the Lundeberg reign, while Bridges was hospitalized with an ulcer condition in the aftermath of the MFPC convention, the *Chronicle*, described the visiting Lundeberg as “a Bridges lieutenant.” Given the disdain with which seamen customarily viewed longshoremen, it

¹⁰ Stephen Schwartz, *From West to East; California and the Making of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster Inc. , 1998), 264, 265.

is realistic to conclude that Lundberg did not relish the thought of serving as a “lieutenant” to any longshoreman.¹¹

Providing us an insider’s view, Henry Schmidt confirms that the Lundberg-Bridges relationship appeared to be harmonious in the beginning, before Lundberg suddenly embraced the anticommunist agenda. In fact, when Bridges was hospitalized, the Lundeberg visited longshore leader:

Somehow or another friction developed between the two Harrys. I can’t for the life of me remember what started it off. Perhaps they were both vying for position. ‘Who’s going to be the big wheel around here?’ Lundeberg did the, then, popular thing. He started to scream ‘communism.’ That didn’t help the cleavage.... I remember... Bridges wound up in the hospital. He had a very serious stomach operation. I went to see him in the hospital and Lundeberg... came in after I visited Harry for a while.¹²

In tracing the development of Lundeberg’s fanatical anti-communism, it is important to examine his inner-circle. This clique consisted in part of a small band of Trotskyites, including the future temporary editor of the *Voice*, Barney Mayes who arrived in the Bay Area shortly after the Minneapolis Teamsters’ strike. Given that his anticommunist and anti-Bridges attacks increased noticeably as he became closer to Mayes, some opponents of Lundeberg contend that he simply fell under the spell of the Trotskyites. For instance, the *Pilot*, an organ published by Lundeberg’s seafaring rivals

¹¹ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 5 June 1935, Sec. 1, 1; Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*, 198.

¹² Henry Schmidt, *Secondary Leadership in the ILWU*, interviewed by Stein 29 November 1974, 171.

on the East Coast noted: "The...followers of Trotsky, seeing Lundeberg's glaring egotism and conceit, proceeded to surround him with a group of their choice intellectuals.... Lundeberg...was very impressed with the Trotsky philosophy."¹³

Norma Perry

Others observers have claimed the crux of the Bridges-Lundeberg rift stemmed from the presence of a woman named Norma Perry. Perry served as a personal secretary successively to both of the labor leaders, and rumors swirled on the waterfront about her alleged romances with Bridges and Lundeberg. Some workers felt that it was Perry rather than doctrinal or political differences that sparked the adversarial relationship between the two Harrys. Henry Schmidt recalled his memories of Perry and her departure from the Bridges camp:

She was a typist. She worked without pay. She would help the publicity committee type up stuff, correct the rough language we used in our writings... Then by golly, she was retained as an employee.... In any event, the circumstances surrounded the situation were such that it was appropriate for Lundeberg to drop by my office. Norma Perry and Lundeberg got acquainted. The dope was that Norma Perry and Lundeberg were-- She was married to a guy.... He turned out to be a tool pigeon for the police as I recall (sic).¹⁴

According to Estolv Ward, formerly a reporter for the *Oakland Tribune*, Bridges discovered while Perry was employed as his secretary that she was, in actual fact, working as an informant for the shipowners. Ward also contends Perry became widely

¹³ *The Pilot*, (New York), Anne Rand Research Library, 1188 Franklin Street, San Francisco, 31 March 1939, 17.

¹⁴ Henry Schmidt, *Secondary Leadership in the ILWU*, interviewed by Stein 29 November 1974, 173, 174.

known among longshoremen as “the iron cunt of the waterfront.”¹⁵ The precise role that Perry played in widening the Bridges-Lundeberg schism will probably never be known, but her manipulative manner and powerful influence over Lundeberg appears to be one of the few items of general agreement between the Lundeberg and Bridges forces. Mayes used the same unflattering term as Ward to describe Perry throughout his autobiography, adding that he shared Bridges’ suspicions of the secretary’s tendency towards backstabbing, “If anyone was capable of playing the role of double agent, she (Perry) had all the natural talent and zeal.”¹⁶

Even though the cause of the rift between Bridges and Lundeberg is open to conjecture and differing interpretations, it is safe to say that the controversy over CP participation and aid did not surface to the forefront during the infancy of the MFPC. Elements seem to have gradually emerged within the Maritime Federation that openly opposed Bridges’ willingness to accept Party aid and their sentiments became increasingly vocal and divisive. In contrast, there seems to have never been a deep cleft within the San Francisco ILA rank and file over CP aid or participation. Given the fact Bridges’ leadership had proved capable of producing victory after over a decade of defeat and deteriorating working conditions, the longshoremen seemed willing to embrace, tolerate, or overlook Bridges’ CP ties.

¹⁵ Estov E. Ward, *The Gentle Dynamiter: A Biography of Tom Mooney* (Palo Alto: Ramparts Press, 1983), 236, 237.

¹⁶ Barnard Mayes, “Autobiography,” 651.

IV Testing the MFPC

Major questions faced the new MFPC: If the seamen had a grievance with the employers, what level of support could they expect from the longshoremen? Likewise, if striking longshoremen working in distant ports called on their West Coast brethren for support, what level of commitment from the SUP could the longshoremen expect? What candidate, if any would the Maritime Federation support in the 1936 election? What position would the MFPC adopt if any of its affiliates came under attack by AFL conservatives? Although the Maritime Federation was set up an umbrella to foster cooperation between West Coast maritime unions, the degree of cooperation was never explicitly specified. Its flexible constitution may have been designed lure land-based union such as the Teamsters' Union, yet the loose affiliation would inevitably led to innumerable problems. It did not take long for the Maritime Federation to face its first dilemma; a tanker strike had been called just prior to the Maritime Federation's founding convention in Seattle.

The Tanker Strike

Paul Scharrenberg, the notoriously conservative SUP secretary, had called the tanker strike in March 1935 against the powerful Standard Oil without the consultation of the rank-and-file. Given the slim chance of success in a strike against tankers, the

Waterfront Worker went on the offensive, contending that the tanker strike was merely a diversion intended by conservative ISU and SUP officials to stifle the momentum towards a seamen-longshoremen alliance:

In the first place the strike was instituted by such shipowners; tools as Paul Scharrenberg.... The most potent threat against the shipowner and his large profits is the proposed Maritime Federation.... The shipowners must use any measures to destroy the formation of a federation and the ISU as it now stands...without regard to the wishes of the membership, provided such a method of calling ...the tanker strike... Tell the seamen to fight the ISU officials in their efforts to discredit the forming of the proposed maritime federation and so kick out their misleaders and elect some real honest leaders that won't sell their souls every time the shipowners approach them with a few dollars (sic)¹

The SUP, faced with a strike many of its rank-and-file members did not want, was forced to concede defeat in the tanker strike. The ill-advised strike provided the militant faction of the seamen an excuse to purge their ranks of the traditional trade unionists Scharrenberg. In the aftermath of the tanker debacle, Lundeberg proceeded to orchestrate a 3 June SUP meeting to consider ousting Scharrenberg. He charged the veteran union leader with three counts with three counts of "non-union" activity. The first count alleged that Scharrenberg, who refused to attend the meeting, with calling the tanker strike illegally. Another count accused him of fostering a rival longshoremen's union with Lee Holman. Finally, he was charged with issuing a public statement supporting war with Japan to improve shipping employment. The third charge stemmed from Sharrenberg's comment in front of the seamen's arbitration board, "I wish we could have

¹ *Waterfront Worker*, 25 March 1935, 1.

a war with Japan because then the seamen would get everything they wanted, as in the World War we had everything we wanted.”²

Scharrenberg issues a longwinded statement in which he insisted that Bridges and Lundeberg instigated the expulsion affair. He concluded his defense by promising to appeal the SUP expulsion to the ISU:

The so-called charges against me...were framed by the henchmen of an alien communist, the notorious Mr. Bridges. The farcical trial, while took place during my absence, was personally conducted by Mr. Harry Lundeberg.... I tried my best to prevent a strike... the Insinuation that I want war with Japan are the fulmination of malicious and designing scandalmongers... The final charge on non-union conduct with respect to the so-called blue book union of the longshoremen in San Francisco fail... I shall appear to... expect to be fully vindicated... I shall continue to fight to finish the subversive and disruptive element that has recently come in the Sailors Union. A similar wrecking crew virtually destroyed the... Union in 1921 and history will repeat itself unless ... manipulations of these disrupters are checked.³

Although it appeared that the MFPC had survived the tanker strike unscathed, the International's leadership under Furuseth protested the SUP expulsion of Scharrenberg, and relations between the ISU and the SUP became extremely strained. In the eyes of the International's officials, Lundeberg, in league with Bridges, had orchestrated the Scharrenberg expulsion. On the other hand, relations within the MFPC between the seamen's union and the longshore union, and between their leaders, Bridges and Lundeberg, appeared on the surface to be unified and harmonious. However, it did not take long for the first crack in the solidarity of the Bridges-Lundeberg alliance to appear.

² San Francisco Chronicle, 4 June 1936, Sec. 1,1.

³ Ibid. 5 June 1935, Sec 1, 11.

The Quickies Controversy

The first relatively open disagreement between Bridges and Lundeberg centered on the issues of “quickies,” or “quickie strikes,” and “hot cargo.” “Quickies” surfaced as a tactic by the unionists to combat the attempts of employers to circumvent the arbitration award: increasing the weight of the sling loads, blacklisting, dismissing militant unionists on trumped-up charges, and the critical issue of “hot cargo.” “Hot cargo” was the term used to identify cargo that was directly or indirectly involved in a labor dispute. These disputes were not between the maritime workers and their employers, but other employers and employees. According to employer attorney Gregory Harrison, who testified before the United States Maritime Commission, the maritime workers engaged in one hundred and seventy-three “quickies” in the aftermath of the 1934 strike settlement “for the purpose of compelling members of the Waterfront Employers Association to employ union men in other occupations.”⁴

A system evolved in which the arbitrary nature of the “quickies” was somewhat controlled by union-appointed dock and gang stewards. They served as a buffer between the foremen and the workers, who met regularly to determine the speed and manner in which work was to be performed. According to the *Waterfront Worker*, the dock and gang steward system was invaluable in controlling the workloads and preventing the employers from brutally resorting to “speed-ups” to increase profit margins, “The dock

⁴ Gregory Harrison “*Maritime Strike on the Pacific Coast: a Factual Account of Events Leading to the 1936 Strike*, (Pamphlet) ILWU Coast Committee Case Files, Carton 7, Anti-union Publicity file, ILWU Anne Rand Research Library, San Francisco.

and gang steward system means a business agent in every gang, a steward who cuts down speed up, builds uniform loads, maintains safe conditions.”⁵

Henry Schmidt recalled how the dock and gang steward system evolved to combat the arbitrary nature of the quickie:

The guys got very arbitrary. They would call a slowdown or work stoppage themselves without consulting anybody.... So we set up a steward system. There was supposed to be a steward in every gang. He was the union representative on the job. In connection with that a steward's council was set up. They met once a week to discuss conditions on the job. There it would happen somebody would make a motion that, starting tomorrow morning that instead of hoisting twenty-three sacks, we cut it down to eighteen. The fellows claimed that was democratically arrived at (sic).... ‘Didn’t we vote on it?’⁶

Initially, the “quickies” were either embraced or tolerated by both Bridges and Lundeberg. In the course of events during the summer of 1935, however, Bridges pragmatically retreated from this tactic. His decision to forsake the spontaneous “quickies” allowed Lundeberg to question Bridges’ *de facto* leadership of all maritime workers. However, Bridges realized the employers were not going to tolerate such militant actions and that an insistence on the continuation of such tactics stood to destroy the gains of 1934. In the eyes of the shipowners, the unionists were proving to be untrustworthy negotiating partners. Paul Eliel, the director of the Industrial Relations Department of the Industrial Association, noted, “The settlement... was not a settlement.

⁵ *Waterfront Worker*, 20 April 1936, 2.

⁶ Henry Schmidt, *Secondary Leadership in the ILWU*, interviewed by Stein 15 November 1974, 146.

For the employers, the troubles had the trouble had only begun.... Strikes and stoppages, forbidden under their awards, became a matter of daily occurrence.”⁷

Eliel’s key phrase was “forbidden under their awards” and Bridges was well aware that allowing “quickies” to continue was certain to put his men in a precarious position. While boycotting “hot cargo” could potentially assist the labor movement internationally, expecting employees to risk jobs and wages in support of faraway struggles could undermine the labor movement locally. The tactic of blatantly disregarding provisions of a contract would certainly make future negotiations more difficult. Moreover, Given that Section 11-b of 1934 ILA agreement stated, “The employees must perform all work as ordered by the employer,” boycotting hot cargo was a direct violation of the contract. Undoubtedly, the men were allowing themselves to be put into a position in which they could be legally fired.⁸

An examination of the 1934 longshore union settlement sheds light on Bridges’ predicament. On one hand, the longshore leader could order his men to work without respecting the seamen’s picket lines. This strategy would endanger the tenuous alliance of the ILA and the SUP and the unity of the MFPC. On the other hand, Bridges could allow the men to respect the seamen’s picket line. This decision would allow the

⁷ Eliel, “Labor Problems in our Steamship Business,” *Yale Review* 26 (1937): 522

⁸ Quin, Appendix to *The Big Strike*, “Arbitration Award Handed Down by the National Longshoremen’s Board, 258.

employers to exercise an option of seeking government mediation to handle such disputes. The shipowners were provided with this option due to Section 10-(d) of the 1934 ILA contract. This provision specified that a Longshoremen Labor Relations Committee would be formed. Such a committee would consist of equal union and employer representation, “to investigate and adjudicate all grievances and disputes relating to working conditions” and Section 10-(e) “To decide all grievances relating to discharges.” In the event the group could not reach an accord, Section 9 of the 1934 agreement stipulated, “In the event that such committee fails to agree on any matter...they shall refer such matter...for decision to an arbitrator, who shall be designated by the Secretary of Labor of the United States or by any person authorized by the Secretary to designate such arbitrator.”⁹

The employers had few ways to deal effectively with labor’s “quickie” tactic short of seeking the expensive and time-consuming route of governmental arbitration. Consequently, the employers attempted to highlight the employee violations of the contract by repeatedly requesting more workers in an effort to deplete intentionally the hiring hall of all its members. This tactic would increase the recorded number of employee violations, thus allowing the employers to present a solid case before the government mediator. As employer attorney Paul St. Sure recalled, “The waterfront employers...would give them the direct command to handle this cargo first; if they

⁹ *Ibid*, 257, 258.

refused to do so they would be sent home until the hiring hall was depleted.... The hot cargo was a very tough issue in those days.”¹⁰

The Point Clear Crisis

The issues of “hot cargo” and “quickies” became the center issue of disagreement within MFPC leadership circles in June 1935. A “hot cargo” crisis emerged; its controversy centered on British Columbian longshoremen who had struck in an effort to obtain conditions similar to those of the American longshoremen along the Pacific Coast. As a result, the British Columbian freighter *Point Clear* lay idle in San Francisco Bay, as the ILA and SUP set up picket lines in support of the British Columbian longshoremen. Thomas G. Plant, as President of the Waterfront Employers’ Association, was quick to complain in a June letter to ILA district president William Lewis: “The agreement has been violated willfully, deliberately... repeatedly. Strike after strike has occurred causing... financial loss to employers.... Efficiency has dropped... cargo handling cost increased.”¹¹

In addition to the fruitless employer tactic of constantly reordering men from the ILA hiring hall, the employers embarked on an intensive campaign to highlight their plight to the government. Maritime Federation officials were summoned to Washington D.C. in August to attend a conference intended to compel the MFPC to work the disputed

¹⁰ Gilb, *St. Sure, Oral History*, 585.

¹¹ *Labor Clarion*, (San Francisco), 7 June 1935, 3.

cargo.¹² Shortly after MFPC officials attended the Washington Conference, the Maritime Federation voted to continue the ban on the disputed British Columbian cargo, forcing the employers to seek a decision through arbitration that was predictably pro-employer. At this stage, Bridges opted for a tactful retreat and ordered the dockworkers to unload the disputed cargo, despite overwhelming sentiments within the Maritime Federation to continue the boycott.

A decision to continue to boycott the cargo would have inevitably led to a full-blown strike that would have pitted a divided Maritime Federation against the shipowners and the conservative AFL officials. In the aftermath of Bridges' decision to lift the ban on *Point Clear* cargo, a mid-November emergency convention of the MFPC in San Francisco was held to address the problematic and divisive nature of "hot cargo" and "quickies." Bridges was forced to defend his seemingly unilateral decision of lifting of the cargo:

He (Bridges) stated at the time of the hot cargo issue it was the belief of 39-79 that the Vancouver hot cargo issue would not have received the solid support of the Pacific Coast in the event the employers were determined to make a showdown.... He stated that the ILA had always supported the seamen and would continue to do so... wires had been sent to Green (AFL president)... and Joseph P. Ryan and that they clarified their position... on the sanctity of agreement and ... he states that San Francisco employers... forcing the question of arbitration penalties for any ILA man... for refusing to work cargo.¹³

¹² MFPC Records, Box 28, Circular Letters file (no.27).

¹³ 1936 ILA Convention Proceedings, "1935 MFPC Convention Minutes," read by ILA District president William Lewis, 12 May 1936, 119.

The sensible but unpopular position adopted by Bridges allowed Lundeberg to position himself as the true voice of the rank-and-file. Rather than acknowledge the difficult position of the longshoremen, which left Bridges little choice but to accede to the mediation decision, Lundeberg reaffirmed his adamant refusal to shun the “quickie strike” tactic. “How to plan job action is never decided by committees or conferences and never will be,” Lundeberg argued in the official MFPC organ *The Voice of the Federation*: “The workers on the job know when the time is right for job action.... The men on the ships are capable of picking the right time and place. Give the rank-and-file a little credit.”¹⁴

Despite Bridges’ decision to lift the ban on British Columbian cargo, the longshoremen did not relish working the disputed cargo. As Henry Schmidt recalled:

I would tell them, ‘Fellows, some day you may own ships and then you can do whatever you please, but there are still shipowners and we have an award.... I don’t remember Harry talking to the guys, but he must have. He carried more weight than me. He probably said, ‘Look this is one of those things where you have to grit your teeth and go back to work. You can’t win them all.’ Words to that effect.¹⁵

During the mid-November emergency conference of the MFPC to address the issues of “quickies,” and “hot cargo,” the Maritime Federation was unmistakably breaking into competing factions that aligned behind Lundeberg and Bridges. Lundeberg’s militancy seemed to far surpass the longshore leaders’. His far-left

¹⁴ *Voice of the Federation*, 31 October 1934, 4.

¹⁵ Henry Schmidt, *Secondary Leadership in the ILWU*, interviewed by Stein 15 November 1974, 146, 147.

positioning in regard to job action earned him criticism from an unexpected source, the editorial staff of the San Francisco CP organ the *Western Worker*. Perhaps the *Western Worker* felt compelled to support Bridges while the debate was transpiring during the convention; however this initial attack on Lundeberg by the CP, although quite mild in nature, may have driven Lundeberg further into the anticommunist camp. According to the *Western Worker*: "Harry Lundeberg does not consciously play the shipowners' game but the results of his individualistic actions well be the same."¹⁶

In reply Lundeberg managed to refrain from direct criticism of the CP, yet he fired back at the *Western Worker* in the *Voice* as he attempted to alleviate any fears within the MFPC that his individualistic style would detract from the unity of the Maritime Federation. Simultaneously he appealed for unity between communists and non-communists:

We should stand together. We are workers first and seamen or longshoremen next. We oppose a common enemy, the shipowners, who are, in turn united against us. This much is clear to all rank-and-file members of the various maritime unions. Petty differences of opinion, personal dislikes and the rest must be buried at this time for the Maritime Federation is to grow in size and power, and the Federation MUST grow if Maritime unions are to be preserved.¹⁷

The exchange between Lundeberg and the *Western Worker* is prescient. At this point, both Bridges and Lundeberg appeared to be attempting to heal the rift that had emerged over British Columbian cargo. Lundeberg refrained from attacking the CP,

¹⁶ Reprinted in the *Voice of the Federation*, 21 November 1935, 2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

preferring to issue a diplomatic call for unity. Bridges withheld direct criticism of Lundeberg. His militancy proved to be problematic for Bridges, but it was difficult not to be impressed with Lundeberg's vigor. Although the two labor leaders seemed capable of diplomatically sorting out their difference via the emergency conference, the *Western Worker* and the *Voice* were emerging as mouthpieces for the Bridges and Lundeberg camps respectively.

Despite the rift that emerged between the *Western Worker* and the *Voice*, the two labor leaders and their respective camps managed to hammer out a diplomatic compromise in regards to contentious issues of "hot cargo" and "quickies" during the mind-November emergency conference. They agreed on Resolution # 47. Resolution #47 permitted spontaneous job actions yet curbed their spontaneous nature as procedures were to be put in place to monitor their use. According to Resolution #47, any job action jeopardizing the Maritime Federation would be referred to the MFPC district councils "for further action and adjustment."¹⁸

The generally militant stevedore's organ, the *Waterfront Worker* praised the compromise of Resolution #47. On one hand the organ scattered praise of the "quickie" tactic. On the other hand, the *Waterfront Worker* pleaded for less spontaneity and regularity in its practice, before concluding with a warning of the dire consequences that haphazard "quickies" would produce:

¹⁸ MFPC Records, Box 1 Special Convention, Minutes file (no.4), Resolution #47. 20 November 1935, 15.

The maritime workers on the Pacific Coast have demonstrated that job action is one of the their most powerful weapons in the struggle against the employers. But job action, like any other form of economic action, taken by the workers to win better conditions...must be organized.... It is a powerful weapon when we observe the simple natural rules that govern all successful economic action...solidarity between all crafts involved. The various maritime groups...in the Maritime Federation are connected together by close ties...they must act together or be crushed one by one. When one...resorts to job action...without consulting the other...affected for support, confusion and disruption result.... Often the welfare of the entire Federation is jeopardized...In the long run, unorganized job action will result in failure...for the maritime unions.¹⁹

Despite the *Waterfront Worker's* lavish praise of the compromise measure Resolution #47, and the outward appearance of unity within the MFPC, Bridges attempted to extend his influence within the SUP as a slate of his allies challenged the Lundeberg clique in the seafaring union's elections of January 1936. Yet, Lundeberg's biggest challenge in January stemmed not from Bridges, but from ISU officials at their convention in Washington that opened on 13 January. The International officials' primary grievances directed towards Lundeberg centered on their perception of a Bridges-Lundeberg alliance, Scharrenberg's expulsion, and SUP membership in the Maritime Federation.

The International's Expulsion of the SUP

There was little doubt the ISU convention would be a contentious ordeal. Prior to Scharrenberg's departure from San Francisco, he publicly announced his intentions to have the SUP charter revoked for, "having come under the influence of the Maritime

¹⁹ *Waterfront Worker*, 3 December 1935, 3.

Federation of the Pacific and of Harry Bridges, longshore leader.”²⁰ Although Lundeberg’s combative stance managed to transform perhaps his most avid supporter, Bridges, into one of his primary opponents within the MFPC in less than a year, Scharrenberg was apparently blind to the fact the Lundeberg was actively engaged in a campaign against Bridges’ SUP allies in the upcoming seamen’s union’s election. Lundeberg would defeat Bridge’s ally, Herb Mills, but Bridges’ choice, Albert Quittenton of San Pedro, would manage to capture the second most important post of assistant secretary-treasurer.²¹

There can be no doubt that the cleft between Bridges and Lundeberg would continue to widen from this point onward. While Lundeberg would never mount a serious challenge to oust Bridges from within the ILA, Bridges’ ally Quittenton would confront Lundeberg directly during a future election. However, Quittenton and Lundeberg, while serving as delegates to the ISU convention in Washington, managed to forge a united stance against the reactionary attack of the International’s officials. Lundeberg’s reliance on job action as well as his barrage of attacks denouncing the conservative leaders of the International in the *Voice* proved too much for the ISU officials to handle. During the opening remarks International’s secretary Victory Olander of Chicago mounted an attack on the MFPC, “(the) Maritime Federation of the Pacific

²⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 12 January 1936, Sec.1, 12.

²¹ *Ibid.* , 15 January 1936, Sec. 1. 6; *Labor Clarion*, 17 January 1936, 11.

Coast... is endeavoring to direct the activities of unions engaged in the maritime industry on that coast.”²²

The mainstream press would gain very little first-hand knowledge of the contentions convention. The aging Furuseth immediately closed the convention to all outsiders shortly after Lundeberg fired back at his critics: “I know from what transpired that Olander does not know the exact situation...I also want to distinctly state, as president of the Maritime Federation, that the organization does not dictate to the seamen or any other affiliated union”²³

Given that Lundeberg was president of the MFPC, his confrontational stance is understandable. However, the International’s officials responded by revoking the charter of the SUP ostensibly for the refusal to reinstate Scharrenberg, electing a chairman from the floor, and taking in members of a dual organization.²⁴ The ISU officials were determined to expel the SUP by stacking the convention. According to the *Chronicle*, elected representatives from International locals along the Atlantic Seaboard were refused seats when they admitted they were sympathetic with the Maritime Federation.²⁵

To make matters worse, Lundeberg, recently elected as SUP secretary-treasurer, was under attack on another front as the shipowners joined the campaign to isolate the

²² *San Francisco Chronicle*, 14 January 1936, Sec1, 1,4.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ MFPC Records, Box 23, file, Harry Lundeberg-Reports as President (no.11), Report 27 January 1936, 1.

²⁵ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 14 January 1936. Sec.1, 4.

pugnacious SUP leader. The shipowners, quick to exploit the unstable state of affairs within the International, announced they would cease using the port of San Francisco due to the unstable labor circumstances. Collusion between the International and the shipowners has never been proven. However, given the timing of the announcement and Furuseth's track record of involvement with business interests, the possibility cannot be ruled out. Predictably, Lundeberg released a statement to the press that lauded the role of the SUP in the building of the ISU while concurrently implying he held the support of the MFPC:

These reactionary officials, who led themselves to aid the shipowners in attacking us, have been drawling their living from per capita tax...Pacific unions have paid them. Furthermore, it is an established fact the International Sailors' Union was rebuilt by the progressive Pacific Coast unions...backed by the rank and file of the Maritime Federation...stand united against any effort of charter lifting. The threat of reactionary shipping interests to 'pull' their shipping...from San Francisco should be taken with a large grain of salt.²⁶

As the International's convention was winding down, the *Waterfront Worker* viewed the proceedings as an attempt to break the MFPC while simultaneously implying ISU complicity with shipowners. Although the rank-and-file dockworkers' paper did not explicitly call for the Maritime Federation to rally behind the beleaguered Lundeberg, the *Waterfront Worker* did appeal to the worker to preserve the MFPC:

Eighteen men sit in a convention all in Washington DC and plot the destruction of the Sailors Union and the Maritime Federation. These...men are acting for the shipowners. The shipowners have conspired to smash the Maritime Federation.... They have not...It was therefore necessary for the shipowners to resort to other

²⁶ *Ibid.* , 16 January 1936, 4.

methods. They fell back on 'their last line of defense,' the traitors within the labor's own ranks...in this case the top officialdom of the International.... They intend not only to...split the Sailors' Union of the Pacific, but to create a split in the ranks of the Federation itself.²⁷

According to Lundeberg, the underlying reason behind the SUP expulsion stemmed from an ISU conspiracy to alter drastically its constitution. The presence of the rank-and-file conscious SUP delegation would have served to block effectively any attempt to change the constitution. Once the militant West Coast delegates were effectively banished on 27 January, the International's conservatives freely enacted their resolutions unopposed. For example, the ISU officials gave Scharrenberg a vote of confidence, elected him as editor of the *Seamen's Journal*, and appointed him as legislative representative in Washington, DC for the International. In addition, the ISU was determined to maintain its presence on the West Coast. As soon as the convention was adjourned, an ISU official, Ivan Hunter, was sent to San Francisco to start a new alternative to the SUP, a Pacific ISU local willing to conform to the ISU hierarchy. To make matters worse for Lundeberg, the International attempted to seize the assets of the SUP. In response, the SUP boss maintained he was forced to give up his position as MFPC president to concentrate solely on SUP affairs.²⁸

²⁷ *Waterfront Worker*, 3 February 1936, 3.

²⁸ MFPC Records, Box 38, file Sailors' Union of the Pacific, 1935-1938, Lundeberg, "Open Letter to Rank and File (no. 21), 14 July 1936.

The SUP, confronted with multiple attacks by the International and shipowners, attempted to mount a legal challenge to the ISU attempt to seize its assets. Representing the SUP was Aaron Sapiro, a nationally known attorney who protested the injunction proceedings of the International's officials.²⁹ Though the SUP attorney did manage to win a temporary restraining order, which tied up funds, the union was left with no funds pending a settlement. Thereafter, the SUP unexpectedly faced another serious predicament as the shipowners, citing their contracts with the ISU, claimed it could not hire SUP members.³⁰ Thankfully for the SUP rank-and-file, the International's officials retreated from this strategy as Orlander telegraphed Frank O'Connor, president of the Ship Owners Association of the Pacific:

I urge that the ships be put into operation without delay and the men who usually make their living on those vessels be given the opportunity to return to work.... They have been misled and miserably misinformed and their affairs have been miserably mishandled by incompetent officials... who have acted as puppets under the manipulation of political extremists unknown to the membership of the union.... You are at liberty to make this telegram public.³¹

²⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 3 February 1936, Sec.1, 1.

³⁰ *Ibid.* , 6 February 1936, Sec. 1, 1.

³¹ *Ibid.*

Orlander may have been seeking to ease the burden for Hunter who was facing a difficult task in attempting to lure SUP men into the new ISU Pacific division. He was supposed to form a new “legal” International charter union along the Pacific Coast under Scharrenberg. This new ISU chartered union would attempt to siphon off a significant portion of the SUP, thus isolating the militants loyal to Lundeborg. Bridges, realizing the West Coast workers could not be isolated from the rest of the country, explicitly pushed his position in the *Voice* for the SUP to abandon Lundeborg, and to seek regaining its charter without delay:

The present critical situation needs cool thinking and cool action.... The Maritime Federation should advise the Sailors Union...to avoid any rash or avert action. With the full support in every possible way by the Maritime Federation...the fight must be to remain in the International and in the American Federation of Labor, through abiding by the international constitution and carrying on the fight by contending the constitutionality and legality of any expulsion through legal methods.³²

Lundeborg and his clique within the SUP were obviously in a precarious position with Bridges backing rank-and-file SUP re-affiliation with Hunter and the ISU. Bridges may have seen the revocation of the SUP charter as a means of disengaging the hostile Lundeborg clique from the MFPC. On the other hand, the longshore leader's motives may not have been vindictive. His 1933 strategy of abandoning the MWIU in favor of the ILA and transforming the ILA from the inside had proved successful. Perhaps Bridges was attempting to replicate his strategy of working within the established unions. The

³² *Voice of the Federation*, 31 January 1936, 1, 6.

Waterfront Worker urged the seamen to follow that example of the longshoremen by transforming the conservative union from the inside on the West Coast: "If a new 'legal' SU of P is set up and boycotted, this would be turning the whole apparatus over to the finks!"³³

The position of Bridges and the ILA in favor of the SUP accepting re-affiliation with the ISU deeply scared the MFPC. Bridges' historically had been fearful of isolation from the mainstream of organized labor, and there certainly was legitimate fear that the accepted and continuing presence of an independent seafaring union on the West Coast within the Maritime Federation would lead the AFL to rid itself of all seemingly radical unions that allied with the SUP in the MFPC. After all the Maritime Federation intentionally positioned itself so it would not be perceived as a threat by the established labor unions. Nonetheless, it was clear that the longshore officials were meddling in the internal affairs of the seamen's union. Writing to the SUP membership in August 1938, Lundeberg recalled longshore officials reaction the SUP expulsion controversy:

Our principle critics have been either the Communist Party...or those closely associated with them.... We have ignored their... advice- which had we taken it would have smashed the sailor's union. They did not stop with advice- they tried to ram this down our throats even though the sailors union membership were able to determine...and did determine to do so would be detrimental to their welfare and ...the seamen's movement as a whole.³⁴

³³ *Waterfront Worker*, 3 February 1936, 3.

³⁴ *West Coast Sailors*, (San Francisco), Anne Rand Research Library, 1188 Franklin Street, San Francisco, 26 August 1938, 2

With Hunter's alternative seamen's union being explicitly supported by Bridges and the *Waterfront Worker*, Lundeberg surely feared that with Bridge's SUP clique leading the way into Hunter's new union, he would eventually be blacklisted and completely isolated. Consequently, Lundeberg sought a declaration of unity by sending a 4 February memorandum to the MFPC: "The Sailors Union of the Pacific requests other labor bodies...the Maritime Federation as a whole to enforce its main principle.... AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL and that these bodies take a position against the employment of seamen from any other source than the Union Hall of the Sailors Union of the Pacific."³⁵

The MFPC response to the memorandum was tepid. Lundeberg's replacement as Maritime Federation president, William Fisher, although a fiercely anti-Bridges Portland longshoreman, was hesitant to thrust the issue of the SUP re-affiliation with the ISU into the arena of debate. Given the fact the ISU had filed an action in federal court to tie up all property of the SUP on 28 January, Fisher surely comprehended the severity of the situation. A public proclamation of support for Lundeberg, whose very future in the labor movement appeared questionable, could potentially unravel the entire MFPC. He

³⁵ MFPC Records, Box 38, file Sailor's Union of the Pacific (no.21), Lundeberg memorandum 4 February 1937.

noted in his daily report of 4 February, "The main problem... now is to keep the Maritime Federation above water for the next few months. The Maritime Federation should not take offensive at this time but should adopt a policy of watchful waiting."³⁶

With Lundeberg unable to find any powerful allies to publicly issue a statement of unwavering support, he appealed to the rank-and-file by developing an emergency program that allowed him to fight for his union's AFL charter while simultaneously insuring his inclusion. His plan was startling simple, yet effective. It consisted of asking the membership to rally around Lundberg by signing pledge cards stating: "I_____ pledge myself to fight to keep the charter of the SUP and uphold the present constitution in the AFL and resist any and all attempts by certain officials of the ISU or others to reorganize our union or take away the fundamental democratic rights as union members."³⁷

As the pledge cards flooded in, Lundeberg acknowledged in a brusque manner that his behavior had in fact endangered the MFPC. Nevertheless, the SUP boss claimed the actions of his seamen managed to preserve, and possibly strengthen the Maritime Federation:

Had they been successful in breaking up the Sailors' Union by this vicious attack, we know the other unions and the Maritime Federation would have been broken up. In our fight we have been successful so far and will continue to be- Why? Between five thousand and six thousand men sailing on deck on this coast

³⁶ *Ibid.* , Box 2, file Second Convention, Misc. Reports and minutes (no.4), Fisher's report 4 February 1936, 2.

³⁷ *Ibid.* , Lundeberg Emergency Committee Report. 1,2,

now have taken their pledge cards and have SUP emergency books, in other words, every sailor on this coast has endorsed this action because they made the plan themselves. That is what is meant by membership control.³⁸

The Bridges-Lundeberg alliance, which was clearly strained by the *Point Clear* controversy over hot cargo, had developed into outright opposition due to Bridges' meddling actions concerning the expulsion of the SUP from the ISU. Notwithstanding the quarreling of two primary leaders, the MFPC would continue to remain viable. As we shall see, the shipowners may have inadvertently prevented the MFPC from imploding. Time after time, the warring factions would patch up their differences when faced with a challenge from the shipowners. The ability of the Maritime Federation to suddenly fuse into an outwardly indomitable force was particularly impressive given the state of organized labor nationwide.³⁹

The CIO is born

Nationally, the labor situation was increasingly fragmented. The CIO had been founded in October 1935 by John L. Lewis of the mineworkers' UMW, Sidney Hillman of the Clothing Workers, and David Dubinsky of the Garment Workers. Though still formally a part of the AFL, the CIO promised to contradict AFL policy by supporting the

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*, 212.

organization on an industrial basis of the auto, rubber and steel workers.⁴⁰ Within the maritime industry the labor movement seems to have fragmented into three principal camps: the ultra-leftist neo-IWW faction, the CP and its sympathizers, and the conservative ALF and its allies such as the New York-based ISU officials and the Joseph Ryan, president of the ILA. Along the Gulf of Mexico, the Maritime Federation of the Gulf Coast (MFGC) had begun to function by March 1936 on a model similar to the MFPC.

In contrast to the hazy picture of the Pacific Coast, where ultra-leftists “neo-Wobblies” united with conservative unionists to combat the CP and its progressive allies, the Gulf Coast appears to have been a clearer battle between the CP and IWW forces for MFGC control. Unlike the situation along the West Coast, where AFL conservatives actually constituted a component of the leadership circle, the ISU conservatives actively along the Gulf Coast and violently sought to disrupt the progress of the MFGC. President and Texas longshoreman Gilbert Mers recalled the recurring violence:

Goons with muscle and an eagerness to use it on Federation supporters began to hang around ISU offices. Wearing an MFGC button could get you crippled for a brief period, maybe a lengthy one. We hadn't anticipated so much goon activity. It served to terrorize and subdue a great number of seamen....

The beef squads dumped (beating up a person with fists or brass knuckles) only seamen who dared voice or display support for the Maritime Federation of the Gulf Coast, such support being translated as disloyalty to the ISU per se. It made building the Federation difficult (sic).⁴¹

⁴⁰ Robert H. Zieger, *American Workers, American Unions* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1986), 44.

⁴¹ Mers, *Working the Waterfront*, 127

The progressive forces along the Gulf Coast, aligned, with either the IWW faction or the CP faction, failed to respond to the ISU terror by forming a united front. On the contrary, the IWW-CP relationship was a bitter battle for control of the newly formed Maritime Federation. Mers, shared his unique perspective as a former CP member who chose align with the IWW, "I never told the Wobblies that I had joined the Communist Party. That might have gotten me the heave-ho into the street.... The Wobs considered the CP to be betrayers of the working class (sic). In their speech they would transform the word 'comrade' into 'comrat.'"⁴²

By the opening months of 1936, the crux of the IWW-CP schism centered on the Party's willingness to enter into and influence the mainstream of American politics in direct contradiction to the apolitical stance embraced historically by the Wobblies. The MFPC, in the midst of attempting to resolve its internal conflict between Bridges and Lundeborg over the proper course of action in regards to the SUP expulsion, was nevertheless bracing for the inevitable battle with the employers. Though many Wobblies may have disapproved, the MFPC was appealing to President Roosevelt for assistance.

In a pre-emptive move, the Maritime Federation sent a letter to Roosevelt in January 1936. In part the letter said:

⁴² *Ibid.* , 155.

It is common knowledge that...these employers diligently endeavored without success to involve the United States Department of Justice and the Department of Labor in this conspiracy.

We now charge that this coterie of financial and industrial interest is prepared to employ whatever ruthless and illegal measures of force and violence...to achieve its purposes...

A prolonged and bitter struggle is certain to follow in the event that these employers and their bankers attempt to carry out their proposals.... American workers are fully aware of the fate of trade unions of Italy and Germany and they will not peacefully to the fascist destruction of unions in America.

That the plans of the shippers are essentially fascist...will be obvious. Such attempts will inevitably arouse public indignation in general and will also cause widespread strikes...with profound social and political consequences.⁴³

MFPC Politics at a Glance

The Maritime Federation's appeal to Roosevelt and the reference to fascism are noteworthy. As in 1934, the shipowners continued to charge that "communist radicals" were attempting to take over the American maritime unions. In reality, Bridges, the CP, and its supporters had drifted towards the center, becoming among the more conservative elements within the MFPC. The militancy within the Maritime Federation stemmed from the apolitical Lundeberg and the ultra-left IWW-influenced faction of the SUP. One possible explanation for the drifting of the CP to the political center can be traced to the rise of fascist dictators in Europe. As tensions mounted in Europe, a growing sense of urgency emerged in Moscow that compelled the Party to seek a broad anti-fascist coalition with Roosevelt and the Americans.

At this stage, doctrinal philosophies were still being developed, alliances still being constructed, and the battle lines were not clearly drawn. However, as the CP

⁴³ *Labor Clarion*, 31 January 1936, 3.

attempted to contend with the impetuous militancy of a Lundeberg coalition, it increasingly found itself attacked by labor militants for seeming to stand for order on the waterfront. The Party's drift to the political center left its members in an unenviable position. In addition to the subtle attacks by the ultra-left elements within the MFPC, the CP was burdened with a formally laid out revolutionary agenda and a past history of antagonizing American business interests, enabling employers and conservative unionists to continue labeling Party members "subversives" and "radicals."

The unusual positioning of the CP in the political spectrum, fused with traditional craft rivalries, led to the emergence of a confusing mosaic of allied and opposing camps within the MFPC. Although the extent of Bridges' ties to the CP continues to be debated, it is clear that the longshore leader became identified with the Party bloc that exercised control over District No. 2, the San Francisco division of the Maritime Federation. Opposing the CP was a conglomerate led by Lundeberg, consisting of scattered ex-Wobblies, and the arrival of a small, but vocal band of Trotskyites. With the further assistance of anticommunist conservative unionists, Lundeberg's clique would gain loose control of the Maritime Federation coastwise, which was ironically headquartered in Bridges' San Francisco longshore stronghold.

A general study of MFPC and ILA proceedings and election results allow a rough understanding of the geo-political state of the longshore union, the seamen's union, and the Maritime Federation. We do know that neither Bridges nor Lundeberg exerted complete control over their respective crafts. For example, the longshore leader was elected ILA president of the Pacific Coast in 1936 by a margin of 7150 to 2550, roughly

sixty-five percent of the longshore vote.⁴⁴ The SUP boss was able to defeat Bridges' ally in the SUP election of January 1936 by a vote of 1,496 to 466, or 76 percent.⁴⁵

The origins of both Bridges' opposition within his longshore union and Lundeberg's opposition within his seamen's union are debatable. Given that the longshore leader presented a slate that consistently challenged the SUP boss, much of Lundeberg's opposition within his union was likely CP-supported. In contrast, the SUP boss never showed much interest in making inroads into the longshore union, at least during the life of the Maritime Federation, leading one to conclude that much of Bridges' opposition within the longshore ranks can be traced to the conservative allies of ILA president Joe Ryan.

Obviously, election results cannot serve as a clear gauge as to the political philosophies of either union's membership. In the case of the ILA, many staunch anticommunist conservative dockworkers likely cast their lot with Bridges due to the longshore leader's track record of producing gains on the jobsite. Other conservative-minded longshore workers probably backed Bridges' opponents due to the their leader's alleged CP ties and, of course, lingering IWW remnants within the ILA, attracted to Lundeberg's militancy, may have opposed Bridges' leadership. In the case of the SUP, many conservative minded seamen, fearful of Lundeberg's militancy and resentful of his purging of Scharrenberg, might have supported Bridges' CP allies in the SUP for lack of an alternative. There may have been such a faction of rank and file seamen, that is, those

⁴⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 12 July 1936, Sec. 1, 3.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 15 January 1936, 1, 6.

that favored the business unionism preached by Furuseth. However, Lundeberg's tendency to expel such members likely prevented the conservatives from being an outspoken force in the internal affairs of the SUP.

The power of the Bridges' clique visibly waned considerably outside of San Francisco. Yet, even in Bridge's San Francisco stronghold, Henry Schmidt recalled a party of conservative dockworkers workers who continually would defy their longshore leader.⁴⁶ In addition, a sizable contingent of longshoremen affiliated with northwestern locals, a traditional bastion of the IWW, opposed Bridges. Many of these men, such as William Fischer of Portland local 38-78 became prominent officials of the MFPC. Despite these generalizations, there were several high-profile exceptions and no clear-cut pattern of geography or craft can be asserted. For example, longshoremen "Paddy" Morris, president of the Tacoma local, although opposed to Bridges, was a conservative unionist, a throwback to the Ryan era, while Matthew Meehan, secretary of the Portland local, was clearly aligned with the Bridges' camp.

Beneath the crazy-quilt political pattern lay the personal struggle between Lundeberg and Bridges. Opportunists often forsook political philosophies and dogmas. These high-profile and unreliable followers of Bridges or Lundeberg, MFPC convention delegates and elected officials, were often driven into one of the respective camps due to their personal affinity or aversion to one of the leaders. A San Francisco longshoreman, Henry Schrimph, is a case in point; a one-time follower of Bridges, he defected into the

⁴⁶ Henry Schmidt, *Secondary Leadership in the ILWU*, interviewed by Stein 3 January 1975, 220-225.

Lundberg camp following his defeat in the ILA elections to choose the head of the San Francisco local. As the eventual winner, Henry Schmidt recalled, "I put my name in. I got the backing of Bridges and what I call the Bridges' forces.... Henry Schrimph was my opponent and he didn't get elected. He and Harry became bitter enemies.... I guess he had a feeling Harry should have backed him."⁴⁷

Although anti-CP collusion between pro-IWW elements and conservative AFL-types is difficult to ascertain, it certainly appears that the IWW remnants along the West Coast embarked on anticommunist campaigns in the spring of 1936. A rank-and-file letter published in the *Waterfront Worker* on 13 April 1936 alleged that Fischer and his cronies were actively and vocally working to push Bridges' CP faction out:

I wonder if you fellows in Frisco know... officers of the district... and even Fischer of the Federation are going from local to local trying to run down Harry Bridges and what they call an irresponsible bunch of reds on the Frisco waterfront. I know... they are using the identical arguments of the shipowners... I can't understand why Bridges... can't pay a visit here. Hoping to see 'Red Harry' up here soon.⁴⁸

The maritime labor mishmash in 1936 was further complicated as New York seamen engaged in a wildcat strike led by an obscure sailor named Joseph Curran during the spring. Because the New York-led strike unfolded without ISU authorization, Lundeberg wholeheartedly threw his support behind the unknown Curran in a letter to the MFPC, "This will inform you that at the present time... three hundred seamen are out on

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, Interviewed by Stein, 15 November 1974, 158.

⁴⁸ *Waterfront Worker*, 13 April 1936, 3.

strike in the port of New York.... They have asked us for support... we are pleased to inform you... the members went on record giving the striking Atlantic seamen one hundred dollars per week.”⁴⁹

Obviously, Lundeberg’s support of Curran served to widen the cleft between the SUP and the ISU. On the other hand, the East Coast insurgent actions in defiance of the International’s officialdom served to further cast the ISU leadership as out of touch with the rank and file, a perception that could only assist the SUP boss who had become the target of frequent attacks in the San Francisco media due to his quarrel with the International’s hierarchy. According to the *Chronicle*, Lundeberg advocated “mutiny at sea,” peril to passengers and ships,” and the “destruction of the American merchant marine.” The SUP boss fired back at his most vocal critic, with a circular addressed to the *Chronicle* entitled “One Thousand Dollar Challenge,” that stated: “You can not prove a single statement...against the Sailors Union...or its present leadership.... To prove this ...we...will pay...one thousand dollars if you can prove one single, solitary instance.... Take this challenge or reveal yourself...as... lying propaganda.”⁵⁰

Lundeberg had been fingered by the mainstream press for his willingness to rebel against the established officialdom of the ISU, an image enhance by his support of the East Coast wildcat strikers led by Curran. Unbeknownst to Lundeberg at the time, Curran maintained a stance towards the CP somewhat akin to Bridges’ professed position of

⁴⁹ MFPC Records, Box 38, file Sailors Union of the Pacific (no. 21), Lundeberg memorandum, 1 April 1936.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* , Box 38, file Sailors Union of the Pacific (no. 21), Lundeberg circular intended for distribution to the public during the spring 1936, undated.

tolerance and cooperation. Claiming not to be a Party member, the New York sailor nevertheless proved willing to surround himself with known CP members in an effort to form a powerful broad-based coalition. By the fall, Curran's political philosophies, combined with his ability to command men to defy the established hierarchy of the AFL bureaucracy, caused some to view the New York sailor as an emerging East Coast Bridges.

In reality, Joseph Curran was no East Coast Harry Bridges. Bridges, having affiliated with both IWW and CP elements during his career, evidently drifted into the Party's camp. Curran was given little choice, the IWW being traditionally a much weaker organization compared to the CP on the East Coast. In contrast to Bridges' relationship with the Party, Curran's seems to have been much less ideologically based and much more of a strategic alliance. Eventually, Curran would attempt to rid himself of CP influence. However, Lundeberg would come to view the New Yorker as tainted by his willingness to associate with the Party and accept its aid, regardless of the particulars. Thus, an adversarial relationship between the two leaders of the seamen would develop, and by extension, relations between Pacific Coast and Atlantic Coast seamen would deteriorate.⁵¹

⁵¹ Mers, *Working the Waterfront*, 190.

V Revolutionary Workers

The maritime labor situation across the nation was visibly chaotic in early April 1936 due in large part to Curran and his East Coast wildcat insurgents. From his ILA headquarters in New York, Joseph Ryan still exerted control of his East Coast longshoremen, yet an alliance of some sort between his rank-and-file longshore workers and Curran's insurrectionary faction of seamen loomed. Despite the fact Ryan's relationship with Bridges' West Coast longshoremen was strained, the West Coast ILA district, headed by two Ryan confederates, Paddy Morris and William Lewis was somewhat secure. Thus, it was the rebellious ILA factions along the Gulf Coast that seemed to pose the greatest threat to Ryan's control. Though he was in a somewhat precarious position, Ryan was in an enviable position in contrast to the ISU officials in New York.

Ivan Hunter's Arrest

The ISU had impetuously cut their ties to Lundeberg, the MFPC, and the West Coast in one fell swoop. Thereafter, the International was forced to contend with the formation of a Maritime Federation along the Gulf Coast, and to make matters worse, Curran and his rebellious East Coast seamen embarked on the unauthorized strike. Accordingly, Ivan Hunter's campaign to lure the SUP rank-and-file into the ISU

alternative local in San Francisco became more desperate and difficult. On 6 April the situation got much worse for Hunter as the International's West Coast representative was arrested for having attempted to hire a gunman to murder Earl King, executive secretary of the Firemen's Union.

James O'Neill, a ship worker, alleged that Hunter offered to hire him to kill King. O'Neill purportedly accepted Hunter's offer, but rather than kill King, he made contact with the police. O'Neill proceeded to introduce Hunter to Gregory Heeg, an undercover policeman who allegedly overheard the details of the plot. Immediately after the rendezvous between the three, Hunter was arrested. The *Chronicle* reported that Hunter informed Heeg he wanted to postpone the assassination. The undercover policeman claimed Hunter said "On account of the Federal injunction we will have to wait at least twenty days. I'm scared of the feds. If anything should happen and the feds started investigating they would dig right down to the bottom... After the twentieth, then what happens to King-if he doesn't show up, that's up to you."¹

Upon hearing of the arrest, San Francisco militants reacted with glee. Despite the *Waterfront Workers'* prior stance that the seamen should join Hunter's organization as an alternative to Lundeberg's union, the longshore newspaper exploited the Hunter's predicament to rail against the conservatives:

Hunter was sent... to bring peace to the West Coast maritime situation. Running true to form Hunter came west and tried to use the tactics that Ryan and other gangsters used to grab off certain chunks of the labor movement.... On the West Coast we have union officials that are wide-awake and a rank and file that is

¹ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 7 April 1936, 1, 15.

organized and prepared to act. 'Old Man' Hunter was stopped cold...His way is the shipowners way.²

Upon his arrest, Hunter refused to give detailed comments until meeting with his attorney. Hunter's decision to remain silent was the first of two critical decisions that result in his acquittal. His second decision that proved significant was the hiring of Walter McGovern as his lawyer. McGovern would masterfully portray the entire incident as a communist plot to eliminate his client from the West Coast maritime labor situation. He quickly released the following statement to the press: "Mr. Hunter is not welcome by the reds. They wish him driven out...so... they can tie up ships, ruin our commerce and prevent men from working.... A kindly, well meaning...labor official who came to bring San Francisco peace and order to a trouble waterfront is not interested in conspiracies."³

McGovern expertly portrayed the entire incident to make it appear that Hunter was framed. The first matter was to dispose of Heeg. As the International's representative was wise enough to speak in vague terms, McGovern successfully argued Hunter's comments could have been solely related to federal action that was currently winding its way through the court system in regards to the ISU-SUP controversy over the seizure of SUP funds. In other words, Hunter did not explicitly use the terms "kill," "murder" or "assassinate" when speaking of his desire to delay the alleged murder. Due

² *Waterfront Worker*, 8 April 1936, 8.

³ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 8 April 1936, 12.

to McGovern's calling attention to his clients' ability to avoid using damaging words, Heeg's testimony was abruptly considered too weak to implicate the defendant.⁴

McGovern then proceeded to tackle King. According to King's testimony, O'Neill had contacted him, claiming to be involved in an ISU scheme to assassinate several union officials including King, Lundeborg, and Quittenton. Upon discovering the plot King admitted paying O'Neill fifty dollars to secure a signed affidavit, an admission that proved deadly to the prosecution, and the case against Hunter would be quickly dismissed on the technicality that O'Neill received payment. McGovern also resorted to discrediting King due to his allegiance to Bridges. According to King, he turned the affidavit over to Bridges. In response, McGovern moved to discredit King by declaring, "Bridges is sort of sacred in San Francisco. He seems to be lurking in the shadows all the time," and upon further questioning of King he added, "As a matter of fact, you wanted to take it up with the high command of the communists in this town, didn't you?"⁵

Notwithstanding the failings of his testimony, it is difficult to believe King was involved in an elaborate scheme with Bridges to indict Hunter for conspiracy to commit murder. Bridges, for his part, had given tepid support to the ISU campaign to readmit the SUP. On the other hand, the International's campaign to siphon off a segment of the SUP failed to pick up any momentum whatsoever; it is not inconceivable that the ISU would resort to such actions. Moreover, if there was any truth to the allegations that Hunter

⁴ *Ibid.* 10 April 1936, 1,14.

⁵ *Ibid.*

plotted to kill King, Lundeberg, and Quittenton, such a plot clearly demonstrates why the International continually failed on the West Coast; ISU conservatives consistently demonstrated a tendency to lump all progressive factions together.

Regardless of what actually transpired, the entire episode can certainly be attributed to the bitterness of the ISU-SUP controversy. Ironically, King would later be indicted for murder in a high-profile case prosecuted by Earl Warren, although historians widely agree with the assertion that King was “framed.” The Hunter investigation faded into the background as another crisis involving the MFPC was rising on the horizon.

The Santa Rosa Crisis

The emerging predicament centered on the *SS Santa Rosa* and the status of her crew of ISU seamen who purportedly refused to respect the insurgent strike led by Curran on the East Coast. In support of the striking insurgents on the East Coast, the San Francisco ILA voted to boycott the ship as she docked in San Francisco. The *Waterfront Worker's* typically aggressive position advocated that the longshoremen boycott the cargo:

The scab ship *Santa Rosa* is due.... She is manned with the cream of the scum of the large eastern cities, armed to the teeth with knives, blackjacks, guns and scab ISU book.... We are faced with the problem, ‘What are we to do?’ If the longshoremen work the ship, the high degree of unity ... will be broken.... The longshoremen and the maritime unions must prepare for a showdown on the issue.⁶

⁶ *Waterfront Worker*, 13 April 1937, 1,3.

Bridges had his doubts as to the legitimacy of the *Waterfront Worker's* claim, and was actively attempting to avoid a showdown by attempting to make contact with Curran. The latter eventually informed Bridges that the East Coast strike was weak, and the status of the *Santa Rosa* crew debatable. The longshore leader recalled the episode at the 1936 ILA convention in San Pedro:

When the sailors brought in the resolution...saying the *Santa Rosa* was unfair, we had nothing to meet the argument with.... They had a fist full of telegrams.... There was only one thing to do...I sent a letter to Curran.... 'Cut out the funny stuff, tell us whether these ships are scab or...they have just been declared scabs by a few individuals. We want details.' That was on April 1st. On April 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 5th there were telegrams.⁷

On the night of 13 April, after contact with Curran had finally been made, ILA officials recommended at a meeting that the working the questionable cargo. The case for boycotting the *Santa Rosa* was not strong due to the weakness of the East Coast strike. Moreover, to boycott its cargo would provoke a showdown with the employers. However, it was too late to avoid a showdown. The Waterfront Employers' Association used the brief boycott of the *SS Santa Rosa* as a pretense to lock out the ILA in an attempt to destroy the hiring hall and remove Bridges from power. The longshore leader was faced with quite a challenge, for it appeared as if he had fallen into a trap in which his very existence as a labor leader was a stake. As the cargo became tied up in the San Francisco Bay, the rank-and-file abruptly began to question Bridges' leadership skills.

⁷ ILA Convention Proceedings, San Pedro, 11 May 1936, 191, 192.

The *Waterfront Worker* attempted to ease employee fears. According to the dockworkers' organ, the employers had been planning a strategy to dispose of Bridges as far back as December. The newspaper further implied that the longshore leader's leadership skill displayed in 1934 had strengthened labor's power, enabling the workers to withstand the lockout:

About the middle of December...certain plans were uncovered. The plans of the employers were...no more gangs to be ordered from the hiring hall. That the radical and subversive leaders of 38-79 (ILA San Francisco local) be eliminated.... To do away with hiring hall means to go back sweating the docks.... There is not one maritime worker who wishes to return to such dark and unhappy days... The union would be a blue book...

Although the shipowners plans are well laid...there is no need to get panicky. We are in a much stronger position then in ...the 34 strike.... Because the maritime industry is better organized...including 3000 warehousemen in the bay area.... If we are forced to strike...the waterfront...becomes an issue for all organized labor.⁸

In this instance, it appears the employers overplayed their hand. During the week-long lockout there was a series of meetings, conferences, and discussion culminating in a decision by the ILA Labor Relations Committee that determined that the shipowners exceeded their authority. The decision allowed Bridges and the ILA to emerge from the potential disaster intact. In the end, terms between the ILA and employers remained unchanged, yet Bridges' leadership was possibly enhanced as the traditional leadership of the Teamsters' Union and the ultra-conservative San Francisco Labor Council, apparently

⁸ *Waterfront Worker*, 20 April 1936, 1, 2.

realizing the employers could set a dangerous precedent of denying rank-and- file the right of selecting union control, endorsed the stand of the ILA.⁹

The ILA San Pedro Convention

In aftermath of the *Santa Rosa* incident both the ILA and MFPC held their conventions in San Pedro; the Federation's convention was scheduled to begin immediately after the ILA convention. Although the Maritime Federation's convention was scheduled to begin on 15 May, the contentious ILA convention was extended until 19 May. Consequently, after appointing convention and rules committees, the MFPC convention was forced to recess for five days to allow the longshoremen to finish their deliberations. The openly hostile debates and power struggles that forced the ILA convention to exceed its expected timeframe were carried over into the subsequent Maritime Federation debates. As we shall see, Bridges' ability to triumph over the conservatives at the ILA convention led to an odd alliance of ultra left seamen and conservative longshoremen that ensured the longshore leader's allies would not leave the Maritime Federation's convention victorious.

Although the ILA convention tackled several non-controversial issues, the conference is best remembered for the battles that transpired between Bridges' San Francisco delegation and ILA district secretary Paddy Morris. In addition to his duties as secretary, Morris was editor of the *Pacific Coast Longshoremen*, the official organ of the ILA that was attacked relentlessly in the San Francisco by the *Waterfront Worker*.

⁹ *Voice of the Federation*, 21 April 1936, 1.

Hostilities broke out into the open early during the opening minutes of the 7 May proceedings as Morris accused Bridges' San Francisco delegation of attempting to filibuster the convention:

Mr. Chairman, the interruptions of the San Francisco delegation prove my contention.... There is a lot of quibbling going on... and the object is to kill time.... Because there are certain issues that are coming on the floor, and they figure that if they kill the time for a couple of weeks you would not have the chance to bring them up and I want that in the record.¹⁰

In response Bridges launched into an attack on Morris, leveling the very serious charge that Morris, while fulfilling his role as secretary, had habitually falsified the minutes of the meetings. According to the longshore leader, the proof was in the minutes of the previous convention, which included instances of Morris continually supporting Ryan. Bridges then claimed that the hullabaloo over filibustering was simply a tactic to isolate the San Francisco delegation. Fellow Australian and San Francisco longshoreman Henry Schrimph quickly jumped in and offered a statement in support of Bridges: "I want this put into the record, in direct contradiction to Brother Morris' statement that Frisco is trying to prolong the convention, their delegate to the Rules Committee was instructed to do everything possible to have this terminated by Saturday."¹¹

The finger pointing between Morris and the San Francisco delegation once again took center stage shortly after Lewis convened the convention on 12 May. Lewis opened the proceedings by reading 11 May bulletin of ILA San Francisco local 38-79. Adapting

¹⁰ ILA Convention Proceedings, San Pedro, 7 May 1936, 19.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 19, 20.

an aggressive tone akin to that of the *Waterfront Worker*, the bulletin attacked Morris, stating: "In line with Paddy Morris' policy of protecting Ryan and blasting the rank and file...deliberately distorted in the minutes.... Morris tried to confuse the issue by raising the phony charge that the San Francisco delegation was deliberately attempting to prolong the convention."¹²

Morris burst out with a demand that charges be leveled against the San Francisco local for character assassination and conduct unbecoming of a union. Countercharges of character assassination came from the floor leveled at Morris. Bridges then declared that the entire convention was an orchestrated attempt to put the San Francisco local on trial. Debate raged on as delegates argued over the origins of the bulletin, and the question of its authenticity, as well as the constitutionality of leveling charges against a local. It was finally determined that Morris' desire to level charges against an entire local was unconstitutional, and he would need "special permission" to do so. Morris was denied the right by a vote of the delegates.¹³

By the convention's end Bridges captured the post of ILA Pacific District president, and his ally Mathew Meehan of Portland was elected secretary at the ILA convention. Neither victorious candidate was forced to face an incumbent, however, as president William Lewis and secretary Paddy Morris declined to run. Bridges' clique was also successful in passing Resolution 19 endorsing the formation of a National Farm

¹² *Ibid*, 12 May 1936, 122.

¹³ *Ibid*, 12 May 1936, 122, 123, 124.

Labor Party. This was a controversial issue, as the progressives feared that a strong third party could upset the balance and tilt the election away from Roosevelt. Thus, the endorsement was restricted to a National Farm Labor Party that abstained from fielding a candidate in the upcoming 1936 election.¹⁴

The MFPC San Pedro Convention

Following the conclusion of the ILA convention, the MFPC convention opened on 20 May. Its Resolution Committee turned down the resolutions regarding support of a Farmer Labor party, opting to endorse Roosevelt in the upcoming election. Several other issues were settled rather quickly. The Maritime Federation pledged its support of Curran's insurgent East Coast strikers and promised to work towards repeal of the criminal syndicalism law. It was also decided the official organ of the MFPC would continue to be dubbed the *Voice of the Federation* despite the fact that an organ entitled the *Voice of Action* existed in the Northwest. Its editor was to be an experienced, impartial union member, giving relatively equal space to all affiliates when possible.¹⁵

On 6 June the MFPC came to an important compromise agreement involving steam schooners and the accompanying jurisdictional problems that existed between longshoremen and the seafaring unions. Resolution 59-A stated that all front and sling men must be longshoremen, if the ILA was present and available in said port. However,

¹⁴ *Ibid.* , 11 May 1936, 109.

¹⁵ MFPC Records, Box 3 Second Convention, proceedings and documents file (no.4), proceedings 5 June 1937 14; Committees file, (no.1) Publicity committee release, 9 June 1937, 11.

one hatch, that is an opening in the deck of a ship giving access to the hold where cargo is stowed, was to be worked by a sailor gang, thus providing the seamen with some work. In addition, the sailor gang could begin work on a second hatch, but only if work had not been previously begun on that hatch by longshoremen.¹⁶

There were several early attempts to forge unity as the delegates agreed to send telegrams of protest to AFL president William Green and ILA president Joseph Ryan for failing to rally behind the San Francisco longshoremen during the *Santa Rosa* lockout. The convention also agreed to instruct all members of the Maritime Federation not to recognize the International Seamen's Union and to recognize only the Sailors' Union of the Pacific following a 26 May speech in which SUP attorney Aaron Sapiro gave a speech critical of the ISU attempts to freeze SUP assets. In his opinion, the International's action served to greatly assist shipowners in their quest to prevent the SUP from functioning.¹⁷

Despite the fiery speech of SUP attorney Sapiro that rallied the delegates behind the SUP in their struggle with the International, the SUP charter revocation eventually proved to be the most contentious issue facing the convention. The bickering centered on the wording of the last resolve of the controversial Resolution 42. Whereas the first resolve of Resolution 42 merely stated that the delegates agreed to denounce employer

¹⁶ *Ibid.* , Box 3 Second Convention, Committees proceedings and documents file (no.3), proceedings, 6 June 1936, 1.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* , Box 3 Second Convention Committees file, (no. 3) Publicity report (No.1) 1, June 1936, 1.

attacks on the hiring halls, its condemnation was extended to any efforts on the part of any individual or groups that “deliberately propose the establishing of the Maritime Federation as a non-A. F. of L. or independent organization or who propose the secession of any affiliated union from the A. F. of L. and its Central Bodies, and the International.”¹⁸

Needless to say, the last resolve of Resolution 42 was perceived to be an attack by the SUP, and minority report signed by SUP activist Robert Dombroff was issued condemning the last resolve:

The course that is advocated by implication in the resolution is to abandon the Sailors’ Union.... The last part... does not in any way strengthen the resolution and is an attack upon the Sailors’ Union for not giving up their democratic rights and reorganizing under the bureaucratic ISU executive board. The Sailors Union, in order to survive, has been wittingly forced into the position that is condemned in the resolution, that of being denied membership. We are fighting to remain in the A.F. of L. and in the ISU but we do not intend to sacrifice our organization and our membership... by turning the organization over to a group of men who are not interested in the welfare of the seamen.¹⁹

The strife over the wording of the last resolve of Resolution 42 was marked by the defection of ILA delegate Henry Schrimph, who broke with Bridges on several occasions during the convention. The hullabaloo that followed the reading of the minority report clearly indicates the extent of the rift between Bridges and his erstwhile ally. Bridges immediately rose and spoke against the minority report. Schrimph responded by moving

¹⁸ *Ibid.* Box 3 Second Convention Proceedings and Documents file, (no.4), proceedings minutes, 5 June 1937, 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

that the last resolve be not stricken from the resolution, but replaced by the following:

“And that we also condemn the various international officials with their union smashing tactics, who are trying...to take away the democratic rights of our membership.”²⁰

As previously mentioned at the end of the previous chapter, the defection of Schrimph demonstrates that the emerging and ever-changing divisions were not solidly along craft or ideological lines. Many unionists were mere opportunists willing to cast their lot with whichever labor leader seemed to offer more opportunity for advancement in the union bureaucracy. Once Schrimph elected to forsake his alliance with Bridges’ apparently due to the longshore leader’s decision to support his opponent Schmidt to head the ILA San Francisco Local, 38-79, the Lundeberg clique would embrace the longshore defector, using him as a tool to humiliate Bridges.

As the 1936 convention came to a close after twenty stormy days in San Pedro, a host of the most important MFPC positions were firmly in control of Lundeberg’s clique. With the essential backing of the conservative Lewis-Morris clique, the Lundeberg-supported candidates William Fischer and Frederick M. Kelly were reelected as the MFPC president and secretary. More importantly, the election of Lundeberg-backed slate allowed the SUP boss to control makeup of the editorial board of the *Voice*. Joining Kelly and Fischer on the editorial board was SUP activist Robert Dombroff, and their new ally Henry Schrimph. C.D. Bentley, of the San Francisco Marine Engineers, would serve as the token Bridges’ ally on the editorial board.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

Rather than concentrating on hammering out a settlement with the employers, the MFPC leadership became preoccupied with two controversies in the wake of the 1936 convention, namely the ISU-SUP controversy and the future direction of the *Voice*, which was directly tied to its temporary editor Barney Mayes. From a distance, it would appear that the International's revocation of the SUP charter would prove to be a greater distraction to Maritime Federation leaders in contrast to the quibbling over the choice of the MFPC official newspaper's editor. However, control of the *Voice* was deemed akin to control of the MFPC, and although the Mayes controversy may have seemed minor at the start, it would evolve into the most divisive issue of the 1936-37 strike.

VI Preparing for Battle

From the very outset, the Mayes controversy rocked the foundation of MFPC officialdom. To a great extent, the 1936-37 strike was fought amongst the factions of Lundeberg and Bridges rather than on the picket lines and Barney Mayes, the *Voice* editor, was unquestionably a central figure in the conflict due to his attacks on the longshore leader that sabotaged the unity of the Maritime Federation. As we shall see, Mayes wasted little time initiating his war against Bridges.

Enter Barney Mayes

Maritime Federation President Kelly hired Mayes as the temporary editor of the *Voice* while the MFPC convention was in session in San Pedro. He informed Mayes that his future as editor of the *Voice* was largely contingent on the election results at the convention. With the Lewis-Morris bloc supporting the Lundeberg slate, and delivering the election to Lundeberg's forces, Mayes' position instantly became more secure. According to Mayes' autobiography, the SUP boss was eager to exploit his ally as editor, "Before we returned to Berkeley we had already learned of the election of the entire slate sponsored by Lundberg.... Tillman (Carl, major spokesman for syndicalists in SUP) also

informed me that Harry expected me to take over right away as the next issue of the *Voice* was coming out in two days.”¹

With the ascension of Lundeberg’s followers to the editorial board of the *Voice*, an active campaign to approve Mayes commenced up and down the Pacific Coast. At a December 1936 meeting held at the hall of the Firemen’s Union, Bridges summed up his view of the campaign by Lundeberg’s cronies to guarantee Mayes’ candidacy:

We all know how we got Mayes. We made the convention lay down the rules whereby we would get an editor. The majority of district councils must approve the applicant for editor. The dope was sent to the other district councils and Kelly went down to San Pedro and put over Mayes down there. And Fischer went to the Northwest and spread the word around and got them to go for Mayes up there (sic).²

Mayes’ background was a subject of hot debate. Prior to his arrival in San Francisco, Mayes was known as Barney Mass and/or Barney Moss. He had worked closely with Trotskyite leaders in the Minneapolis Teamsters strike, and his proclivity towards Trotskyism bred an aversion not only to the CP, but individuals embraced by the CP such as Bridges.³ Consequently, Mayes’ primary goal was not promoting Lundeberg as a viable alternative to Bridges, but rather with developing a Trotskyite waterfront cell

¹ Mayes, “Autobiography,” 556-558.

² ILWU Coast Committee Case File 1936-1937, Carton 6, MFOW RE file, Maritime strike minutes, special meeting, 8 December 1936, 3,4.

³ MFPC Records, Box 54, Letters RE: 12 November 1936, Report on Mayes (no.9).

to oppose the CP. He would later reveal in his unpublished memoirs that his desire to wreak havoc amongst the CP and the Bridges clique preceded his acquaintance with Lundeberg:

I kept as close a contact as I could with the waterfront after reading the commies' *Waterfront Worker*.... Harry Lundeberg... was becoming known as the president of the Maritime Federation of the Pacific.... But that wasn't all. More and more stories persisted on the antagonism existing between him and Bridges.

I knew sooner or later I would have to meet him with the hopes of being able to help him in his fight against Bridges.⁴

Mayes gained access to Lundeberg indirectly through his wife, Joan London, the daughter of Oakland native and writer Jack London. Through London, Mayes met Norma Perry, Bridges' former secretary who had accepted a position as Lundeberg's secretary. It appeared to Mayes that Perry had an unrelenting vendetta against Bridges and that she viewed him, with his Trotskyite leanings, as a potential ally against Bridges.⁵ With the assistance of Perry, Mayes became a trusted confidant of Lundeberg in the early months of 1936. Mayes was initially impressed with Perry's forwardness: "Norma had no hesitation in laying out her credentials. She had been Bridges' secretary and had belonged to the same unit in the Communist Party. Claiming she had a series of quarrels, she was...kicked out of her job."⁶

⁴ Mayes, "Autobiography," 619.

⁵ *Ibid.* , 555, 556.

⁶ *Ibid.* , 557

After Mayes received his position as editor of the *Voice*, he immediately became subjected to an investigation, although at this stage there is no conclusive evidence to suggest Bridges was orchestrating an anti-Mayes campaign. Despite Mayes' claims to previous newspaper experience as an editor of a labor-supported newspaper, he did not belong to a union. The delegates at the 1936 MFPC convention agreed on 9 June that the *Voice* editor must be a member of a recognized labor organization in that field. Accordingly, his hiring on 22 June 1936 led to an investigation in which the Northern California Newspaper Guild protested the hiring of a non-union editor.⁷ The crux of the controversy centered on Mayes' belated application to join the Newspaper Guild. According to a Newspaper Guild letter written to MFPC secretary Kelly, Mayes had applied for union membership after obtaining a job; therefore his hiring was not technically appropriate and it was incumbent upon the paper to hire a union member.⁸

Ironically, MFPC secretary Kelly was forced to defend the right of the Maritime Federation, an organization formed primarily to advocate and protect union hall hiring procedures, of its rights to bypass the Newspaper Guild and hire non-union personal. Responding to the Newspaper Guild's charges of employing non-union personal, Kelly's defensive stance resembled a position frequently taken by the shippers fighting the hiring hall issue, "In the letter... we were practically told who we could hire and not hire (sic).

⁷ MFPC Records, Box 3 Second Convention, Committees proceedings and documents file (no.4), proceedings, 9 June 1936, 5.

⁸ *Ibid.* , Box 58, Newspapers Guild, Misc. file (no.13), Undated letter to F.M. Kelly from Guild Investigating Committee

We are willing and ready at all times to cooperate with organized labor and in return request that you give us full cooperation in the same manner.”⁹

Mayes managed to successfully overcome the union issue, but shortly after his initial hiring he was faced with the charge of “red baiting.” The MFPC had received a letter from secretary Herbert Noboisek, secretary of the Berkeley-based local of the American Federation of Government Employees that charged Mayes’ divisive tactics related to his anti-CP agenda, forced the local to expel him. Allies of Mayes rushed to his defense, claiming the American Federation of Government Employees was too reactionary of a union to be credible.¹⁰

The SUP-ISU Controversy is Resolved

While the MFPC district councils were hotly debating the merits and legitimacy of Mayes as *Voice* editor, the rank-and-file seamen were far more concerned over the fate of the SUP and the Sailors’ Union’s ongoing battle with the International. Undoubtedly, the rank-and-file, as well as Maritime Federation officials had mixed sentiments over the ongoing ISU-SUP controversy. However, the emergency program of Lundeberg had been an effective tool and Hunter’s International hiring hall remained empty. Consequently, the International began taking conciliatory steps towards the SUP boss. In mid-June, the assets of the SUP, including all monies, safe deposit box holdings, and

⁹ *Ibid.* , Letter from F.M. Kelly to Guild, 2 July 1936.

¹⁰ *Ibid.* , Box 54, Editor Barney Mayes File, (no.7), letter from Noboisek to F. M. Kelly, 1 July 1936.

other properties, were released as the International dismissed all cases pending against the SUP.¹¹

However, Lundeborg sought to ensure that a return of the SUP charter did not leave him on the outside as the decision on the representation of the West Coast seamen was brought before an examiner of the National Labor Relations Board. In a letter to AFL president Green that was published in the *Voice*, the SUP boss requested that the AFL president directly intervene to assist the SUP in regaining their charter. His letter to Green described the International officials' manner as "contemptuous and arrogant," and alleged that the ISU merely sought to disrupt the maritime situation for the benefit to the shipowners.¹²

Ivan Hunter, appearing before the National Labor Relations Board to plea the case of the ISU, claimed the International would allow the Pacific Coast Districts to elect their own leadership, allow all future agreements to be submitted to the membership. He promised that the International would cooperate with the Pacific Coast unions in every respect for the welfare of the membership. Bridges interjected his views on the proper course of action for the seamen, claiming the SUP was presented with a "favorable

¹¹ *Voice of the Federation*, 18 June 1936, 1.

¹² *Ibid.*, 27 June 1936, 5.

opportunity to receive their charter.” However, Lundeberg, less than impressed with Hunter’s offer, declared:

We believe we have presented the only evidence of any value to the National Labor Relations Board in determining the proper collective bargaining unit for the Sailors of the Pacific Coast. Because the weight of evidence presented was so overwhelmingly in our favor, we cannot imagine how the board can refuse to certify the Sailors Union of the Pacific as the appropriate and proper unit to bargain with the shipowners. A certificate to that effect will remove the chief obstacle to entering into negotiations with the International...for the adjustments of any remaining differences.¹³

On 23 July 1936 Hunter released “An Open Appeal to the Officers and Members of the Sailors’ Union,” a four-page leaflet intended to reopen negotiations between the International and the SUP. In a separate letter to the *Voice*, Hunter offered the SUP an International charter, but demanded the discontinuance of “quickies.” Although he claimed to lack the power to suspend any of the new amendments to the ISU constitution, Hunter acknowledged that the SUP, upon reentry into the International, had the right to challenge the validity of any amendments. He also claimed that the contentious topic of MFPC affiliation looked to be solved in the very near future pending the MFPC application for an AFL charter. Hunter concluded his letter in the *Voice* in a conciliatory manner:

Personally, I have no bitterness or antagonism towards any member of the Sailors’ Union of the Pacific. I believe...the Sailors’ Union...actually desires...to remain within the American Federation of Labor. This can be accomplished by the means of an honorable and self-respecting settlement, which I am writing to recommend to our Executive Board and which I have every reason to believe will be accepted.¹⁴

¹³ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 11 July 1936, Sec. 1, 1.

¹⁴ *Voice of the Federation*, 32 July 1936, 5.

Bridges appears to have believed that the MFPC could not be isolated from the mainstream of the labor movement, especially with the contract expiration date of 30 September on the horizon. Yet, to a certain degree, it is not unreasonable to assume that his support of Hunter also stemmed from a growing discomfort in his relationship with Lundeberg. The 30 July issue of the *Voice* printed the official ILA stance:

We accept the position of ...Hunter at its face value, and if the ISU attempts to enforce the constitution to the detriment of the Sailors Union...we go on record as backing the Sailors' Union one hundred percent.... It might be well to explain that the ISU proposal for the return of the Sailors' charter has all the earmarks of a face-saving proposition for the ISU executive council. The original plan to disorganize the sailors and possibly other crafts having failed, it seems very clear what should be done.¹⁵

Several responses from the SUP rank-and-file that were published in the *Voice* that predictably opposed the ILA position, including the official SUP position that appeared alongside the ILA. According to the official SUP position:

The international is now in a position where it apparently must resort to any tactics to confuse the issue.... The terms, which Hunter sets out in the leaflet, ...are not the same ones he gave the ILA Executive Board and the press a week ago.... Anyway, the union voted to sit tight on the proposals... and to condemn any backdoor terms...published but not submitted to the union.¹⁶

The most scathing response was, as could be expected, from Lundberg. His reply was a personal appeal to the other craftsmen, especially the longshoremen. To Lundeberg's credit, he seems to have grasped the powerful grip that Bridges held over

¹⁵ *Ibid.* , 30 July 1936, 5.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

the ILA. The SUP boss wisely held back from attacking the longshore leader or attempting to raid the ranks of the ILA in search of allies. As an alternative method of conveying his position, Lundeberg exploited the longshoremen's loyalty to Bridges by drawing a comparison: "We wonder just how much the longshoremen... would relish it if they were driven back... and... Ryan had the power to remove any officer... or deputy... an reorganize.... Brother longshoremen! This is what they are asking us to do."¹⁷

Despite the diplomatic approach displayed in the *Voice*, Lundeberg was determined that if re-affiliation of the SUP with International were to occur, it would be on his terms. The SUP boss allegedly resorted to violent threats against his opponents within the Maritime Federation. On 4 August longshoreman Mervyn Rathborne, a staunch Bridges ally and the MFPC District 2 (San Francisco) secretary, released a letter that accused Lundeberg and roughly ten of his followers of conducting a raid upon District 2 headquarters on 1 August demanding any copies of the Hunter's circular, "An Open Appeal to the Officers and members of the Sailors Union of the Pacific" Several copies of Hunter's appeal were destroyed, as Lundeberg, whose demeanor was described as "distinctly threatening," proclaimed that anyone in possession it would be considered an "enemy" of the SUP, and "would be treated as such."¹⁸

¹⁷ *Ibid.* , 3.

¹⁸ MFPC Records, Box 43, Circular Letters file (no. 14), Rathborne letter 4 August 1936.

The Lundeberg campaign to regain affiliation on his terms also continued in the *Voice* with an 6 August open letter from the “rank-and-file” signed by Lundeberg and roughly fifteen other high profile officials and members that implied that the SUP truly represented the interests of the rank and filers. The position of the SUP boss, as stated in the 6 August letter, was to refuse to reenter the International unless the amendments to the ISU constitution that were passed shortly after the SUP expulsion were removed:

Mr. Hunter says the accompanying proposal is designed to bring harmony between the Sailors’ Union of the Pacific and the ISU. We say your proposal is not designed for this.... It is to force us to accept the illegal amendments to the constitution, which, by trickery, you succeeded in putting over...

Brother members of the Maritime Federation:

Whom are you with? The membership of the Sailors’ Union of the Pacific who fought with you on the 1934 picket line, who backed the BC longshoremen... who have backed all workers in trouble to a man? Or are you with the Scharrenberg machine... who tried to break up the Sailors’ Union, who are on the record against the Federation?¹⁹

The ISU-SUP controversy reached an impasse as SUP attorney Sapiro walked out of a hearing of the Regional Labor Relations Board claiming he “deemed the records were full,” meaning there was nothing left worth discussing. Robert Littler, an attorney for the ISU asked the Board to institute proceedings to force the SUP officials to attend. The Coast Committee of Shipowners insisted that the question of jurisdiction be settled before they entered into any new agreements. As the ISU-SUP hearings came to an abrupt halt, the ILA and employers announced their negotiations reached an impasse.²⁰

¹⁹ *Ibid.* , 6 August 1936, 3.

²⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 3 September 1936. Sec. 1, 3.

The SUP-ISU controversy would temporarily resolve itself thanks to a dispute incited by the arrival of the Dollar line's *President Hoover*. The SUP-ISU impasse developed into a seemingly minor detail as San Francisco's maritime community became focused on an SUP boycott of Dollar's passenger liner *President Hoover* on 4 September. The crux of the sailors' boycott that stemmed from the Dollar's refusal to allow SUP seamen and union delegate Charles Brenner to sail with the crew of the *President Hoover*. Brenner, who had clashed with Captain George Yardley during a previous voyage, charged the captain with failing to observe government safety regulations. Yardley countered that the accusing sailor a previous track record of being "insubordinate and incompetent."²¹

The SUP reacted to Dollar's decision to ban the union's delegate from sailing with the crew by holding a mass meeting that declared that this refusal of Dollar to employ one of its members constituted a lockout of all members. The West Coast seamen were venturing into dangerous territory by refusing to supply a crew to the *President Hoover*. In addition to the ship's 471 passengers, the ship's cargo included perishable cargo and US mail headed for the Orient. Furthermore, the other companies united behind Dollar, threatening to break off negotiations with the SUP regarding the expiration of the contract in less than a month. Nevertheless, to allow Dollar the right of

²¹ *Ibid.* , 6 September 1936, Sec.1, 6.

refusal to employ the crew's union delegate cut at the core of the sailors' grievances.

Thus, Lundeberg was forced into a fight he did not necessarily want but a fight that was assured after Dollar issued the following statement, "Despite the efforts of union leaders to fog the issue, the whole case...simmers down to this: Does the Dollar line...have the right to select the men...it must depend on for safeguarding life at sea?"²²

For the first several days, neither side was willing to budge as Brenner reported to work every morning, only to be banned from the ship. Port Captain L. H. Westahl adamantly clung to the position that Brenner would not sail on the *President Hoover*, but the union felt it could not capitulate by supplying a Brenner-less crew. In response, the Labor Department sent E.H. Fitzgerald to the Bay Area to attempt to solve the emerging crisis. Lurking in the background was Hunter and the International; Dollar made it clear that the shipping line was attempting to recruit another crew. On 9 September, amid reports that an ISU crew had been assembled, more than 90 police equipped with tear gas bomb and riot guns appeared ready to escort an ISU crew aboard. However, the ISU crew never materialized, the police dispersed and the two sides proceeded to work with Fitzgerald.²³

Finally, with the assistance of the Labor Department's conciliator, an apparent compromise was hammered out between Lundeberg and Thomas G. Plant

²² *Ibid.* , 7 September 1936, Sec 1, 3.

²³ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 10 September 1936, EXTRA, Sec1. p. A.

on 10 September at two o'clock in the morning. For the time being, both sides could claim victory. Dollar gained the satisfaction of preventing Brenner from joining his crew aboard the *President Hoover*. The SUP boss could point out that the Federal Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation would subject Yardley to an "investigation" in lieu of arbitration. The *Hoover* incident was viewed as a tremendous victory for Lundeberg, the SUP, and the MFPC. As union control of hiring was of central importance to all affiliates of the Maritime Federation, all MFPC unions, including the ILA, rallied by behind the beleaguered seamen. Clearly, the solidarity of the Maritime Federation had not been compromised by this incident, thus the *Hoover* episode served as a much-needed boost of MFPC unity as the 1936 contract expiration date approached.²⁴

More importantly, the International had proven unable to provide a crew when most needed by the employers. Notwithstanding the announcement of Dollar that the shipping line would seek an ISU crew to replace the SUP seamen, Selim Silver, speaking on behalf of the International and Hunter, denied that Dollar made any effort to recruit a crew.²⁵ Yet, Dollar's alleged attempt to undermine the SUP position by turning to the ISU inadvertently unmasked the weakness and duplicity of the International. In addition, the shipowners failed to back up their threat of suspending negotiations and Lundeberg's prestige was greatly enhanced as he

²⁴ *Ibid.* , 11 September 1936, Sec. 1, 16.

²⁵ *Ibid.* , Sec. 1, 11.

guided his union through the crisis unscathed. Perhaps the SUP boss was correct in analyzing the strength of the International as he predicted, “They won’t get a man to go on that deck crew.”²⁶

In the wake of the Brenner incident, the SUP received a tremendous boost from an unexpected source. The inability of the International to mount a challenge of any kind in supplying a crew for the *President Hoover* left no doubt as to which seafaring labor body was representing the Pacific Coast seamen. Despite the renegade image of the SUP and the media campaign directed against Lundeberg, the National Labor Relations Board declared on 11 September a “hands off” policy that essentially recognized the SUP as the bargaining agent for the seamen. The Board claimed, “No question exists concerning the representation of the sailors by the Sailors’ Union.”²⁷

Coinciding with the *President Hoover* hullabaloo was an official ILA statement released to the media that threw gasoline on a simmering fire. According to the ILA proclamation, the owners had sought alterations in the current contract that essentially would destroy the very gains that were achieved in 1934, including the first step toward reintroducing the employer-dominated hiring halls. In regards to the controversial six-hour shift and overtime, the wording of the current employers’ proposal would allow the shipowners to pay straight time for two consecutive six-hour shifts. The employers also sought to introduce an efficiency-based wage system. In other words, the shipowners

²⁶ *Ibid.* , 10 September 1936, EXTRA, Sec1. p. A.

²⁷ *Ibid.* , 12 September 1936, Sec. 1, 3.

were attempting to reintroduce the infamous “speed-up.” The shipping lines also sought to cease paying longshoremen for traveling expenses to and from work. More importantly, the employers attempted to restrict the work performed by longshoremen in a transparent attempt to paint once again longshoremen’s gains as seamen’s losses.²⁸

Ryan’s Threatens East Coast Strike

On 11 September circumstances in regards to the Pacific Coast longshore situation changed dramatically, providing the ILA with an incredible boost from an unexpected source, ILA president Ryan. After a series of telegrams between Thomas Plant (serving as both the president of the Waterfront Employers’ Union and a corporate vice president of American-Hawaiian in San Francisco) and the ILA president in New York, Ryan, asserting that conditions for the East Coast workers were nearly identical to conditions for West Coast workers, boldly threatened to join his national body in striking with the ILA Pacific District if a settlement was not reached by 30 September. The unexpected offer of bicoastal solidarity by the notoriously conservative Ryan forced Plant to respond by drawing his own comparisons of the East and West Coasts:

We regret to inform you that we cannot agree that the Pacific Coast and Atlantic Coast employers and employees are in the same position. The Atlantic Coast employers have been working with an organization that has respected and observed its agreements. The Pacific Coast employers have been working with an organization that has openly and deliberately repudiated its obligations and has continually violated its agreement. Observances of contracts is of prime importance... Again we repeat that we do not see any other way of disposing of our difference than by arbitration.²⁹

²⁸ *Ibid.* , 3 September 1936, Sec. 1, 3.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 12 September 1936. Sec. 1, 3.

Ryan's threat brought negotiations between the employers and the ILA to a abrupt standstill. Bridges responded by requesting a national conference in New York to confer with Ryan and other ILA leaders where he would attempt to steer the national body along a unified course of action with the Pacific Coast membership. Bridges' task was made infinitely more difficult due to the current jurisdictional conflict between Gilbert Mers' MFGC and the ILA. Given the similarities between the Gulf Coast Federation and the Pacific Coast Federation, it is not surprising that Bridges' association with the MFPC prompted criticism by ILA Gulf Coast officials. According to his own report issued in the *Voice*, "The conference finally decided that no support could be pledged to the Pacific Coast ILA by the other districts... One of the main reasons for this decision was brought up by the Gulf representative who accused the West Coast of disrupting the ILA in the Gulf Coast."³⁰

Ryan's daring threat to strike his men along the Atlantic Coast compelled Bridges to push for a united ILA front. However, he was hindered by the violent and complex Gulf Coast situation pitting Gilbert Mers' MFGC against both the ISU and the ILA that was completely out of his control. Therefore, the Gulf ILA was understandably reluctant to back a strike in support of the MFPC, led by Mers' ally Fischer. In addition, the Pacific District of the ILA had traditionally insisted upon its autonomy when advantageous to its bargaining position. Nonetheless, at this stage, Bridges was appealing the Gulf Coast ILA to give up its autonomy and strike in sympathy with his West Coast district. Despite

³⁰ *Voice of the Federation*, 8 October 1936, 8.

the ultimate failure of the Bridges' mission to New York, Ryan's threat to strike his men along the Atlantic would eventually aid both the Pacific and Atlantic districts of the ILA.

As we shall see, Ryan's posturing would successfully frighten several eastern-based firms, providing Bridges with a far superior bargaining position and the Atlantic ILA with far better conditions. However, upon attaining better contracts for his Atlantic Coast workers, ILA president Ryan would renege on his offer to strike in sympathy with the Pacific Coast longshore workers. Predictably, the Ryan-Bridges relationship, tenuous from its inception, would continue to deteriorate and Ryan's bluff would earn him the wrath of maritime militants across the nation who would brand him "Judas" Joe Ryan. Ryan viewed the situation differently. According to his logic, Bridges was requesting that the Atlantic Coast ILA strike its men in sympathy, not with the Pacific Coast ILA, but with the MFPC.

Obviously, Bridges' goal of attaining ILA cohesion nationally was handicapped by his apparent willingness to embrace the intra-craft solidarity of the MFPC. Surely, his plea for greater cooperation between ILA districts would have seemed more credible to ILA Gulf officials had he withdrawn the ILA from the Maritime Federation prior to his New York mission. In the view of the ILA Gulf Coast officialdom, Bridges, who presided over the opening MFPC convention in Seattle, was a maverick, immersed in the Maritime Federation and its apparent commitment to industrial and inter-craft unionism.

Achieving inter-craft solidarity proved to be as difficult as achieving inter-district unity among the longshore districts. On the MFPC front, Bridges had been engaged in an effort to discredit Mayes. According to Mayes' application for the position of *Voice*

editor, he had worked as an independent correspondent for the Federated Press, as well as the Minneapolis Teamsters' official organ, the *Northwest Organizer*, and the *Kansas City Post Journal*. In addition, Mayes application stated experience on a publicity committee of the UMW and five years of publicity work with Paramount Studios, as well as experience as a special writer with several New York papers.³¹

Bridges Goes After Mayes

In late August, Bridges openly called Mayes' credentials into question by unveiling the investigating work he had accomplished over the summer to his fellow MFPC officials.³² Bridges had written to Paramount's Idwell Jones, one of Mayes' references, asking for conformation of Mayes' experience. Jones replied to the longshore leader's letter by stating that Mayes had never worked for Paramount, but he was, nevertheless, given permission to use Jones as a reference.³³ Though Jones' reply to Bridges appeared initially to be proof of Mayes' deceptiveness, his memo also explained that recommendations "were not taken seriously" within the industry. In fact, according to Jones it was commonplace to give strong recommendations to inept writers.

³¹ MFPC Records, Box 54, Letters RE: Nov. 1936 Report on Mayes file (no.9), Findings of the editorial board of the *Voice of the Federation* in regards to the Mayes investigation, 9.

³² *Ibid.* , Box 2, Second Convention, Misc. Reports and Minutes (no.4), Report of Brown, 26 August 1936, 2.

³³ *Ibid.* , Box 54, Letters RE: Nov. 1936 Report on Mayes file (no.9), Jones letter to Bridges, 14 July 1936.

Furthermore, after examining Bridges' a copy of the *Voice*, "Evidence is that Mr. Mayes is a competent editor."³⁴

On 30 September the agreement with the shipowners expired, but the MFPC and the employers agreed to a two-week extension of the expired contract to allow further negotiations. Thus, given a reprieve from negotiations, Bridges resumed his quest to depose Mayes as *Voice* editor. In early October he wrote both *The Desert News* of Salt Lake City and *The Kansas City Post Journal*, to check the reference cited by Mayes, but he was frustrated in both attempts to find additional discrepancies in Mayes' background.³⁵

It is important to place Bridges' vendetta against Mayes in its proper context. The series of letters composed by the longshore leader during the critical negotiations with the employers appear on the surface to be petty and divisive. However, Bridges' search for incriminating evidence to dispose of Mayes was far more than a mere personal attempt to purge the MFPC of his most outspoken opponent. As editor of the *Voice*, Mayes exercised incredible influence on the direction the strike would take. Needless to say, the two had different opinions as to the tactics the MFPC should employ. Mayes recalled his perception of Bridges at this stage, "Negotiations with the employers were getting nowhere fast and Bridges suddenly became an apostle for peace and order on the

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*, Bridges' letter to *The Desert News*, 1 October 1936; Bridges' letter to *Kansas City Post Journal*, 2 October 1936, Letter from *The Desert News* to Bridges, 13 October 1936.

waterfront to get public sympathy as he put it. No wild job action, no rocking the boat as it would be playing into the hands of the shipowners.”³⁶

Clearly, Mayes and Bridges had different agendas and goals as the MFPC attempted to hammer out a last minute settlement to avert a strike. First and foremost on the longshore leader’s agenda was preserving the 1934 gains of the ILA and avoiding a long strike in which the men would incur incalculable financial losses and personal hardship. Mayes, on the other hand, would continue to draw a salary during a long strike. In addition, a protracted struggle would likely enlarge the circulation of the *Voice* and dramatically enhance his own sense of importance. Given the fact that Mayes left Minneapolis shortly after the conclusion of the Teamster strike 1934, it seems logical to conclude that his usefulness to labor was primarily as an agitator, and as such, was dependent upon an ongoing struggle.

The Maritime Commission Arrives

In the meantime, the Bridges’ forces were attempting to coordinate a strategy with the Lundeberg faction as the employers had agreed to extend the terms of the expired contract for an additional two weeks past 30 September 1936. The goals of the two labor leaders ostensibly did not vary greatly. Bridges was willing to fight for additional gains for the longshoremen. Lundeberg sought to gain for the seamen what the longshoremen attained in 1934, specifically, union-controlled hiring for his SUP. However, the two labor leaders immediately clashed over participation in the negotiations of the US

³⁶ Mayes, “Autobiography,” 592.

Maritime Commission, led by Edward F. McGrady. Roosevelt ordered the McGrady and US Maritime Commission to San Francisco to investigate the issues and attempt to mediate a settlement.

Both Bridges and Lundeberg likely feared the influence of lobbyists on a commission that lacked union representation. However, the longshore leader, with an eye towards the public relations front and Roosevelt's reelection campaign, publicly accepted the idea, while the SUP boss staunchly opposed the presence of a commission as well as any public relations campaign. Lundeberg claimed his opposition to the commission stemmed from his affinity for rank-and file-participation; in portions of the pre-strike memorandum to the MFPC, he noted:

To concede to such an important step without consulting the membership of the unions is in our opinion an outright betrayal of their interests.... We dare not establish on our part recognition of this Commission at this time.... Why the sudden rush? Even at the expense of ...as some say the favorable "publicity" release, we surely cannot endanger the principle existence of the unions.... We propose the following: that each union call a special meeting of the membership to take up this question The next 12 or 14 hours is all that is involved ...it is worth a hell of a lot more that a few hours to protect the interest of our organization.... So in conclusion, we ask that our two proposals be accepted as the only possible basis for meeting the present crisis that we are in.³⁷

After the two leaders openly disagreed over the presence of the Maritime Commission, Lundeberg finally relented and acceded to the Maritime Commission's presence. A Maritime Federation decision to follow the SUP boss' suggestion of to reject the involvement of the US Maritime Commission would have surely led to a loss in public support. The local media had been lavishing praise on the unproven concept of a

³⁷ ILWU Coast Committee Case Files 1936-1937, Carton 5, proposals file.

Maritime Commission. For example, according to the *Chronicle*, “The new and powerful The US Maritime Commission [which]...will step directly into the Pacific Coast situation today... was described...as ‘undoubted integrity, wholly nonpolitical and nonpartisan’”³⁸

Though Bridges finally did manage to triumph on the issue of the presence of the US Maritime Commission, Lundeberg would publicly proclaim his decidedly negative view of the Maritime Commission while concurrently denying any lack of unity between the SUP and the other affiliates of the MFPC:

Our solidarity with the other maritime unions is unquestionable.... The Sailors Union took this action in order to exhaust every possibility in order to reach an understanding –and postpone the holding of a strike vote until such time as they could determine what the true intention and purpose of the Maritime Commission was, and what powers would be exercised. We do not recognize the Maritime Commission is entitled to set itself up as an authority to act as an arbitrator. We do recognize the fact that under the law the Maritime Commission has the authority to investigate conditions about wages and also grant subsidies but we do not grant accepting the Commission as an arbitration board in this dispute.³⁹

Lundeberg’s posturing on the issue of the issue of the US Maritime Commission and his stance towards “quickies” assisted in positioning Bridges as the less militant of the two labor leaders. In a probability, the longshore leader’s professed support for the

³⁸ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 18 October 1936, Sec. 1, 1.

³⁹ *Ibid.* , 16 October 1936, Sec.1, 1.

US Maritime Commission was a pragmatic attempt to work with Roosevelt, essentially to postpone the strike until after the election.⁴⁰

There was definite danger on the horizon, with the expiration of the arbitration agreements coinciding with the 1936 presidential election. The Republican candidate, Alf Landon, was an outspoken opponent of the New Deal, and, having received the endorsement of Henry Ford, was clearly aligned with business interests. Though Roosevelt eventually won handily the election, the outcome was far from certain according to the press.⁴¹ Bridges noted in his report on the ILA national conference that one of the few areas of agreement between ILA officials was the desire to see Roosevelt reelected, "The political aspects of the situation received considerable attention, it being agreed that the employers would also benefit by a showdown at this time, as such it could be used to discredit the present administration and be further utilized to defeat the reelection of President Roosevelt."⁴²

⁴⁰ Larowe, *Harry Bridges*, 113.

⁴¹ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 15 October 1936, Sec. 1,1.

⁴² *Voice of the Federation*, 8 October 1936, 8.

Major maritime labor unrest could conceivably jeopardize Roosevelt's reelection. Yet, it is understandable that Lundeberg was less inclined to be concerned over the fate of Roosevelt. After all, the arbitration committees set up under the Roosevelt administration were far more generous in their decisions regarding the ILA than the SUP. Underlying Lundeberg's aversion to the Maritime Commission was its origins, which stemmed from a provision of the hated Copeland Act.

The Copeland Act

Passed by Congress in the 1936 Merchant Marine Act, the Copeland Act not only proposed a Maritime Commission, but required seamen to carry the identification booklets, called "fink books" by the sailors, which revealed a sailor's entire record of voyages. Presumably, this provision of the Copeland Act could check the abuses endured by seamen; however, the system provided the shipowners with an effective tool for blacklisting. According to the *Voice*, "After the notorious Copeland Fink book bill ... passed by Congress (on 1 July 1936)...over 35,000 militant seamen have signed statements that refused to accept the Copeland fink books...anti-labor clauses have been constantly exposed by maritime unions as openly blacklisting and strike breaking."⁴³

Seamen also opposed the Copeland Act due to its discriminatory nature. The Copeland Act provided that all vessels should be manned exclusively in deck and engine departments by citizens of the United States unless satisfactory proof was made that

⁴³ *Ibid.* , 7 December 1936, 3.

capable citizens were not procurable.⁴⁴ Obviously, the SUP, which its traditionally large contingent of foreign members, could not embrace such a measure. Moreover, the Copeland Act's "fink books" were largely symbolic of a past in which the seamen were forced to carry similar "fink books" issued by the employers, a hated requirement that resulted in Furuseth's bonfire at Clay and the Embarcadero in 1934.

Plainly, the Copeland Act's potential for creating divisions within the MFPC was great because it had little impact on conditions of the land-based workers, so it would prove difficult to rally longshoremen against the bill. The ILA official stance position was to seek amendments through political channels to change the infamous bill.⁴⁵ The sailors, on the other hand, viewed the struggle in 1936 as primarily their struggle, and were determined to settle the matter through striking. According to Paul Eliel, spokesman for the Industrial Association, "While both Bridges and Lundeberg opposed the continuous discharge book for the seamen Lundeberg stated that the West Coast strike would never be settled. Bridges immediately took the opposite position... the

⁴⁴ MFPC Records, Box 1, Fist Convention, Correspondence file (no6).

⁴⁵ ILWU Local 10 Strike Bulletin, no. 28, 29 January 1937; *Voice of the Federation*, 7 December 1936, 3

longshoremen could by majority vote in the ...Federation (to) settle the strike...the continuous discharge book would not be a factor in the settlement.”⁴⁶

In addition, the Copeland Act was central to the Mayes controversy. Bridges believed that Mayes, as editor of the MFPC organ, was obliged to convey views that represented the views of the entire membership. Thus, contentious topics such as the Copeland Act needed to be treated objectively. In Mayes' view, the seamen were leading a fight against the employers, and as the leading union of the Federation, the seamen were entitled to have their concerns and viewpoints of their leadership covered.⁴⁷ In the opinion of Bridges, Mayes was preoccupied with conveying Lundeberg's views on the Copeland Act. One of many likeminded *Voice* editorials stated, “Time and time again in the past few months Brother Lundeberg has warned us against the shipowners who move together with the Copeland fink act to force us into government hiring halls and back into the slave market.”⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Eliel, “Labor Problems in Our Steamship Business,” *Yale Review*, vol. 26 (1937): 526.

⁴⁷ Mayes, “Autobiography,” 570.

⁴⁸ *Voice of the Federation*, 8 November 1936, 2.

Consequently, Bridges feared Mayes' editorial focus on the Copeland Act would disrupt the solidarity of the strikers. Perhaps the longshore leader was even more concerned the militant stance towards the Copeland Act would alienate government's stance towards labor. In this case the workers would be opposing an act of Congress rather than an a policy imposed by the employers. The longshore leader understood the problematic features of the Copeland Act and favored active and aggressive action through legislative channels to amend the bill; Bridges did not view it as feasible to challenge government policy via a strike.⁴⁹

Early Negotiations

The Maritime Commission may have originated as a provision of the detested Copeland Act, yet it appeared briefly its mediation could prevent a strike. However, it became obvious that despite Lundeberg's prior proclamations of solidarity with the other maritime unions, he was working independently. On 2 October 1936, negotiations with the SUP came to an abrupt halt when the seamen refused to take a liner into dry dock in the East Bay.⁵⁰ Despite the fact that negotiations were at a critical stage and in spite of the

⁴⁹ MFPC Records, Box 54, Box 54, Letters RE: Nov. 1936 Report on Mayes file (no.9), Bridges letter to editorial board, 7 January 1937.

⁵⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 3 October 1936, Sec. 1, 15.

fact that “quickies” were the primary employer justification of their inflexible poison, the SUP was engaging in a “quickie.”

As a result of Lundeberg’s defiant actions, the US Maritime Commission made little secret of its preference for dealing with Bridges, claiming that the longshoremen group was demonstrating a more conciliatory tone.⁵¹ The SUP boss responded to being fingered as the “difficult” labor leader in the media by issuing an official statement to the *Chronicle* that reaffirmed the solidarity of the MFPC:

This statement is issued to stress the fact that there is a complete unity in the joint negotiating committee representing all the maritime unions.... False and malicious rumors to the effect that the affiliated unions of the Maritime Federation are not united on a program with respect to the present controversy are absolutely untrue and have been spread purposely to create confusion among the maritime workers. The maritime workers remember too well that the solidarity of the 1934 won for them concessions from the ship owners and established their unions on a solid and sound basis. This solidarity and unity has not been disturbed.... The fundamental issues...the unions cannot relinquish are: For the ILA, the hiring hall and the six-hour day; For the Sailors’ Union, employment through the union office and cash overtime.⁵²

Lundeberg was sending mixed messages, acting independently of the Maritime Federation one day, preaching the gospel of union solidarity the next. It seems logical to

⁵¹ *Ibid.* , 15 October 1936, Sec. 1, 1.

⁵² *Ibid.* , 17 October 1936, Sec. 1, 8.

conclude that the “quickie” was designed to suggest that the upcoming battle was primarily a SUP struggle. However, was the SUP boss solely responsible for his unpredictability? By this stage, Mayes claims Lundeberg had, to a great degree, fallen under the influence of Perry:

Harry would vacillate from day to day, from one position to another. It was then that I became aware of something I had not paid attention to before. After every serious discussion on some pressing problem I had with Harry, I would get a call from Norma to whom I would express my opinions very frankly.

A number of times she called to enlist my support for some of her pet projects she wanted Harry to support. This consisted of putting someone on or taking someone off the payroll or taking a more conciliatory attitude to some of Bridges' supporters...she would characterize as being naïve or mislead.⁵³

With negotiations at an impasse as the 14 October deadline approached, McGrady pleaded with the Joint Negotiation Committee to accept yet another two-week extension of the 1934 agreement until the Maritime Commission could hold a hearing. Yet it was clear that the use “quickies” by the SUP would endanger any remote chance of the Maritime Commission had of averting a strike. According to the *Chronicle*, the extension explicitly forbade “quickies”:

Shipowners of the Pacific and union representatives accepted a proposal from the powerful Maritime Commission to continue operations pending an investigation of problems by the commission....

The union acceptance specified the truce should continue to October 26....

The Maritime Commission-created to build up a great merchant marine-swung into action to prevent the disastrous tie up...by telling both workers and employees that “in the public interest this commission purposes to use to the fullest extent of its power and authority, both legal and moral, to prevent the threatened catastrophe....

⁵³ Mayes, “Autobiography,” 600.

In the meantime-both ship operators and the maritime unions not only are requested, but they are expected, to continue operating under agreements now in force.⁵⁴

Once again, the ability of the Maritime Commission to impose another extension led to a brief glimmer of hope that a settlement would be reached and a strike averted. At this point, the shippers once again attempted to drive a wedge into the MFPC by proposing a one-year extension of the 1934 agreements, a proposal that the ILA surely found more attractive than the SUP. In addition, the employers refused to meet with the Maritime Federation, insisting on bargaining with the unions separately. To make matters worse, McGrady's ability to avert the potentially volatile strike was handicapped by related maritime unrest along the Atlantic, and he was alarmed over the possibility of a crippling bicoastal strike.⁵⁵

McGrady's fear of a bicoastal maritime strike was well founded. Although the insurgent New York seamen's strike during the spring had been resolved, a possible seamen's strike loomed along the Atlantic Coast, with the rise of the Seamen's Defense Committee, led by Joseph Curran and his Seamen's Defense Committee. In addition, Curran favored the formation of a national maritime federation, to be known as National Maritime Union (NMU), which would be modeled after the MFPC. McGrady surely viewed Curran's sudden San Francisco appearance in late October to urge a greater cooperation between Atlantic and Pacific maritime workers as an ominous sign. Speaking

⁵⁴ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 14 October 1936, sec. 1, 1.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 19 October 1936, Sec. 1, 1.

before the city's maritime workers on 21 October, Curran stated, "It is only a question of a short time before there will be a national maritime federation. That is a weapon the shipowners are afraid of."⁵⁶

With the threat of a national marine federation on the horizon, the first open schism appeared within the ranks of the shipowners as twenty-six smaller companies suddenly broke with the "Big Three," (American-Hawaiian, Matson, and Dollar) and proposed a separate agreement with the ILA. This offer of the smaller companies was decidedly pro-ILA, agreeing to all the longshoremen's demands. However, Bridges and Lundeberg's boasts of solidarity were not empty rhetoric, however, as the longshore leader reaffirmed his stance that the ILA would not accept a settlement without an SUP agreement. According to the *San Francisco News*, "Harry Bridges... declared the union could not accept the offer unless the demands of the seafaring unions were satisfied."⁵⁷

The sudden willingness of the twenty-six companies to propose an ILA-friendly offer almost certainly stemmed from the public offer from ILA president Ryan to assist the Bridges' ILA along the Pacific by striking on the East Coast. Although the Big Three managed to control the bulk of the Pacific Coast commerce, the other smaller companies had extensive interests on the Atlantic seaboard. With Ryan's threat, the lesser companies were far more concerned with a costly East Coast strike. Thus, the offer

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* , 22 October 1936, Sec. 1 , 8.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.* , 24 October 1936, Sec. 1, 14.

would allow the smaller companies to avoid an ILA strike on the East Coast, where the majority of their income was generated.

On the Pacific Coast, militants had been critical of Ryan's vigorous stance against inter-craft alliances. However, Ryan's threat to stage a sympathy strike successfully gained his longshoremen along the Atlantic seaboard a favorable contract. From Ryan's perspective, the offer of the lesser twenty-six companies confirmed the validity of traditional craft unionism. Moreover, he had managed to stifle the momentum towards a national maritime union based on the model of the MFPC that was building along the Atlantic and Gulf ports by keeping his dockworkers on the job. At the same time, having attained favorable terms for his East Coast longshoremen, Ryan almost certainly never seriously considered pulling his East Coast men out in sympathy with West Coast workers in violation of their contracts. Indeed, Ryan would be widely criticized for failing to order his men to strike in sympathy with their West Coast brethren.

The effect of the contract proposal by the Eastern-based twenty-six lesser companies was tremendous on the West Coast as the fractured leadership of MFPC was provided with a tremendous advantage along the Pacific Coast. In addition to giving Bridges and the ILA an opportunity to confirm their solidarity with the Lundeberg and the SUP, the offer of the 26 lesser companies proved to be a public relations nightmare for the "Big Three." Their resistance to embracing the offer of the lesser 26 companies quickly earned them the label of "radical minority" in the mainstream press.⁵⁸

⁵⁸ *Ibid.* , 24 October 1936, Sec. 1, 14.

VII

The Second Big Strike

As the labor movement as a whole divided outwardly over doctrinal differences during the autumn of 1936, the maritime labor movement, despite its internal squabbling, displayed an amazing degree of solidarity. Since 1934, the nation's maritime workers had been attempted to gain more and more control over working conditions, and the employers had been jostling with their workers every step of the way. Both sides had ample time to prepare for a West Coast showdown, but few would have predicted the nationwide maritime wildcat strikes that subsequently ensued as conservative AFL union officials lost control of the rank-and-file. After the dust settled, the rank-and-file had officially repudiated many of the conservative AFL leaders, ushering in a new era of maritime unionism.

In contrast to the haphazard manner in which the 1934 strike unfolded, the strike postponements and subsequent delay allowed the MFPC to become highly organized and prepared by midnight 29 October, as negotiations ceased and the maritime workers struck along the Pacific Coast. A myriad of committees and facilities to systematize MFPC strike strategy had been formed. Overseeing the strike along the entire West Coast was the Coast Policy Committee, formed to coordinate action and make recommendations to the various Joint Marine Strike Committees. The Joint Marine Strike Committees were

composed of five members from each striking union, who met to coordinate strategy in every port city along the West Coast. In addition, a Central Defense Committee was formed to organize union attorneys. All bond brokers were asked to work in close cooperation with the Central Defense Committee. In every port, temporary relief kitchens were set up, and first aid stations were opened.¹

A Lundeberg pre-strike memorandum to the MFPC conveyed his view towards public relations, "You do not win a fight merely by considerations for publicity. We cannot hope to compete with the resources of the employers to put our side of the question favorably to the public...we must recognize that unionism is built up not by chasing around publicity, but by following correct policy."² Despite Lundeberg's stance against a public relations campaign, the MFPC took several steps to gain the sympathy of the public. As we shall see, one of the more controversial committees formed was the Joint Publicity Committee. Even though this publicity committee was dubbed "joint," it would be dominated by the ILA and headed by prominent longshore stalwarts such as Henry Schmidt and John Schomaker.³

¹ MFPC Records, Box 2, Second Convention, Misc. Reports by District Councils file, (no. 4) Brown's district council report, 8; *Voice of the Federation*, 5 November 1936, 2.

² ILWU Coast Committee Case Files 1936-1937, Carton 5, proposals file.

³ 1937 ILA convention proceedings, 29; *Voice of the Federation*, November 1936-February 1937.

Eager to avoid the perception of an unruly mob, the Maritime Federation formed its own internal police force to insure an orderly strike. Men with distinctive armbands patrolled the waterfront, “arresting” drunken or rowdy strikers, and taking them into “custody.” The Maritime Federation police were on duty around the clock as four six-hour picket shifts were established at both San Francisco and East Bay ports. According to the *Voice*, “In order to preserve peaceful conditions on the waterfront during the strike situation, unions have delegated members to patrol the waterfront with full union authority to take care of irresponsible elements.”⁴

In the midst of the fight on many fronts in the Bay Area was the ILA Ladies Auxiliary #3. Consisting of longshoremen’s wives, the auxiliary was organized during the strike of 1934. By 1936 the women were strike savvy and prepared to go into action. They had been building a strike fund, and they had set up their own committees. A new bulletin entitled *ILA Women’s Voice* was established to assist women whose husbands were out on strike. The women stepped into the role of overseeing emergency relief as thousand of applications for assistance poured in from members of all maritime craft unions. They distributed food boxes and warm clothing to those in need. Clearly, the strikers and their wives would not to be starved into submission.⁵

The MFPC confronted the usual media biases by employing a variety of strategies via the Publicity Committee. Perhaps the most important move was the decision to ease

⁴ *Voice of the Federation*, 19 November 1936, 2.

⁵ MFPC Records, Box 6, Third Convention, District Council Reports file (no. 5) Brown’s district council report, 43.

media-incited fears of an imminent food shortage by agreeing to work perishable cargo. Despite opposition within the Maritime Federation against such a move, the Coast Policy Committee ordered the cargo worked in early November. In addition, the Joint Publicity Committee published 150,000 four-page pamphlets addressed to the workers of California in an effort to curtail strikebreaking. Several other positions emanated from the Publicity Committee early in the strike. The Publicity Committee exploited the refusal of the shippers to resume negotiations by depicting the employers as obstinate. The Publicity Committee also railed against the government for continuing its practice of subsidizing the shipping industry during the strike.⁶

Serving as the meeting place of the various committees was the union's recreation center that opened shortly after the strike began. The diversion of funds to support the center was a contentious topic due to the urgent and pressing economic problems of the membership. However, the recreation center, providing bi-weekly smokers, card tables, a gym, pool tables, a library, showers, and steam rooms surely maintained morale among the strikers.⁷ The significant role of the recreation center in the maritime strike of 1936-37 is frequently overlooked. As the schism between the various factions widened over the course of the strike, the recreation center allowed rank and file unionists of all crafts and political persuasions to reinforce their sense of solidarity.

⁶ MFPC Records, Box 2, Second Convention, Misc. Reports by District Councils file, (no. 4) Brown's district council report, 8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, Box 6, Third Convention, District Council Reports file (no. 5) Brown's district council report, 40, 41.

In two short years the maritime unions in San Francisco had evolved considerably. Structured under the MFPC, highly organized, working in apparent unison, and brimming with confidence, the workers presented the employers with a challenge despite the internal turmoil that existed between factions within the Maritime Federation's leadership. Rather than confront the MFPC with strikebreakers, the employers elected to simply close down operations, and cease negotiations creating one of the most unique work stoppages in American history.

The East Coast Strikes

In contrast to the situation along the West Coast, the maritime workers and their employers along the East Coast engaged in a far more disorganized and violent struggle. Curran managed to lead an insurgent sympathy strike on the East Coast; that quickly spread up and down the coast and throughout the Gulf ports. He had promised the MFPC the cooperation of the East Coast sailors, yet it was unclear at the time if he and his Seamen's Defense Committee had the strength to lead successfully a walkout that would be opposed by the ISU hierarchy. On the night of 31 October 1936, a meeting was held at the International's Cooper Hall in New York in which the membership repudiated its officials and rallied behind the mutinous Curran. According to the *New York Times*:

More than 1000 members of the International Seamen's Union, at a rump meeting, following an official session called by national officers, voted unanimously to go on strike immediately last night... immediately in all Atlantic ports...to aid the 30,000 striking Pacific Coast maritime workers. The vote was taken by Joe Curran...after national leaders in charge of the meeting had been repudiated by the membership.... Ivan Hunter, national secretary-treasurer and other national officers ...constantly heckled from the floor with the demand: 'We Want Curran'....A committee... escorted Curran and his followers to the

platform. Although the lights had gone out, Curran had continued the meeting and the vote for an immediate sympathy strike was taken.⁸

As the East Coast employers and ISU officials quickly discovered, Curran's power was not limited to New York. Directing the strike, on 1 November, in Boston, was John Palmer, recording secretary of the Seamen's Defense Committee. Under his leadership, agitators traveled from ship to ship, announcing the outbreak of the New York seamen's strike, as the International's officials unsuccessfully attempted to obstruct the departure of seamen leaving the ships. The Boston sailors walked off their ships stating a desire to back their West Coast comrades. In Philadelphia, thirteen of fourteen ships lost their crews in a spontaneous show of support for the MFPC, while five hundred sailors picketed the Baltimore harbor, essentially tying up all maritime traffic within the Chesapeake. In Houston, striking sailors called on their longshoremen brethren to form a national maritime federation based on the model MFPC. New Orleans was in a state of chaos, as ILA chapters went on an unauthorized strike in an act of defiance of Ryan. Labor difficulties also appeared to be brewing in Providence and Mobile.⁹

The official ISU position on the upheaval on the East Coast was to label the turmoil as an "outlaw" strike. With seamen striking along various ports along the Gulf and East Coasts, attention was directed towards ILA president Ryan and his longshoremen. Maritime unionists across the nation hoped he would authorize a sympathy strike with the Maritime Federation and the insurgent seamen. Ryan responded

⁸ *New York Times*, 1 November 1936, Sec. 1, 1.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 2 November 1936, Sec. 1, 1, 22,

by taking immediate steps to prevent an insurgent strike within the ranks of the ILA, proclaiming that any ILA local willing to strike in sympathy with the MFPC and the insurgent seamen would be expelled. The ILA, he added, was in a state of agreement with the Atlantic Coast employers.¹⁰ However, Ryan held out possible hopes for the future. Questioned on the prospects of altering his position should the maritime situation remain unresolved, Ryan equivocated, stating: "We'll cross that bridge when we get to it."¹¹

Not only was Ryan signifying his loyalty to the employers with his reluctance to strike, he was also demonstrating his allegiance to the ISU officials. Certainly, he and other conservative trade union leaders saw support of an insurgent strike and the MFPC as counter to their philosophy of unionism. But his unwillingness to authorize a strike was seen by maritime strikers as a betrayal of the union movement. With internal dissension bubbling beneath the surface of the MFPC, the anti-Ryan position became a rallying point that all factions could agree on. Ryan quickly became a target of relentless criticism from Mayes, who continually lambasted him in the *Voice*. Accusing Ryan of breaking a promise to union members, the *Voice* wrote: "They believed Ryan ... when he promised to support the West Coast in the event of a strike; they thought Ryan was

¹⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1 November 1936, Sec. 1, 1.

¹¹ *New York Times*, 2 November 1936, Sec. 1, 22,

merely voicing their sentiments in the matter and they were and still are ready to back him up. Instead, Ryan went back on his promise.”¹²

It initially appeared that Curran had managed to compel the East Coast seamen to behave unselfishly, as the seamen claimed not to be striking for improved working conditions, or increased wages, but for fellow workers, thousands of miles away. Knowing that it could prove difficult to maintain such a sympathy strike, Curran quickly remedied the situation by giving the seamen their own fight. Soon the East Coast sailors were demanding parity with the gains of their West Coast brethren. According to the *New York Times*:

Parity for seamen in Atlantic and Gulf ports with those of the Pacific will be sought...an audience of 2000 was told last night. Joseph Curran declared that ...efforts for a settlement on the Pacific Coast...‘cannot ignore conditions on the East Coast...Our program is well defined and we will not alter it’..... He added that the strike organization expected the cooperation of other crafts, especially longshoremen.¹³

Under Curran’s leadership, the actions of the insurgent seamen progressively placed the International’s leadership on the defensive. Within weeks the disobedient sailors had sued their union for the right to have their agreement with the ISU considered null and void, while setting up picket lines around the International’s hall.¹⁴ With the

¹² *Voice of the Federation*, 10 December 1936, 4.

¹³ *New York Times*, 9 November, Sec. 1, 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 21 November 1936, Sec.1, 9.

picketing of the ISU hall in November, during the midst of the second wildcat strike in a matter of months, it was clear that the International was in sharp decline.

MFPC Disunity

In contrast to the East Coasts and Gulf Coasts maritime situations the West Coast situation appeared to be a simple conflict between labor and management. On the Gulf Coast there were working ILA longshoremen alongside striking Maritime Federation of the Gulf Coast sailors. Likewise the East Coast with its insurgent seamen leading a wildcat strike witnessed unionists fighting amongst themselves. The West Coast, by contrast, witnessed Lundeberg and Bridges conveying the appearance of a united front in the early stages of the strike. Appearing in San Francisco in front of 6,500 people at the Dreamland Auditorium on 11 November, Lundeberg attacked the shipowners and the Copeland Act. Bridges, speaking directly after Lundeberg, stated the value of the East Coast strikers, "This time we are not coping with a situation on the West Coast alone. We tie up the West, the East, the Gulf, and they stay tied up until we get the demands we've made for all our unions."¹⁵

Despite their pretence of solidarity, Bridges continued his investigation of Mayes' background in hopes of removing him from his powerful position as editor of the *Voice*. Even if Mayes and Lundeberg had little in common with the exception of their anti-Bridges position, Mayes was viewed as a mouthpiece for Lundeberg. Although casual observers were by and large unaware of the internal strife that was transpiring, according to Mayes, his presence, as editor had become the most divisive issue within the

¹⁵ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 12 November 1936, Sec. 1, 1.

Federation, "The rivalry between Lundeberg's supporters and Bridges' commie followers increases each day. Bridges became hysterical over his frustration in not being able to remove me, so that my remaining editor of the *Voice* became the most talked about issue on the waterfront."¹⁶

In this atmosphere, the Joint Marine Strike Committee offered a token act of unity in regards to the Copeland Act. In a unanimously passed resolution on 13 November, the strike committee stated its position that the subsidies given to the shipowners were used to supplement the wages of the owners, while the sailors had continued to receive inadequate wages. The government was allowing funds ostensibly designated to make the American Merchant Marine more competitive to assist the shipowners in breaking the strike. In addition to the demand that the government stop and desist from subsidizing the employers while a labor dispute was ongoing, the strike committee again demanded that negotiations resume.¹⁷

Despite loose agreements on the Copeland Act and rallies at Dreamland that suggested unity, on 14 November Bridges wrote a letter inquiring into Mayes' past to the United Rubbers Workers in Akron. However, he was once again frustrated. In fact, the reply from the United Rubber Workers' research director B.J. Widick attacked Bridges' investigation of Mayes, suggesting that Bridges could ill afford to be preoccupied with the internal squabbling within the MFPC in the midst of a strike:

¹⁶ Mayes, "Autobiography," 571.

¹⁷ ILWU Coast Committee Case File 1936-1937, Carton 5, JMSC minutes file, Resolution passed 13 November 1936.

The letter purports to be investigating the personal letter of your editor, B. Mayes. I am at a complete loss to account for the insinuations and 'investigations' of your editor.... It seems to me that if the brilliant record of *The Voice* under the direction of your editor needed any 'investigating' that it should emanate from the body responsible to the membership for the policy and conduct of its official paper....

I can only hope the slanderous campaign against your editor... can be allayed before it results in serious injury to the strong front needed against the shipowners.¹⁸

So, the divisive issue of Mayes, as temporary editor of the *Voice* was becoming well known in union circles nationwide. Unlike the strike in 1934, the 1936-37 strike did not involve attempts by the employers to break the strike with strikebreakers, but rather the strike was fought in the newspapers, on radio, and with leaflets and pamphlets. With negotiations at a complete standstill and the employers making no effort to operate with strikebreakers, hostilities within the union camp naturally festered. In contrast to the unity displayed by the strikers in the face of riot police and National Guardsmen in 1934, the workers fell into disarray in their attempts to combat the employers' propaganda in 1936.

Although the propaganda battle would be fought on many fronts, the mainstream press was undoubtedly the most powerful weapon of the employers. The MFPC attempted to lessen its influence by refusing to allow reporters into the employer-employee conferences.¹⁹ As in 1934, letters between employers and ostensible "internal"

¹⁸ MFPC Records, Box 54, Letters RE: Nov. 1936 Report on Mayes file (no.9), Bridges letter to Widick 14 November 1936, Widick letter to Bridges, 2 December 1936, findings of the editorial board of the *Voice* of the federation in regard to the Mayes investigation, 9, 10

¹⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 8 October 1936, Sec. 1, 8.

letters between businessmen stressing the shipowners viewpoints were a common occurrence during the strike. As a pre-strike memorandum from the offices of the Coast Committee for the Shipowners and disseminated to the shipowners reveals, the employers had actively sought to exploit and manipulate the mainstream press, "It was our hope that the daily papers would be the most effective medium... With that in mind we have given every newspaper and every news service copies of all correspondence as well as additional amplifying statements when necessary," it noted.²⁰

The Propaganda War

The leading industrial journal of the employers, the *Pacific Shipper* resorted to distributing to a free public circular that consisted a question and answer format to convey the employers' viewpoint. Portions of the circular are as follows:

Q. What do the unions seek?

A. In their quest for greater economic power, they are making fairly moderate demands for new concessions, but are trying to preserve the judicial power over their own acts; in short to live up to their agreements only if and when they wish to. They are encouraging inefficiency as a deliberate policy.

Q. Will strikebreakers be used?

A. Not unless the stoppage of work is prolonged and then only provided the public... gives the shipowners strong support."²¹

As the strike wore on, the shipowners disseminated a pamphlet published 26 November 1936 by the Waterfront Employers' Association entitled "Marine Strikes on the Pacific Coast." Its contents were taken from a statement by Gregory Harrison, an

²⁰ ILWU Coast Committee Case File 1936-1937, Carton 7, Anti-Union Publicity file, 1 September 1936.

²¹ *Ibid.*, Circular dated 18 September 1936, *Pacific Shipper*.

attorney for the employers before the US Maritime Commission on 2 November 1936. The employers' attorney attempted to turn the tactic of "quickies" against the unions by claiming that job action and stoppages by the longshoremen had commenced the day the men returned to work after the 1934 strike. Harrison also stated that the longshoremen had prevented all non-union dockworkers entitled to work under the award from attaining employment. In addition, he argued that the provisions of the longshoremen's award were rendered useless by the action of the union seizing exclusive control of the hiring hall.²²

The employers once again embarked on a concerted campaign to portray Bridges as a radical intent on controlling every aspect of civic life. For example, one full page of the *San Francisco News* stated in part:

Citizens of San Francisco
Here is what this town is up against....
'After this strike is over, we will show them a real march inland.'
Who said that? Harry Bridges...
Citizens of San Francisco, employers and workers, the foregoing authentic examples of unreasonable...stand of the longshore leader shows you what many firms are up against. It shows you why these firms must resist ... to the utmost.²³

The ILA led the Maritime Federation in taking on the employers in the propaganda battle by publishing a booklet, entitled *The Maritime Crisis, What It is and What It Isn't*. One passage stated:

²² Gregory Harrison "*Maritime Strike on the Pacific Coast: a Factual Account of Events Leading to the 1936 Strike*, (Pamphlet) ILWU Coast Committee Case Files, Carton 7, Anti-union Publicity file.

²³ *San Francisco News*, 21 November 1936, Sec.1, 9.

Maritime Strike! Once again, as these lines are being written, those words are blazoned in headlines across the country....

Is it because...maritime workers are troublemakers-men who enjoy strife for the sake of strife, men so blind that they...need... a little excitement?

No.... They face the loss of the most elementary necessities of life-food, shelter and frequently health-not only for themselves, but for their wives and children.²⁴

The MFPC Publicity Committee headed also resorted to spending the Federation's strike funds on a radio campaign. Presented almost daily during October and November on KGGC, typical messages, lasting fifteen minutes, generally consisted of a question and answer session:

Question: I'm just an ordinary citizen of San Francisco. I'm not a maritime worker and I'm not a shipowner. But my interests are being seriously affected by the present waterfront strike. I want to know who started this ...and who is it that prevents it from being settled.

Answer: Well, I'll tell you this much. It wasn't the maritime workers who started this strike. It brings more hardship to us than anyone else...

Question: That's funny. I never heard anything about it. Why wasn't it in the Newspapers?

Answer: I'll tell you why, mister...the shipowners are tied right in with the newspaper publishers.²⁵

Unfortunately for the strikers, the propagandists of the Maritime Federation devoted much energy and time fighting amongst themselves. In late November or early December, a leaflet, purportedly composed by Mayes, entitled "Moscow Bridges Falling Down," urged workers to oust the CP-controlled Bridges and was distributed on the

²⁴ ILWU Coast Committee Case File 1936-1937, Carton 7, Publicity file, *The Maritime Crisis, What it is and What it Isn't*, International Longshoremen's Association, 1936.

²⁵ ILWU Coast Committee Case File 1936-1937, Carton 7, Publicity file, KGGC script, October 1936.

waterfront. Bridges personally spoke out against the concerted campaign directed against him in early December, "You don't see any leaflets coming out to the front to get rid of Mayes...to get rid of Ryan...to get rid of Lundeberg! Did you ever think about that? No-get rid of Bridges! Why? He's a radical." ²⁶

As might be expected, the Bridges-controlled Publicity Committee's relations with the Lundeberg-controlled editorial board of the *Voice* steadily deteriorated as the strike wore on. The Publicity Committee regularly visited the office of the *Voice* to submit its contribution. At first the visits were marked only by tense interactions between the factions. Eventually, however, the ideological differences emerged to the forefront as Mayes protested the content of the Publicity Committee's contribution. As he recalled, "The publicity committee...began submitting stories that were contrary to the policy of continuing militancy ...so after a lot of haggling, I published the stories with parenthetical explanation preceding them that the editorial staff was not responsible for its contents. This enraged Bridges. He renewed his campaign for my removal."²⁷

Although Bridges had resumed his campaign against Mayes wholeheartedly, he was forced to contend with the enemies on other fronts as well. Early December witnessed the longshore leader engaging in three fights concurrently. Bridges openly lashed out at ILA president Ryan. He also participated in a debate with Roger Lapham of

²⁶ *Ibid.* , Carton 6, Maritime Strike Misc. MFOW RE min. file, Special Meeting, 8 December 1936, 8.

²⁷ Mayes, "Autobiography, 613, 614.

American-Hawaiian, who agreed to an 8 December public debate that was witnessed by thousands. He also traveled extensively, making appearances as far north as Seattle and as far south as San Pedro. Bridges made as a cross-county journey that included stops in Boston, New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore. It was during his northwestern jaunt, which included several appearances with Lundeberg that the Mayes controversy boiled to the surface in front of the rank-and-file.

During the first week of December, as Lundeberg and Bridges were making a joint appearance in Seattle, the longshore leader was questioned by the rank-and-file over the Mayes controversy. Apparently, Fischer, suspecting Bridges would carry his anti-Mayes campaign to Seattle, attempted to preempt the Bridges campaign by venturing to Seattle to warn the membership of Bridges' impending attack on Mayes. Fischer's strategy backfired as workers provided the longshore leader with the opportunity to attack Mayes. Bridges contended that he never intended to attack Mayes while in Seattle, a plausible contention given the fact he was making joint appearances with Lundeberg throughout the Northwest to emphasize MFPC solidarity. According to Bridges, "I did not bring up... the *Voice*.... Questions were asked...based on the statement made by Brother Fischer a day or two before.... I was nailed on the floor with these questions and when things come up I told them (sic)."²⁸

Speaking to reporters during the northwestern expedition, Bridges targeted his public attacks on ILA president Ryan for not pulling his ILA on the East Coast off the job

²⁸ MFPC Records, Transcripts, Volumes 1 and 2 file (no.12), 12 December 1936, 42, 43.

in support of the striking seamen led by Curran. In a statement released to the press, Bridges implied that his association with Ryan was comparable to Lundeberg's combative relationship with the ISU officials. The longshore leader charged that Ryan, as a "shipowners' agent and strikebreaker," would seek to have his Pacific Coast Division "descend to the same deplorable" level of strikebreaking as the East Coast ILA by entering into an agreement with companies willing to grant the ILA its demands "despite the fact that thousands of maritime workers, fighting for a just cause remain on strike."²⁹

Bridges' public attack on Ryan did not come without warning. Pleading with the ILA president to strike in sympathy with the MFPC, he had warned Ryan that he would resort to publicly attacking him as an enemy of labor in a letter dated 28 November. Ryan fired back in personal correspondence with Bridges, claiming that his position had been clarified during the national ILA conference in September. Ryan's 2 December reply offered his analysis of the situation. According to Ryan, his threat to strike his Atlantic Coast ILA succeeded in prompting the isolation of the "Big Three," which proved advantageous to ILA workers on both the East and West Coasts. Yet, rather than coordinate his activities with his fellow ILA officials, Bridges elected to enter the fray in support of other unionists within the Maritime Federation. At this stage, with the Pacific

²⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 2 December 1936, Sec. 1, 1.

Coast membership on strike for several weeks, Bridges was attempting to shift blame onto Ryan, a charge the ILA president “declined to accept.”³⁰

Moreover, Ryan felt compelled by Bridges’ threat to smear him that he responded by releasing a preemptive public statement in his defense. Ironically, though the ILA president and West Coast longshore leader were becoming embroiled in a bitter public dispute, Ryan’s press release, which clarified the events that transpired during the ILA national conference, was essentially identical to Bridges’ report of the conference in the 8 October *Voice*. Both men agreed that ILA district officials refused to support the idea of a strike in sympathy with the MFPC. On 1 December, the following statement was issued by Ryan’s office to the press:

Answering attacks upon...Ryan ...by Bridges.... At the national conference...the Great Lakes representatives stated they could not be of benefit to the Pacific Coast.... The Gulf representatives stated they...signed agreements.... The representatives of the Atlantic Coast District agreed to support the Pacific Coast ...even to the extent of a strike if necessary, to enforce their demands. All representatives...clearly and definitely stated to the representatives of the Pacific Coast, that under no circumstances would they agree to a sympathetic strike called by the Maritime Federation of the Pacific Coast.³¹

Despite Ryan’s defense, the crux of the Ryan-Bridges conflict revolved not around the events of the September national ILA conference in New York, but rather Ryan’s unwillingness to support the MFPC in December. From a technical standpoint,

³⁰ MFPC Coast Committee Files, 1936-37, Carton 8, Ryan Correspondences file, Copy of Ryan’s 1 December 1936 statement to press enclosed with Ryan’s 2 December 1936 letter to Bridges; *Voice of the Federation*, 8 October 1936, 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*

Ryan had not deviated from his stated position. However, according to the Maritime Federation, Ryan's actions of forcing his men to cross the insurgent picket lines was akin to forcing his men to work as strikebreakers. Along the Gulf Coast, several locals formed insurgent picket lines in defiance of Ryan's orders, yet the East Coast dockworkers continued to defer to Ryan.³² The unanswered question centered on the sentiments of the East Coast ILA rank and file. Would they engage in the insurrectionary tactics of their Gulf Coast brethren to force the West Coast employers to settle?

It became increasingly clear that the East Coast impasse could prove harmful to the West Coast workers. Initially, the MFPC welcomed the sympathetic support of Curran and the East Coast seamen. Several weeks later, after the East Coast strikers developed a list of their demands, the situation came to be viewed as problematic for the West Coast maritime workers. In a worst-case scenario, the West Coast employers and the unions of the MFPC would hammer out a settlement prior to the end of the insurgent East Coast strike led by Curran. West Coast workers would then be confronted with working ISU-manned East Coast ships that would be dubbed "hot." A contentious incident would surely materialize as Maritime Federation workers would be forced to choose between breaking the united front that had been established with Curran's insurgents or striking on the heels of a settlement with their West Coast employers. Consequently, an East Coast settlement became arguably a pre-requisite to a West Coast settlement. In Bridges' view, the addition of striking longshore locals on the East Coast

³² Mers, *Working the Waterfront*. 164.

would facilitate an end to the East Coast struggle, thus he prepared to embark on a trip there.

The Bridges-Lapham Debate

In the meantime, Bridges was also preparing for his widely anticipated public December 8 debate with Roger Lapham, an official of the American-Hawaiian Steamship Company and a prominent employer spokesperson. The unions were given an unexpected boost from an unlikely source as the *Chronicle* denounced employer spokesman Thomas Plant's alleged comments that he would be willing to tie up the ships for two years before capitulating to union demands just prior to the debate:

The announcement of...Plant...that the interests he represents will tie up their ships for two years, if necessary...raises a question more fundamental than...the strike. That question is what do these shipowners 'own'? They own the ships, of course-even though the government advanced them much of the money.... But do they own the right to have an essential public service continued? And should they 'own' the labor of the workers without which the ships cannot operate? The American people are committed to the policy of private ownership of these ships.... But if this...is to mean...a public right has become a private property, the movement for public ownership will become irresistible.... Threatening a two-year tie up is not a response.³³

Given Plant's gaffe, the employers were fortunate that Lapham rather than Plant had agreed to debate Bridges, as Lapham would prove to be a far more diplomatic and thoughtful spokesperson for the employers. The willingness of both sides to debate openly attests to the fact that both sides genuinely felt their arguments justified. Both labor and industry had spent much capital in marketing their conflicting viewpoints to the public via the radio, media, and pamphlets. A public debate would allow the two sides to

³³ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 4 December 1936, Sec. 1, 1.

confront each other directly. The prospect of a union-employer public debate in a large public arena led the unions to attempt to heighten public interest in the debate by staging a union parade on 5 December.

Every organization was represented at the parade with banners bearing written messages to the public. The procession made its way from the Ferry Building to Marshall Square. The musicians' union provided three bands.³⁴ There were several hundred wives, sons and daughters in the procession, many adorned with placards telling of the upcoming public debate. There were several floats, such as the "SS Hardship" that poked fun at the shipowners. At the parades' conclusion, Henry Schmidt addressed the crowd, preaching solidarity between the unions and urging attendance at the debate with the shipowners.³⁵

On the afternoon of 8 December, just hours before Bridges was to debate Lapham before an audience of thousands, a special meeting was held at the Firemen's Union hall that turned into a contentious debate between Bridges and Mayes. Bridges opened the meeting by announcing he was prepared to level three charges against Mayes: forging the references on his application; maintaining a biased editorial policy, especially in regards to the Copeland Act, which was deemed to be detrimental to the MFPC; and conspiring in shady bookkeeping procedures with members of the editorial board and the SUP. In

³⁴ MFPC Records, Box 6, Third Convention, District Council Reports file (no. 5) Brown's district council report, 33

³⁵ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 6 December 1936, Sec. 1, 10.

the latter matter, Bridges' third charge argued that the *Voice* provided the SUP with 500 free copies of the *Voice*.³⁶

Bridges maintained the true damage caused by Mayes' actions ranged beyond the scope of the *Voice*. Specifically, the leaflet written by Mayes entitled "Moscow Bridges Falling Down" angered Bridges who noted of its comments, "The arguments Mayes used are the same as the shipowners-anticommunist arguments." He continued:

There's the argument of the editor of the *Voice*.... 'Get rid of Bridges, he's a red.' There's the argument of a guy who never belonged to a union in his life...Red baiting? Just on the proof of the things that have been going on in the *Voice* alone, on the fact the editor was put there on phony references, that he has kept control of the *Voice* from where it belongs...it should be enough to condemn anyone.³⁷

Following the special meeting at the Firemen's Union hall, Bridges proceeded to the mass union-sponsored debate dubbed "Shipowners vs. the Public." An overflow crowd attended. Lapham, representing the employers in front of the largely pro-union audience at the Civic Auditorium, was accompanied to the stage by several other shipowners. Representing the unions were Bridges, Schmidt, and John F. Dore, who was introduced as "the fighting Mayor of Seattle" to a boisterous round of applause. The Seattle mayor's warm reception stood in stark contrast to the absence of San Francisco mayor Angelo Rossi who was perceived in union circles as supporting the effort by the

³⁶ ILWU Coast Committee Case File, 1936-1937, Carton 6, MFOW RE file, Maritime strike minutes, special meeting, 8 December 1936, 1-8.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

Industrial Association and the Chamber of Commerce to break the strike. Dore's comments reflected both his belief in nonviolence and the righteousness of the workers' demand to organize:

It is not necessary to use violence in strikes. I have issued a proclamation...the police would never be used as strikebreakers. There have been no gas bombs hurled in Seattle and there has been no damage to property.... In Seattle, a Teamster delivering a national soft drink gets forty dollars a week; in Tampa, for delivering the same product, six to twelve dollars a week. Yet the price is the same in all cities. That disposes of the argument that increased wages are taken from the consumer.³⁸

Bridges' address to the rally highlighted the importance of the maritime workers' struggle to the entire union movement. The employers "as a group" intended not only to defeat the striking maritime workers, but also to weaken the labor movement as a whole. Bridges also attacked the government's subsidies to the shipowners provided under provisions of the Copeland Act. He declared that American lines received up to 80 percent of their ship building cost subsidized by the government, and the benefit of mail contracts, yet Australian lines, not receiving the benefits of government support managed to pay comparable wages. To Lapham's assertion that West Coast maritime workers were the highest paid, Bridges replied, "And the hardest worked, before we got something out of them."³⁹

The audience of nearly 20,000 accorded the president of American-Hawaiian a less than respectful hearing as he attempted to convey an optimistic message. Lapham showed his courage in speaking for the employers in front of an extremely hostile crowd.

³⁸ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 9 December 1936, Sec. 1, 1, 15.

³⁹ *Ibid.* , 15

Stressing the mutual interests between labor and business, he addressed the issue of the hiring hall, citing its centralization as a matter of convenience for both employer and employee. It wasn't the hiring hall issue that prevented a settlement but merely the organizational structure of the hiring hall: "Properly organized the hiring hall serves a useful purpose.... You want to go to work. We want to go to work. I publicly pledge my support to end this."⁴⁰

Two decades later, Oakland business attorney Paul St. Sure recalled Lapham's appearance. According to St. Sure, the employers considered Lapham's decision "brave, but foolish." Despite the rude welcome, Lapham left a deep impression with the crowd, "The meeting began...he was... booed to the point that he couldn't be heard and finally with a grin, he said, 'Okay boys, if you want to wait to hear me, fine, I'm going to wait here until you want to hear me.' When he began to talk he made a tremendous impression and was cheered by the crowd for his courage and forth righteousness."⁴¹

The union members acknowledged that Lapham made a good impression. Bridges released a letter to the press directed towards Lapham that conveyed his newly gained respect for the American-Hawaiian official and praised him for his sportsmanship. Bridges concluded his letter by stressing that Lapham's stance provided hope for a quick settlement, "We believe that this is the first time that the shipowners and unions have presented their cases to the public on the same platform. We hope this practice can be

⁴⁰ *Labor Clarion*, 11 December 1936, 1

⁴¹ Gilb, *St. Sure, Oral History*, 583.

continued. We believe that if the employers display the same sportsmanship and fairness that you did last night, the two side can easily get together and settle the strike.”⁴²

Labor and industry had seemingly discovered a superior means by which to convey their arguments. Within a few days both C. Lyn Fox, an assistant to the Plant, and Henry Schmidt read extensive statements on behalf of their respective viewpoints over several radio stations. Fox asserted that with the positions of the unions and employers were so drastically opposed that negotiations would be fruitless. However, a radical minority within the MFPC stubbornly opposed the obvious solution of arbitration advocated by the employers. Schmidt countered that arbitration, “means that you put your signature on a piece of paper and empower some supposed impartial body to write what they please above it,” a proceeding amounting to a union “death warrant.”⁴³

The Mayes Trial

Just prior to Bridges’ departure to the East Coast, on 10 December, Bridges filed a formal complaint before the Executive Board of the MFPC, concerning the editorial policies of Mayes. Ignoring the fact that he had been investigating Mayes for months, Bridges reiterated his claim that the northwestern expedition earlier in the month prompted his decision, “In raising the question before the Executive Board, I did so after I had visited the Northwest and had been questioned regarding some of the articles in the

⁴² *San Francisco Chronicle*, 10 December 1936, 6.

⁴³ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 14 December 1936, 4.

paper their effect possible leading to misunderstanding regarding the conduct and policy of the strike.”⁴⁴

The Executive Board of the MFPC, claiming the policies of Mayes lay outside its jurisdiction, declined to cooperate. Therefore, Bridges left with few others options, filed a formal complaint against Mayes with the editorial board of *The Voice*. The longshore leader revealed in said complaint his plans to level three formal charges against Mayes and the editorial board itself:

- 1) That the editor forged references with his application for the job as editor;
- 2) That with the knowledge of the editor, members of the editorial board. And officials of the Sailors Union, the Sailors Union received five hundred copies of the *Voice* every week.
- 3) The editorial policy regarding the Copeland Bill; that is injurious to the Federation.⁴⁵

Leveling charges against the editorial board in front of the editorial board itself might seem foolish, and Bridges realized obviously he could tarnish his reputation. Nevertheless, lacking a viable alternative and anticipating that thrusting the issues into the open would doom the editor’s future with the *Voice*, the longshore leader elected to present his charges on the just prior to his trip to the East Coast.

On 9 December, the editorial board, all too well aware of Bridges’ plans, held a four-hour special meeting in anticipation of the impending Mayes’ trial. Lundeberg was allowed to attend this special meeting as an observer. The main topics of the meeting

⁴⁴ MFPC Records, Box 54, Letters RE: Nov. 1936 Report on Mayes file (no.9), Bridges letter to Editorial Board and all ILA locals, 7 January 1937.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

were the five hundred free copies of *The Voice* and the proper strategy to handle the pending investigation. Mayes began rehearsing his longwinded defense by attacking Bridges:

It struck me very peculiarly that in a strike situation where the unity...is paramount, that such an issue would be publicly discussed.... Mr. Bridges...said that he had this information for some time. It seems odd that any responsible official of any union...should have kept this up his sleeve.... There are several unions who are not paying for *The Voice*. In some of these cases it is justifiable... Therefore this situation that exists with the Sailors' Union is suddenly singled out to be some extraordinary thing. It is only being used for political purposes.⁴⁶

Though Lundeberg was reminded of his observer status, he insisted on talking. Lundeberg refused to admit knowing how many papers his union received but acknowledged that he gave away several papers to ships bound for the East Coast and Gulf. After Lundeberg's admission, the editorial board proceeded to reprimand him and other members of the board who were aware that the SUP was receiving free copies of the *Voice*.⁴⁷ Consequently, the editorial board felt prepared to handle any forthcoming charges from Bridges on this point. In concluding their preparation for the Mayes trial, the editorial board denounced Bridges' actions; "We are of the opinion that bringing such flimsy charges is very poor union tactics, especially during a strike when maintaining our solidarity should be paramount."⁴⁸

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* , Editorial Board minutes, 9 December 1936, 7-9.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.* , 9.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.* , 47.

Two days later, 11 December, the actual proceedings against Mayes commenced at the Masters, Mates, and Pilots Hall on Main Street. The first day consisted of longwinded denunciations, insults, charges and counter-charges. Henry Schrimph accused Bridges of covering up his true intentions of devastating the credibility of the *Voice*, “Brother Bridges said he had something up his sleeve before our meeting.... And he claims he was so interested in the *Voice*, in pushing it ahead; he wants to see it grow, holds no malice against the *Voice* at all, but he didn’t like its board. But on the other hand, he knew about this while the board did not know.... He would never go out of his way to straighten it out, yet he says he is interested in the *Voice* himself.”⁴⁹

Neither the editorial board of the *Voice* nor Bridges attempted to conceal their feelings of animosity towards each other during Mayes’ so-called “trial.” During the second day of the proceedings, Bridges formally filed his charges against Mayes after an exasperated Fischer instructed him to cease his relentless criticism of the editorial board and file the charges. Bridges refused to be bullied. He responded with a tough reply that acknowledged his predicament, “As I am up here with the editorial board that I know will cut my throat for a nickel if they get the chance, I present the case as I want or I will not present it.”⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Proceedings from 11 December 1936, reprinted in the *Voice of the Federation*, 7 January 1937, 6.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Proceedings from 12 December 1936, reprinted in the *Voice*, 14 January 1937, 5.

The Mayes proceedings continued on the next day. However, Bridges finished stating his case and was scheduled to speak at New York's Madison Square Garden on 14 December. So he was absent on 13 December, the final day of the proceedings. Mayes recalls the editorial board responding to the end of the proceedings in a celebratory manner. However, in the aftermath of his trial, Mayes sensed a party might be premature, "Downstairs Schrimph insisted we have a drink. Not wanting to diminish his moment of triumph, I did impress on him that Bridges would not take this lying down and that we should prepare ourselves for his next move. He would not listen at all as he ordered more drinks."⁵¹

On 16 December, the printed transcripts were released to the editorial board, and the board members presumably conferred over the fate of Mayes. Predictably, the editorial board exonerated Mayes on all three counts and demanded an apology from Bridges. However, the bulk of the meeting centered on an odd dilemma: the editorial board could print the transcripts to highlight the abrasive and divisive side of Bridges' nature rarely seen by the rank-and-file but doing so would depict the editorial board as equally, if not more, divisive. In the end, the editorial board decided to risk the unity of the Maritime Federation by publishing the transcripts in the midst of the strike in an effort to tarnish Bridges' reputation.⁵²

⁵¹ Mayes, "Autobiography," 624.

⁵² MFPC Records, Box 55, Minutes file, (no. 13) Series: Editorial Board Minutes, 16 December 1936, 2.

In an attempt to justify the decision to publish the Mayes hearings, the editorial board decided unanimously to suspend their editor. This action subsequently allowed the editorial board to claim the transcripts would allow the rank-and-file to better determine the validity of the charges against Mayes.⁵³ Though the recently suspended editor bitterly denounced the decision of the board Mayes had contrarily declared on 11 December, I am perfectly willing to leave that decision to the membership and rest on that decision.”⁵⁴

Lee Holman Reemerges

In the intervening time, Lee Holman, the former head of the ILA who had been suspended for his reactionary policies prior to the 1934 strike, reemerged in the headlines of the local newspapers with the formation of an alternative employee-friendly union. On December 10, a board of directors was selected for his new union in a meeting of roughly 250 at his headquarters on Howard Street. The meeting quarters was surrounded by police as loudspeakers carried Holman's denunciations of Bridges and other ILA officials into the streets. The following day the board of directors of Holman's self-styled union drew up a list of demands to be presented to McGrady and the shipowners.⁵⁵

The employers did not seem eager to respond to Holman's overtures, but Holman refused to give up, and the MFPC was burdened with yet another irritant over the next several weeks, as this renegade union would rove the streets, physically attacking both

⁵³ *Ibid.* , Special meeting of the editorial board, 16 December 1936.

⁵⁴ Proceedings of 11 December 1936. Reprinted in the *Voice of the Federation* 7 January 1937, 8.

⁵⁵ San Francisco Chronicle, 11 December 1936, Sec. 1, 6.

the Bridges and the Lundeberg factions of the Maritime Federation. Striker Peter Lechy recalled his experience with Holman's men:

I had just left my room on Harrison Street for a cup of coffee. Suddenly, after walking a short distance I saw twelve or fifteen men coming toward me. They came up and asked what sort of union button I had on, and seeing that they were ILA and Maritime Federaiton, they kicked me unconscious. The next thing I knew I was in the hospital.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ *Western Worker*, 14 January 1937, 2.

VIII The Strike Winds Down

Though at times it may have seen as if the competing factions within the MFPC were overly concerned over the fate of Mayes at the expense of the strike itself, a host of other strike related events were occurring. As could be expected, there was no coordinated strategy between Bridges on the East Coast and Lundeberg, who was in the midst of negotiations with the shipowners. Mayes would proceed to utilize the situation to foil Bridges' East Coast mission by depicting the progress of the Lundeberg's negotiations as imminently successful. He was determined not leave his post at the *Voice* quietly and Bridges would have to scamper back to San Francisco, forced to abandon his challenge to Ryan's authority.

On 13 December 1936 discussions occurred between Lundeberg with Plant and employer attorney Gregory Harrison. After the deliberations concluded, the SUP boss publicly pronounced the shipowners and seamen to be closer to an agreement than at any time since the strike began. However, the negotiations had to be adjourned to allow Lundeberg time to tend to the internal affairs of the SUP. In addition to the Mayes' controversy, he was facing another challenging union election in which he was opposed by Bridges' ally Albert Quittenton.¹

¹ *Western Worker*, 14 December 1936, Sec. 1, 4.

Harry Bridges Goes to New York

In his scheduled speech in New York on 14 December, Bridges attempted to lure the East Coast ILA off the job in defiance of ILA president Ryan. Before an audience of 16,000 at Madison Square Garden, Bridges lashed out at Ryan. In response, Ryan dismissed Bridges from his position on the ILA executive committee. Bridges then taunted Ryan by reminding him of his prominence on the Pacific Coast, "I didn't represent the ILA on the West Coast by virtue of appointment, but I represent it by election...I'm still in my official capacity on the Pacific Coast and Ryan can't fire me."²

Gilbert Mers, the president of the Gulf Coast version of the Maritime Federation, the MFGC, followed the Bridges' trip to the East Coast with great interest from Texas. After all, the success of the Gulf Coast struggle was in the balance and an insurgent movement by the East Coast dockworkers would certainly aid the effort of the MFGC strikers. Although Bridges was ultimately unsuccessful in leading an insurgent movement against Ryan, the ILA president had a difficult time maintaining control of his longshore union, particularly in Baltimore. According to Mers:

West Coast ILA president Harry Bridges came to the East Coast about mid-December. He made speeches in Boston, New York and Baltimore as I remember it.... He urged East Coast longshoremen to come out in support of the rank and file strike and dwelt on the need for a National Maritime Federation....

Bridges stirred things up.... He stirred one person in particular: International President Joseph P. Ryan. Bridges had been on the ILA payroll as an organizer.

² *Ibid.* , 17 December 1936, Sec.1, 1.

Ryan fired him.... Baltimore longshoremen were showing some rank and file strike sympathy. Ryan went into Baltimore, where he had to be rescued from an angry group of strikers and strike supporters.³

It is unsurprising that the Bridges managed to make the most headway in Baltimore. In contrast to the vast complex ports of large metropolitan New York and Philadelphia, Baltimore was a small city with a compact waterfront district that offered greater opportunity for workers to interact and organize. In addition, Baltimore received particularly heavy attention from the CP due to its close proximity to Washington, D.C. As a result, Baltimore evolved into a MWIU stronghold during the thirties, and these maritime workers, insured they would be clothed, housed, and fed by CP supporters during a strike, were more willing to strike.⁴ According to Mike Quin, the Baltimore longshoremen pulled Ryan's pants off.⁵ Ryan recalled the Baltimore experience as particularly unpleasant in a 12 January 1937 letter to MFPC Pacific District President Matthew Meehan, noting, "The next morning, Friday, a mob appeared upon the Baltimore waterfront under the guise of seamen and their sympathizers."⁶

Ryan's correspondence with Meehan was an attempt to defend his actions during Bridges' East Coast tour. According to Ryan, Bridges antagonized Ryan by

³ Mers, *Working the Waterfront*, 171.

⁴ Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*, 96.

⁵ Quin, *The Big Strike*, 223.

⁶ ILWU Coast Committee Case File 1936-1937, Carton 8, File, Maritime Strike Correspondence, J. Ryan, Pres. ILA, Letter to Mathew Meehan, dated 12 January 1937.

telegraphing his office with a challenge to attend the Madison Square Garden mass meeting “to answer charges of strikebreaking.” Although given the opportunity to defend himself and explain his position to the rank and file, Ryan elected to decline, explaining “How ridiculous it would have been for the president of our organization to address a meeting arranged by the Communist Party...to which no representative of the AF of L...or the New York District Council had been invited.”⁷

In Ryan’s eyes, Bridges’ decision to strike the “Big Three” along with the unions of the MFPC was the problem of the Pacific Coast District of the ILA. Ryan was far more tolerant than the ISU officials in allowing his ILA West Coast locals to affiliate with the MFPC. However, a sympathy strike in favor of insurgent seamen to appease Bridges would have been akin to relinquishing control of the ILA on the East Coast. Bridges quickly discovered that his attempt to induce an East Coast coup d’état against Ryan would not be immediately successful and that he had to attend more pressing matters on the West Coast.

Although his critics were quick to point out the East Coast mission as a failure, Bridges conceivably could have led an insurgent longshore strike analogous to the seamen strike led by Curran had he been given more time. Speaking to strikers at San Pedro mass meeting in late December, Bridges made it apparent that he was considering returning to East Coast to challenge Ryan once more. In the militant city of Baltimore, Ryan had lost control and the longshoremen were ready to fight. In Philadelphia, Ryan maintained only tenuous control by employing thugs who exerted their control over the

⁷ *Ibid.*

rank and file through violence. Although in Boston the men appeared intimidated, an intensive campaign could successfully lure the Bostonians out in a short amount of time.⁸

In the aftermath of Ryan's firing of Bridges from the executive committee of the ILA, Bridges received an open declaration of support from Lundeberg in the 17 December edition of the *Voice* that charged that Ryan was attempting to defeat the strike by removing the rank-and-file elected Bridges.⁹ In spite of his open statement of support of Bridges in the *Voice*, it was Lundeberg's other actions, combined with other stories printed in the 17 December *Voice*, that derailed Bridges' East Coast mission and forced him to scamper back to San Francisco.

"Strike End Looms"

With Bridges three thousand miles away attempting to build a grand coalition, the shipowners, seized their opportunity to divide the workers. They offered Lundeberg numerous concessions and reached a tentative agreement with the SUP boss. However, it was not Lundeberg's negotiations that thwarted Bridges' attempt to lure the East Coast stevedores off the docks, but rather, Mayes' depiction of the tentative agreement as a

⁸ *Maritime Strike News*, "Official Publication of the San Pedro Joint Strike Committee, (San Pedro), 30 December 1936, 1

⁹ *Voice of the Federation*, 17 December 1936, 1.

virtual settlement. Controversy erupted within union circles after the release of a December 17 *Voice* headline stating "Strike End Looms:"

Hope for a successful ending of the strike rest on...the Sailors' Union of the Pacific...and the shipowners. Receding from their uncompromising stand, the shipowners have agreed to recognize the Union hiring hall.... The employers agree to give preference in employment to membership of the Sailors Union of the Pacific and to secure their unlicensed deck personnel through the offices of the Sailors Union of the Pacific. This action removes some of the main obstacles in the way of reaching an agreement.¹⁰

This story made it appear as if the SUP was breaking with the Maritime Federation as negotiations with the various other affiliates of the MFPC had yet to be resumed. This, of course, undercut Bridges' attempt to garner support among the longshore locals along the Atlantic seaboard as East Coast longshoremen assumed their West Coast brethren were on the verge of defeating their employers. As an infuriated Bridges was forced to scurry abruptly back to San Francisco, mass confusion within the Maritime Federation's hierarchy ensued. As the minutes from the day's Joint Marine Strike Committee demonstrate, the headline of *The Voice* nearly led to a physical assault against Mayes by the longshoremen:

At the conclusion of this report, in which the headline of the Dec. 17th issue of the *Voice of the Federation* was criticized, a delegate from Local 38-79 (ILA) rose and stated he would go to Local 38-79...and get volunteers to clean out such elements. I wish to inform all delegates here that Local 38-79 is on record against any form of vigilantism and does not concur in such actions.... Inasmuch as certain individuals... are not helping to create unity and any attempts by anybody to disrupt the solid front against shipowners at this time is not true unionism. Individuals responsible for such action have no place on the waterfront. I repeat,

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

as a member of Local 38-79, I will do everything in my power to drive such elements from our midst.¹¹

The Disposal of Mayes

Upon his return to San Francisco, Bridges and his followers concentrated their efforts on disposing of Mayes permanently. The Mayes controversy was thrust into the open as all the affiliates of the MFPC held mass meetings in quick succession to determine Mayes' future status as *Voice* editor. With the exception of the SUP, all the Maritime Federation affiliates supported the permanent dismissal of Mayes.¹² Henry Schmidt, in an interview on 29 November 1974, recalled his difficulty in chairing the ILA meeting that was attended by Mayes:

Of course, the fact of the matter was that the strike might be terminated and the unions might get better contracts, but it was certainly an error putting out a piece saying that it had been won. Well, Harry went after Mayes. Anyhow, Barney Mayes was requested to come to that meeting. He was on the platform...and was taken to task.... It wasn't an easy meeting to handle. On one occasion, Barney said something that wasn't exactly complementary.... I don't recall how many more papers Barney was allowed.... I'm pretty sure he got the sack.¹³

¹¹ ILWU Coast Committee Case File, 1936-37, Carton 6, File, JMSC San Francisco, JMSC minutes, 17 December 1936,3.

¹² MFPC Records, Box 54, Letters, Barney Mayes, (no.8), Bridges letter to editorial board and all ILA locals, 7 January 1937.

¹³ Henry Schmidt, *Secondary Leadership in the ILWU*, interviewed by Stein 29 November 1974, 171, 172.

Mayes would eventually dub the longshoremen meeting held to decide his fate as “the first Moscow trial in America.” In recalling his experience of attending the contentious longshoremen’s meeting, Mayes insists Schmidt refused to allow him to speak:

Schmidt introduced Bridges. He hacked away with the same old crap.... His main contention was that I had shown favoritism to the sailors and had discriminated against the longshoremen.... I could hardly finish a few sentences before I was interrupted with catcalls.... Bridges took advantage by asking that I be heard.... Just as I had their ears, Schmidt interrupted to read a few alleged important messages.... Not aware his holding a mike I said to him, ‘You lousy sunnuvabitch, are you afraid to let me speak?’ My remarks carried over the speaker set off a real pandemonium.... I lashed away at this point, concluding my remarks by accusing Bridges of having lied.... Using as an excuse the meeting had extended its time to report for picket duty, the commies proceeded to railroad a motion that I be removed as editor.¹⁴

Following the ILA meeting, Mayes attended the seamen’s meeting where he claims he was given a drastically different reception. Although Mayes’ recollections of the respective ILA and SUP meetings may have been embellished, there can be little doubt the relations between the two leading unions within the MFPC were extremely strained, Mayes lay at the center of the hostilities, and that the SUP stood alone in its support of the beleaguered *Voice* editor. Mayes recalls concluding the SUP meeting with a tirade directed at Bridges and the CP, “It was hard for me to break into the applause... but before I finished I made it plain ...that every damn one of them, not excluding Bridges, had to be a member of the Communist Party.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Mayes, “Autobiography,” 632, 633.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 643.

Mayes was not quite done wreaking havoc within the Maritime Federation.

Shortly before Christmas, Lundeberg left San Francisco to visit once again the northwestern locals. In his absence, a mysterious SUP Publicity Committee responded to Mayes' expulsion by releasing an official bulletin that was nothing more than a derisive assault on Bridges. Portions of the 22 December bulletin #32 read as follows:

To the membership! Sailors! Pass this along to your fellow longshoremen.... In the past few months, particularly the past few weeks, the Sailors Union of the Pacific have been the target...disruptive, and unprincipled attacks...by a disruptive faction, in meetings addressed by members of this faction.... In the past, in the interest of preserving unity and harmony for all the maritime members, and in order not to was dirty linen in public and let the shipowners... have information...we have let these asses bray and have felt we would only be dignifying their vile slanders to even answer them. But now they have launched a PUBLIC CAMPAIGN against Brother Lundeberg.... They have asked for a fight! Now they are going to get it.... Now here are the facts. Lundeberg did negotiate an agreement-did secure the hiring hall-did secure cash overtime- did secure a wage increase of 16%-did secure many concessions.... And if Brother Bridges is mad because he had nothing to do with negotiating an agreement for the sailors-its just too bad! He must remember that even Napoleon had his Waterloo! And he has been warned.¹⁶

Later that evening a mass meeting of the MFPC was held at the Dreamland Auditorium with roughly 10,000 attendees. A resolution introduced by Albert Quittenton expressing confidence in Bridges was passed. In addition, the membership agreed to send a contingent of six delegates, one from each seafaring union to Washington, D. C. to

¹⁶ ILWU Coast Committee Case File 1936-1937, Carton 7, Publicity file.

conduct a campaign to amend the Copeland Act.¹⁷ Lundenberg's absence was convenient, for it allowed him to avoid the contentious mass meeting and to disassociate himself publicly from the anti-Bridges propaganda the SUP publicity committee had released earlier in the day.

However, in Lundeberg's absence an attempted *putsch* occurred within the SUP ranks. Although details of exactly what happened and who was responsible remain a matter of debate, it is clear that elements within the SUP were attempting to guide the seamen's union towards more harmonious relations with the ILA while Lundeberg was out of town. According to the *Western Worker*, SUP members took matters into their own hands and assembled a special meeting in which Austin Hansen of the publicity committee was recalled.¹⁸ Mayes suspected that Perry, who temporarily assumed control of the SUP Publicity Committee, was in cahoots with the CP. According to Mayes, he managed to recapture the SUP for the Lundeberg clique:

It was just a short time before Christmas... I received a series of calls about a special bulletin issued by the Sailors' Union on mimeographed paper proclaiming the need to bury the hatchet and proposing peace between all factions in the spirit of the holiday season.

I was so goddamned mad that I could not dress fast enough... I do remember Norma having presented some material to our waterfront group who had repudiated it.... The first thing I did was order all copies of the bulletin to be picked up and destroyed. In this I was supported by the officials and the other militants... who were as indignant as I was and at a loss of how it came to be published and who was responsible.

¹⁷ MFPC Records, Box 6, Third Convention, Misc. Reports by District Councils file, (no. 5) Brown's district council report, 16

¹⁸ *Western Worker*, 4 January 1937, 4.

There were no traces of...Norma. All I could find out about Harry's whereabouts, he was stalled in some snowstorm south of Portland with no way of contacting him.¹⁹

Mayes maintained that he learned of the CP-Perry plot against Lundeberg indirectly through his wife, who purportedly learned of a Party offer to halt the campaign against the SUP boss in exchange for Mayes' resignation. Mayes' presence as temporary editor of the *Voice* was becoming a liability to Lundeberg, and even Mayes realized the SUP boss was eager to disassociate from the entire Mayes controversy. Hence, rather than continue to fight, he offered his resignation as temporary editor of the *Voice*. Mayes recalled telling Lundeberg of his decision, "I told Harry of my intended resignation with which he agreed, holding down as best he could his enthusiasm from showing.... I remember discussing the importance of timing any agreement so that Bridges would not get credit for it. This to him was of great concern personally as well as politically."²⁰

Although Mayes' significant role in the propaganda war directed against Bridges is undeniable, he was a minor casualty as the editorial board of the *Voice* remained under control of the Lundeberg forces. However, Lundeberg's participation in the SUP propaganda campaign against Bridges is difficult to ascertain. He happened to be out of town as the scathing 22 December bulletin #32 was released despite the fact negotiations were at a critical stage. We do know that another member of the SUP was willing to accept the full responsibility for the anti-Bridges propaganda. According to the minutes

¹⁹ Mayes, "Autobiography," 648.

²⁰ *Ibid.* , 652-955.

of the Joint Strike Committee of 26 December: "Bro. Tillman SUP: Reports bulletin put out by SUP, which contained statements against Bro. Bridges cased considerable comment. States as an officer and member of the SUP he will take full responsibility for this bulletin and is proud to back it up."²¹

What was the reaction of the rank-and-file to the SUP strike bulletin #32?

According to an article in the *Western Worker* entitled "Reaction of Pickets on the Waterfront to Vicious SUP Bulletin was one of Disgust" many of the MFPC workers were repulsed by the brazenly aggressive stance of the SUP bulletin. Purportedly written "by a Sailors' Union member" the writer conducted several interviews on the picket line to gage the sentiments of the rank and file. Segments of the article stated:

Stevedores were asking sailors if they were breaking away from the Federation. But no one seemed to know.... the Sailors' Publicity Committee... had just declared war on Harry Bridges....

Again...they failed to take into consideration... the rank-and-file.... What they have to say and feel about this is what really goes on along the waterfront....

'Harry Bridges is good enough for me. He was okay in 34 and he is just the same now. I wonder where a lot of those fellows who are attacking him have been keeping themselves. Nobody saw them around before this strike.'²²

Lundeberg's motivation for negotiating the tentative settlement that sparked so much controversy is purely a matter of conjecture. It is conceivable that the employers' sudden offer of key concessions caused Lundeberg to act in haste and he sincerely believed his actions would pave the way towards settlement for all the unions. On the

²¹ ILWU Coast Committee Case File, 1936-1937, Carton 6, File, JMSC San Francisco, JMSC minutes, 26 December 1936, 4.

²² *Western Worker*, 4 January 1937, 3.

other hand, Lundeberg may have intentionally attempted to thwart Bridges' campaign on the East Coast. The Bridges-Curran alliance and the momentum towards a national maritime federation may have been seen by Lundeberg as a threat to his role as the unquestioned leader of the West Coast seamen.

Regardless of Lundeberg's motives, clearly there was an inability or an unwillingness of the two labor leaders to coordinate their strategies. With the longshore leader on the East Coast and SUP boss engaged in negotiations, the two leaders were actively pursuing conflicting agendas, and each was in a position to emerge as the strike's leader. Had the East Coast dockworkers responded to the call to defy Ryan, Bridges' ability to lure the ILA to strike would have been hailed as a significant step towards victory. In the end, of course, Lundeberg's tentative settlement foiled Bridges' East Coast campaign.

IX The Strike's End

Although some workers praised Lundeberg for his negotiating skills, he was forced to contend with the accusation that he was a “secret negotiator” by the Bridges’ clique. However, the MFPC, as well as the general public, were well aware of his bargaining sessions while Bridges on the East Coast. In addition, the agreement was tentative, subjected to both SUP and Maritime Federation review. Arguably, it was not Lundeberg’s negotiations that damaged the position of the Federation, but rather it was the inability of the *Voice* to conceal the employers’ concessions within the tentative agreement pending SUP and MFPC review that damaged the Maritime Federation’s position.

It appears that the 17 December article was crafted exclusively for political reasons. In addition to sabotaging Bridges’ expedition to the East Coast, the *Voice* article entitled “Strike End Looms” implied that Lundeberg was leading the MFPC towards victory, though he represented only one component, the SUP. Unfortunately, Mayes editorship had non-political ramifications; it inevitably crippled the strikers’ position on the West Coast as the rank and file faced a cut in food and shelter donations.

Making Ends Meet

The ability of the unions to feed, shelter, and clothe the strikers had been instrumental asset in the Maritime Federation's arsenal. However, the 17 December *Voice* predictably led to a drastic decline in community and union donations that had been invaluable in preventing the employers from starving the strikers into submission. According to Bridges, "Records of the San Francisco Joint Strike Committee show that on that day and on subsequent days, receipts and donations from other unions and sources dropped one thousand dollars a day."¹

Accordingly, the strikers soon faced an emerging crisis in food and housing. Operating costs of the soup kitchen during the strike ran in excess of eleven hundred dollars a day. With donations slowing down to a trickle, the soup kitchen suddenly found it necessary to turn hungry strikers away. To make matters worse, hundreds of strikers, dependent upon letters of credit from the MFPC for their housing, were suddenly faced with the prospect of sleeping in the streets in early January.²

The Maritime Federation had managed to shoulder the majority of the financial burden by means of donations. However, in the aftermath of the *Voice* headline proclaiming the end of the strike to be near, strikers were increasingly forced to seek aid

¹ MFPC Records, Box 54, Letters, Barney Mayes, (no.8), Bridges letter to editorial board and all ILA locals, 7 January 1937.

² *Ibid.*, Box 6, Third Convention, Misc. Reports by District Councils file, (no. 5) Brown's district council report, 48.

from the government. Attaining government relief proved to be exceedingly difficult for single men. To help combat the food and shelter problem facing the strikers, the Single Men's Relief Committee was organized on 4 January, and on the following day, members of the new Committee, meeting with the Assistant Relief Administrator for the State of California, managed to secure \$18.75 a month for single men of the MFPC to apply towards housing.³

Despite the willingness of the government to subsidize housing for the single strikers, funds could not be distributed fast enough to accommodate the growing demand for assistance. Within a few days, the County Director of State Relief was met by a contingent of fifty strikers pleading for state housing assistance. At the meeting's conclusion, he agreed to accept one hundred men per day. By 1 February three thousand single men were deemed eligible to receive state relief. Regrettably, not all striking seamen were eligible due to residency requirements that stipulated recipients of California relief were required to have lived one year in the state and three years in the United States.⁴

The emerging housing and food shortage compelled Bridges' forces to embark on a campaign to revive the strike, a tactic that allowed their opponents to portray Bridges as the lone obstacle to a settlement. The longshore leader found himself forced to clarify his position in regards to the East Coast situation as rumors swirled that he had cemented his alliance with Curran and his insurrectionary seamen by pledging to keep the MFPC on

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

strike pending a settlement on the East Coast. Although Bridges attempted to defuse the rumors by issuing a public statement proclaiming that no commitment had been made to Curran, his opponents continued to exploit Bridges' East Coast excursion to confuse the issues and give the appearance that his alliance with the insurgent sailors stood in the way of a settlement.⁵

The Attempted Isolation of Bridges

The attempt to isolate and alienate Bridges from the rank-and-file was supported by an assortment of industrialists and politicians. For instance, the Associated Farmers of Stanislaus County announced it had initiated a petition seeking his deportation on 31 December 1936. The group claimed it would collect 35,000 signatures demanding Bridges' deportation on the grounds he has "established a dictatorship among his followers based on force and violence," had been repudiated by Ryan because of a "tie-up with communist leaders," and had "opposed the 'American' way of doing things as well as other charges."⁶

On 5 January, bargaining with all unions resumed with the exception of Bridges' longshore union. According to Plant, Bridges and the ILA stood in the way of a settlement by rejecting "a final attempt" to bring about peace. Plant and the employers offered the ILA an extension of the 1934 terms in their so-called "final attempt" to end

⁵ *Labor Clarion*, 25 December 1936, 1.

⁶ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1 January 1937, Sec. 1, 4.

the standoff. The longshore union argued for an agreement by the “Big Three” that mirrored the terms offered by the lesser companies on 26 October.⁷

The resumption of maritime negotiations was overshadowed by a 5 January nationwide radio address by San Francisco Mayor Angelo Rossi in which the mayor joined the attack on Bridges. In his statement, Rossi attempted to place the blame of the strike’s continuation on Bridges’ desire for power. In concluding, he also pleaded with Roosevelt for presidential intervention, stating:

I deem it my duty...to lay before the public at this time the facts.... Regardless of optimistic statements...the plain truth is there is no prospect of peace.... I am advised that the sailors and the shipowners had arrived at an agreement.... I am further advised that a peaceful solution ...could be arrive at.... I have been told ...that the solution...was bound up with the ambitions of certain leaders....A national emergency confronts us.... Only by the President’s intervention can this be accomplished.⁸

Rossi was not alone in demanding that Roosevelt intervene and settle the dispute. Led by the mayors of Berkeley and Oakland, officials from sixteen local municipalities and seven counties followed Rossi’s lead by endorsing his radio address and telegraphed Roosevelt with a plea “on behalf of 200,000” persons in the Bay Area to end the maritime labor dispute. A hastily formed executive committee, consisting of two

⁷ *Ibid.* 6 January 1937, Sec. 1, 1, 11.

⁸ *Ibid.* , 5; ILWU Coast Committee Case Files, Carton 7, Longshore Case file, Rossi, Angelo, “*The Truth About the Maritime Strike*,” Transcript of 5 January 1937 national radio address.

representatives from each county, agreed to wire the labor leaders and shipowners informing them of their determination to affect an end to the “impossible” situation.⁹

Far from being an impossible situation, the strike finally appeared to be near resolution. In contrast to the ILA impasse, negotiations with several unions had been going well. The Fireman’s Union, as well as the SUP, claimed to have reached an agreement. Other unions claimed to be “almost in accord” or separated by “only one point of consequence.” The only union not actively engaged in negotiations was Bridges’ ILA, although the longshore officials stood ready to meet immediately.¹⁰

At this point, the employers’ strategy of isolating the ILA was startling simple and transparent. With the MFPC visibly disjointed in the aftermath of the Bridges’ visit to the East Coast, the employers abruptly offered concessions on several points to the other Maritime Federation affiliates that were previously deemed beyond compromise, while relegating Bridges and the ILA to the sidelines. The solidarity of the MFPC, despite the political infighting that had been occurring within its leadership circles, had presented the shipowners with a serious challenge. The most effective way to combat the Maritime Federation was to detach the ILA from the MFPC. The longshoremen, consisting of nearly half the MFPC membership, were the heart of the Maritime Federation. Moreover, no labor leader had displayed organizational talent comparable to Bridges’ ability.

⁹ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 9 January 1937, Sec. 1, 12.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Although the ILA appeared to be the only union incapable of reaching an understanding with the employers, the other unions within the MFPC remained adamant in its position that no contract would be signed unless every affiliate reached an agreement and the Maritime Federation was kept intact. Despite the acrimonious relationships within MFPC officialdom, it appears that the idea of actually forsaking the concept of a Maritime Federation in favor of complete autonomy was never seriously considered.

Nonetheless, the MFPC infighting continued. Even if Mayes had departed, Bridges' clash with the *Voice* continued as the newspaper's editorial board announced the impending publication of the Mayes' proceedings. In a 7 January letter composed by Bridges, released to the editorial board of *The Voice* and all Pacific Coast ILA locals, the longshore leader pleaded in vain to the editorial board to preserve MFPC unity by refraining from printing the transcripts of the Mayes investigation during the strike.¹¹

Bridges managed to deflect some of the attention away from the publication of Mayes' transcripts by making a nationwide radio address in which he replied to the broadcasting of Mayor Rossi. Bridges portraying the conflict in the astonishingly simple terms of a few stockholders aligning against the interests of thousands of workers:

Exactly one week ago tonight Mayor Angelo Rossi broadcast a speech.... That speech was of the utmost importance since it dealt with ... a controversy between forty thousand American workingmen on one hand and thirty-nine stockholders on the other.... Mayor Rossi took the side of the shipowners and delivered a propaganda speech in exact conformity with the strikebreaking publicity

¹¹ MFPC Records, Box 54, Letters, Barney Mayes, (no.8), Bridges letter to editorial board and all ILA locals, 7 January 1937.

campaign of the Waterfront Employers Association...Mayor Rossi's speech was nothing more or less than another effort to break this strike instead of settling it.¹²

Of course, Bridges was aware that the employers were faced with seemingly endless complexities in attempting to negotiate with several different unions concurrently. Even so, both sides had engaged in potentially constructive negotiations and public debate during December. When agreement could not be reached however, both sides resorted to simplistic sound bites, imagery, and slogans. The radio warfare of propaganda and disinformation continued as Plant addressed a nationwide radio audience on 16 January. The employers once again attempted to paint Bridges' personal ambitions as the primary stumbling block to an immediate peace. What is more, Plant's speech chided Bridges for his alleged ties to the CP agenda, "The Communist Party is openly advocating a continuation and extension of this labor unrest and turmoil, that it spreads its vicious activities into ...agriculture and shore industry.... The alien labor leader (Bridges) who openly attacks our county...is best condemned by his...statements."¹³

In addition to Plant's tirade against Bridges, the remainder of his radio address reveals why he became the number one enemy in the eyes of the MFPC membership. Plant asserted that industrial peace reigned for "many long years" along the waterfront prior to 1934, when, amid "exaggerated" reports of "injustices and hardships" a violent strike broke out after the strikers rejected peaceful means for a settlement. What is more,

¹² *Western Worker*, 18 January 1937, 1, transcript of Bridges' nationwide radio address of 12 January 1937.

¹³ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 17 January 1937, 5.

he asserted that the employers attempted to abide by the agreements but the union proved to be an untrustworthy negotiating partner by advocating “quickies.” Declaring that the employers were misrepresented as intending to nullify the 1934 gains of the ILA, Plant said, “We do not want to take...a single gain legally secured...we do not want the unions to attempt to take advantage illegally or by means of job action or ‘quickie strikes’”¹⁴

Negotiations Resume

Plant’s speech was only one of the numerous recent unconstructive developments. Though the ILA reported at a Joint Policy Committee meeting that although the employers had resumed negotiations with the dockworkers, the negotiations were proceeding at an exceedingly slow rate. Furthermore, the ILA reported the steam schooner group had injected potentially explosive and age-old jurisdictional problems into the picture. To make matters worse the SUP, widely believed to be the union leading the way towards a settlement, reported a new obstacle. The seamen’s union revealed during the negotiations on 16 January, that it planned to refer the agreement to their negotiating committee to debate seeking changes in certain clauses. Plant responded by threatening the sailors that any proposed changes at this stage would force the employers to scrap the agreement entirely.¹⁵

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ MFPC Records, Box 11, Joint Policy Committee Minutes file (no.3), Joint Policy Committee meeting, 16 January 1937, 4.

Naturally, the maritime workers increasingly found themselves openly debating the merits and flaws of the Lundeberg-Plant settlement on the picket lines as well as in the *Voice*, the *Waterfront Worker*, and the *Western Worker* and in various striker bulletins. Arguably, the debate boiled down to a question over the merits of Lundeberg as a viable labor leader. Bridges' ILA adopted a predictably negative view of the Plant-Lundeberg agreement. At the same time the ILA encouraged the sailors to decide their own fate but reminded the SUP to adhere to the general consensus that any union could come to terms with the employers, but none would return to work until all the others had reached accords. According to ILA Strike Bulletin #23 released on 7 January 1937:

The Longshoremen are not concerned with the Sailors' ...agreement-that's up to their respective membership, and as far as we know the employers are wrong when they say members of the sailors' union...have accepted the agreements.... At present, the ILA District officials cannot recommend the acceptance of these points without jeopardizing our entire organization. OUR BUSSINESS: it is certainly not the business of the longshoremen if the sailors wish to work under such terms, but the membership must resist to the very end, this latest maneuver of the shipowners to shackle an agreement onto the ILA.¹⁶

In the meantime, a flurry of letters both pro and con appeared in both the *Voice* and the *Western Worker*, prompting Lundeberg to defend his actions in the 14 January 1937 edition of the *Voice*:

Why did I meet with the shipowners? Because I wanted get the best possible terms for the sailors' union and my idea of getting the best terms is not to put things in the newspapers, but to go straight to the shipowners with the backing of

¹⁶ ILWU Local 10 Strike Bulletin, no. 23, 7 January 1937

a solid picket line...and this is what the sailors got; control of the hiring hall; cash overtime, raise in overtime rates; recognition of the Sailors' Union of the Pacific for collective bargaining. These are the things that the shipowners said they would never give us. Read the terms.... See what we got.... We'll work shoulder to shoulder with other unions in the common fight.... Let the unions count on the sailors 100 percent until the strike is brought to a victorious conclusion.¹⁷

The most extensive and high profile opposition to the Lundeberg-Plant agreement stemmed from Bridges' SUP ally Albert Quittenton, who had recently introduced a resolution that was passed at a mass MFPC meeting expressing confidence in Bridges' leadership.¹⁸ He publicly attacked the Lundeberg-Plant settlement in an editorial entitled "Sailors' Tentative Pact No Victory" that appeared in the *Western Worker* (a condensed version also appeared in the rank and file section of the *Voice*). Portions of Quittenton's editorial read as follows:

After a through study of the agreement...of the Sailors union of the Pacific, I would like to offer my comments and analysis....

Article 5 is the joker... 'shipowners shall have the right to reject men found unsatisfactory and 'unsuitable'....

Article 18 is the port committee.... Also, this idea of a federal judge is absolutely out.... And pray tell, who is a federal judge? I am sure and so are you...that if a federal judge has any sympathy it is not with labor.¹⁹

¹⁷ *Voice of the Federation*, 14 January 1937, 1.

¹⁸ Markholt, *Maritime Solidarity*, 310.

¹⁹ *Western Worker*, 19 January 1937, 3.

Despite Quittenton's defeat in his recent challenge to Lundeberg in the SUP elections, he had managed to gain roughly one-fourth of the membership's vote. Consequently, Quittenton's campaign to reject the Lundeberg agreement was taken seriously enough to prompt a sharp response from the SUP attorney Aaron Sapiro:

The letter from Quittenton reads like the statement of a man who spits in the soup because he doesn't like the cook At no place does it say what the sailors gained.... It is more than the International Longshoremen's Association ever got, at any time, even though Quittenton talks so proudly of the achievements of the longshoremen and seems to want the Sailors' Union to become simply a seafaring branch of the ILA.... Quittenton's anger has run away with his power of intelligent analysis.²⁰

Seaman William Caves, a former member of the MWIU, and seaman Charles Hansen replied to Sapiro's anti-Quittenton diatribe with a fiery letter in the following issue of the *Voice*. Their commentary chastised Sapiro for attempting to exploit age-old craft jealousies. According to Caves and Hansen, "Brother Quittenton is a ... seaman.... Sapiro is practicing law. Legal advice and clarifications of certain clauses are certainly within his province, but a scathing criticism of a ... member... is certainly outside the province of an 'honorary member.'"²¹

In the intervening time, other issues emerged that overshadowed the future of the Lundeberg-Plant agreement. The age-old jurisdictional dispute over the right to unload steam schooner lumber at the smaller ports once again divided the MFPC. The Maritime Federation had attempted to put the problem to rest at its 1936 Convention by adopting

²⁰ *Voice of the Federation*, 23 January 1937, 3.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 28 January 1937, 2.

Resolution 59-A that stated that all front and sling men must be longshoremen, if the ILA was present and available in said port. However, one hatch was to be worked by a sailor gang, thus providing the seamen with some work. In addition, the sailor gang could start work on a second hatch, but only if work had not been previously begun on that hatch by longshoremen.²²

Regardless of the straightforward attempt of Resolution 59-A to prevent jurisdictional problems from erupting, the major sticking point to materialize was jurisdictional work on steam schooners. The problem stemmed not from the wording of the tentative SUP, but rather, an agreement that was worked out with the Masters, Mates, and Pilots. The wording of the Masters, Mates, and Pilots' tentative agreement provided the union would return to work with the "previous practice" on steam schooners regarding their tending of hatches.²³ Clearly, the ambiguous wording of the Masters, Mates, and Pilots agreement conflicted with the MFPC resolution 59-A.

The Masters, Mates, and Pilots' contract negotiations had proven to be quite problematic during past. Although the Masters, Mates, and Pilots numbered a mere 3000 members, the men were "licensed" personal, deemed the elite affiliate of the MFPC. In contrast, the "unlicensed seamen," the members of the crews in the deck department, engine department, and stewards' department, ranked below the Masters, Mates, and Pilots. Consequently, after extensive debate, the employers had successfully extracted

²² MFPC Records, Box 3, Second Convention, Proceedings and Documents file, (no.4), 6 June 1936, 1.

²³ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 28 January 1937, Sec. 1, 1,4.

employer control of hiring Masters, Mates, and, Pilots.²⁴ The employer insistence on determining job assignments may have reflected the legitimate difficulty of attempting to negotiate several contracts in tandem. Possibly, the Masters, Mates, and Pilots were awarded extra work along steam schooners, in spite of the potential problems with the ILA, as a concession to counterbalance employer control of hiring. On the other hand, the employers may have intentionally attempted to isolate the ILA, and stir up age-old craft rivalries in a last ditch effort to shatter the MFPC.

Notwithstanding the inevitable objections of the ILA, the employers held firm in their insistence that certain stevedoring work on steam schooners be under the jurisdiction of the Masters, Mates, and Pilots. The ILA responded by arguing that jurisdictional problems should be left to the unions and alleging that the employers were inserting the jurisdictional dispute in an effort to block any settlement, thereby breaking the unity of the MFPC. The employers countered the ILA charge by once again pointing to the militant use of “quickies.” Plant stated, “It was hoped that those awards (1934) would form the basis for a new and lasting peace and that the old relationship between employer and employee would be established.” On the contrary, “a situation developed...a campaign of job action or so-called ‘quickie strikes’...openly resorted to gain the unions advantages not intended by agreements and awards” Because of that, Plant claimed the steamship companies realized the necessity of changing the

²⁴ *Ibid.* , 1 January 1937, Sec. 1, 4.

jurisdictional agreements and amending them in such a way that “would assure their observance and enforcement in the future.”²⁵

The unions ultimately proved resistant to allowing the employers to determine jurisdictional duties as the various affiliates rallied behind the ILA proposal of settling jurisdictional conflicts within the confines of the MFPC. The employers responded to the united front presented by the Maritime Federation by suddenly announcing on 23 January their refusal to hold further negotiations. Plant stated, “Our refusal to hold further meetings at this time is required...to make it perfectly clear to the ...unions that we are not continuing to negotiate agreements and that our offers represent the maximum extent...the industry can go without jeopardizing its existence.”²⁶

Were the employers laying a trap in the hope that age-old jurisdictional rivalries would seep to the surface forcing the ILA to break from the seafaring unions? Although the unions had managed to present a united position, the employer tactic of freezing the negotiations could very well have resulted in union animosity being turned inward. The employers were attempting to force the MFPC to scrap Resolution 59-A and cut at the very heart of the Maritime Federation’s constitution. Once again, however, the unity of the MFPC proved strongest when the employers attempted to isolate the ILA or control hiring procedures.

²⁵ *Ibid.* , 17 January 1937, Sec. 1, 5.

²⁶ *Ibid.* , 24 January 1937, 24 January 1937, Sec.1. 4.

So, the situation was at yet another impasse. On the other hand, hopes for a settlement suddenly improved as the East Coast and Gulf Coast strikes came to an end. Curran and his wildcat strikers agreed to forsake immediate gains in exchange for a National Labor Relation Board election, in which the eastern sailors would choose between remaining with Furusth's ISU or rallying behind Curran's rank-and-file Seamen's Committee. According an ILA strike bulletin, "East Coast seamen...placed themselves in a strategic position to get rid of the ISU leadership. A national Labor Relations Board poll, to be taken soon, will give the rank and file the opportunity to repudiate the officers who have hampered them for so long."²⁷

The end of the East Coast conflict had broad implications. With the decision to hold a NSU-ISU referendum along the East Coast, the death of the ISU was considered a foregone conclusion. In addition, Bridges was suddenly relieved of a tremendous burden as the contentious issue of whether to hold out to support the East Coast strikers unexpectedly disappeared. Within a few days, the longshore leader would release a brief statement praising his East Coast collaborator; "We have aided the East Coast in getting organized.... Curran will help the East Coast longshoremen get rid of Ryan like we helped the sailors get rid of Scharrenberg out here."²⁸

With the death of the ISU seemingly assured, the strike situation cleared up along the Gulf Coast as well. Although the tremendously violent and complex Gulf strike was officially called off, the striking seamen had retained their militancy. According to

²⁷ ILWU Local 10 Strike Bulletin, no. 28, 29 January 1937.

²⁸ *Ibid.* , no. 29 2 February 1937.

MFGC president Gilbert Mers, “ In the last days of January the strike was called off-as far as the picket lines were concerned. A slogan was raised, ‘Carry the strike to the ships; I think the Communists Party people get credit for that. Whoever first voiced it, it caught on.”²⁹

The Police Raid Holman’s “Union Hall”

Amid the announcements of maritime peace on the East Coast and along the Gulf Coast was the final high-profile reemergence of Lee Holman and his new “union” in San Francisco. Although his December 1936 organizational meeting had attracted only a few hundred followers, Holman claimed in late January to be the organizer and president of the Maritime and Transportation Servicemen’s Union of the Pacific, a union with a membership of more than 15,000. In addition to physically assaulting outnumbered strikers, Holman’s thugs also purportedly resorted to terrorist acts directed at the offices of the *Voice* in late January. On three consecutive nights passing automobiles hurled a barrage of heavy rocks through the windows of the offices of the Federation’s newspaper.³⁰

The patience of law enforcement was exhausted after a second wild melee broke out between Holman’s men and longshoremen in the heart of the San Francisco’s business district on 23 January. Following the scuffle between Holman’s men and members of the ILA, a police raid on Holman’s Howard Street residence led to the confiscation of a number of clubs, blackjacks, and knives. The police also netted 23 of

²⁹ Mers, *Working the Waterfront*, 175.

³⁰ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 24 January 1937, Sec. 1, 1.

the men, citing them as vagrants with no visible means of support. These men claimed to belong to Holman's union, but with few exceptions, none had worked in the maritime industry.³¹ Disdain for Holman's vigilante union seemed to be the only issue Lundeberg, Bridges, the judges, the police, and the employers could readily agree on. With the end of the East and Gulf Coasts maritime strikes and Holman's ruffians either in jail or leaving town, pressure on the employers and the unions to come to a settlement became intense.

On 26 January, local government officials of the Bay Area met with both shipowners and union spokesmen to ascertain if an impasse had been reached. All parties agreed that they would prefer to handle the situation without government interference. Bridges expressed the utmost confidence in Roosevelt while Plant claimed that he would accept presidential intervention "unquestionably and without condition." Nevertheless there was a key dissimilarity in their positions. Whereas Bridges argued that presidential intervention through a government-appointed arbitration board should cover the few remaining differences, Plant maintained that the entire settlement should be open to arbitration. In the end, the parties agreed to Lundeberg's plan simply to reopen negotiations. "Why not let it ride a couple of days and see if the workers and the employers can't get together?" he suggested, "There is a possibility of everything being fixed up in twenty-four hours."³²

³¹ *Ibid.* , 24 January 1937, Sec. 1, 1.

³² *Ibid.* , 27 January 1937, Sec. 1, 4.

On the surface, Lundeberg appeared to be the diplomat leading the way to the negotiating table. However, he attempted to insert a new item into the agenda that would make a settlement more difficult to attain. Lundeberg unexpectedly proposed a plan to prolong the strike until the Copeland Act was repealed. The SUP boss, who just a few weeks earlier claimed to be the one leading the road maritime peace and who managed to convince the employers to reopen talks, was now actively recruiting not only MFPC affiliates, but also politicians, including San Francisco Mayor Rossi, to back his plan to prolong the strike until the Copeland Act was repealed.³³ As could be expected, Bridges claimed such a proposal constituted a “new” issue, and the ILA executive board strenuously opposed Lundeberg’s new plan.³⁴

Lundeberg clearly knew what Bridges’ position on this cause would be and his action could be viewed as a challenge to the longshore leader’s position. The two had been jockeying for months to control the Maritime Federation. The position of the rank-and-file in regards to the Copeland Act issue would, without a doubt, indicate which leader controlled the MFPC. Lundeberg was once again positioning himself to the far left. In this instance, he was suddenly calling for a strike, not against the shipowners, but rather the US government. However, the timing of events seem to indicate that Lundeberg’s actions were not necessarily a direct challenge to Bridges, but rather a legitimate attempt to shift the policies of the federal government.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ *Ibid.* 26 January 1937, Sec. 1, 4.

During most of January, it appeared that the vigorous campaign of the MFPC would result in a revision of the Copeland Act. Congressmen William I. Sirovich had introduced an amendment to it on January 22 that would make the “fink books” optional. However, the unanticipated arrival of C.W. Sanders, supervising officer of the Federal Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation, arrived in San Francisco in late January with over 60,000 continuous discharge books intended for distribution. Sanders’ arrival seemed a direct challenge to the MFPC campaign. Likewise, the Maritime Commission simply chose to ignore union demands that the enforcement of the Copeland Act be postponed until Congress could consider the proposed legislation.³⁵

In an attempt to confer with his allies and solidify his power base ahead of a 28 January MFPC mass meeting, Lundeborg called a rump meeting in advance on 27 January at the Scottish Rite Auditorium. This meeting was attended by the SUP and the other Lundberg-friendly Maritime Federation affiliates, namely the Marine Cooks and Stewards, and the Marine Firemen’s Unions. The affiliates that supported Bridges’ position on the Copeland Act, the Masters, Mates, and Pilots, the Telegraphists’ Association and the Engineers Union were not invited. The member unions snubbed by Lundeborg appealed to the Joint Marine Strike Committee, which immediately sent a delegation of four to five hundred individuals, including Bridges and Schmidt, to the auditorium to investigate Lundeborg’s actions.³⁶

³⁵ *Ibid.* , 27 January 1937, 4.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 28 January 1937, Sec. 1, 4.

Although they were not permitted to enter, Bridges, Schmidt, and their delegation continued to mill about the outside the auditorium. According to Lundeberg's allies, the decision to ban the Joint Marine Strike Committee was unanimous. However, a delegate inside the meeting claimed that when Bridges' credentials were brought in, they were tabled by the chairman and never acted upon. Bridges, as well as some delegates that claimed to have attended the meeting, maintained that half of the delegates chose to leave the meeting after he and his delegation were refused admittance. Those who left the meeting reportedly claimed that Lundeberg's actions would spilt the entire MFPC.³⁷

Details of what otherwise transpired inside the meeting are hazy and subject to debate. A vote was taken in favor of attending the meeting to be held the following day with all affiliates of the MFPC at the Dreamland Auditorium. It was reported that Lundeberg attempted to pass a resolution that would have postponed all strike settlements for six months pending a repeal of the Copeland Act. Moreover, that the meeting adjourned with a motion to give Lundberg a vote of confidence. After the meeting, the SUP released a statement to the press confirming that the three attending affiliates would be asked to sign pledge cards not to accept objectionable features of the Copeland Act.³⁸

The employers had sought to exploit the Bridges-Lundberg schism by attempting to paint Bridges as the unyielding radical who forged the alliance with Curran, thereby prolonging the strike ad infinitum. However, now with the East Coast strike settled and

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Bridges still in command of the ILA, it was Lundeberg who appeared capable of prolonging the strike, albeit with only half the MFPC. Ironically the employers, who devoted a great deal of effort towards the goal of breaking the MFPC, now seemed to realize that a fractured MFPC might not be in their best interest, as long as Lundeberg commanded enough loyalty within the ranks to prolong the strike.

Perhaps it now appeared to the employers that Bridges and Lundeberg could serve to counterbalance each other whereas bargaining with the two separately could prove to be a more difficult scenario. Forced to contend with Lundeberg's threats of prolonging the strike, pending the overturning of the Copeland Act, the employers quickly introduced a face-saving solution to the sticky jurisdictional problem. The steam schooner companies agreed to submit a plan that would allow the National Labor Relations Board to serve as a adjudicator in the regards to the jurisdictional matter.³⁹ The employer proposal was noteworthy. It was not only a sudden retreat from their position on determining jurisdictional duties, it appeared to be aimed at bringing the affiliates of the MFPC together on the sticky jurisdictional problems.

The ILA executive board agreed to recommend the proposal from the steam schooners group to their membership. Technically, the employers would preserve their tentative agreements with the SUP and Masters, Mates, and Pilots in regards to the manning of ships and crews. On the other hand, due to the dispute with the ILA, the employers also agreed to allow work to be done in accordance with the general terms of

³⁹ *Ibid.*, Sec.1, 1.

the 1934 award. Obviously, the employers' agreements contained a contradiction that would lead to inevitable jurisdictional conflicts within the MFPC. Hence, it was agreed that any arising disputes within the MFPC affiliates would be decided on a case by case basis by a joint labor committee to be located in each port.⁴⁰

The Dreamland Auditorium meeting scheduled for the following day of 28 January would allow the affiliates a chance to debate the merits of the new proposal and listen to delegates returning from Washington to report on matters of legislation in regards to the Copeland Act. As the divisions of the Maritime Federation had been thrust into the open once more, the ILA released a strike bulletin to be distributed at the meeting that attempted to affirm the unity of the MFPC:

Because all striking unions are members of the Maritime Federation of the Pacific, the 40,000 strikers will vote together.... In other words, the vote tabulation will be made on the basis of total membership and not on the basis of individual unions....

After the December 8 Civic Auditorium mass meeting, any union, particularly the longshoremen, could have stepped out and won all their demands.... One thing is clear. The Maritime Federation of the Pacific Coast had been preserved and strengthened. That is important.⁴¹

⁴⁰ MFPC Records, Box 11, Joint Policy Committee Minutes file (no.3), minutes of Joint Policy Committee meeting, 29 January 1937, 3.

⁴¹ ILWU Local 10 Strike Bulletin, no. 28, 29 January 1937; *San Francisco Chronicle*, 28 January 1937, Sec.1, 1,5.

Bridges opened the proceedings by insisting the meeting be conducted in an “orderly and democratic” fashion. Lundeberg’s proposal to lengthen the strike pending the overturning of the Copeland Act dominated the meeting. In the end, the SUP and its allies would adhere to Bridges’ position against striking against the government in an effort to overturn the Copeland Act. To appease the Lundeberg clique, the MFPC approved a telegram pleading for a suspension of the Copeland Act until “such time as Congress can act on the Sirovich resolution.” However, it must be noted that the bending of the SUP position did not come without assistance from the government. Acting in harmony with the unions, Mayor Rossi, along with Berkeley and Oakland city officials, in an effort to thwart Lundeberg’s threat to prolong the strike, telegraphed the Department of Commerce. The city officials asked Roosevelt to delay the distribution of the continuous discharge books until the grievances of the West Coast sailors could be heard. Later that evening Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins notified the unions that the requirement for the continuous discharge book would be suspended until 26 March.⁴²

The strike came to a rapid conclusion following the 28 January mass meeting. Minor differences between the ILA and the employers were quickly resolved, and the Policy Committee quickly recommended acceptance of the proposals in which all the maritime unions could claim victory. The longshoremen managed to preserve the gains achieved in 1934, including the union dispatcher. The SUP obtained its own hiring hall,

⁴² *San Francisco Chronicle*, 29 January 1937, Sec. 1, 5.

an eight-hour day and a monthly wage increase of ten dollars. The Marine Cooks and Stewards obtained a monthly wage increase of ten dollars, an eight-hour day on freighters and a nine-hour day on passenger ships in addition to hiring control. Marine Firemen got a ten-dollar increase in monthly wages, eight-hour day and hiring control. The Masters Mates and Pilots received a fifteen-dollar increase in monthly wages. The Telegraphists received a ten-dollar monthly increase in pay and hiring control. Finally, the Marine Engineers received the eight-hour day and a pay raise of fifteen dollars.⁴³ On 3 February 1937 the ILA published its final strike bulletin, #30:

Unity: After all is said and done the organized employers were defeated. They were determined to break the maritime unions. They failed because the Maritime Federation could not be broken. We have learned that no matter how strong any individual union may be or how strong it may think it is, it is not strong enough to face the employers alone. Strength the maritime workers strength lies in the Maritime Federation of the Pacific. 40,000 workers were put to the acid test....Let us preserve, build, and cherish this powerful weapon. Let us remain bound by the brotherly slogan-an injury to one is an injury to all.⁴⁴

⁴³ *Voice of the Federation*, 11 February 1937, 1.

⁴⁴ ILWU Local 10 Strike Bulletin, no. 30 3 February 1937.

X The AFL-CIO Struggle

Perhaps the most noteworthy difference between the strike of 1934 and the strike of 1936-37 was the addition of East Coast and Gulf Coast maritime strikers in the latter conflict. On one hand, the inclusion of East Coast and Gulf Coast strikers appeared to be a step towards a national maritime union. On the other hand, the open internal strife within MFPC officialdom cast doubt as to the very existence of the MFPC and West Coast maritime unity. Despite the mutually acknowledged animosities between the Bridges and Lundeberg forces, the strike situation had forced the two labor leaders to rein in their attacks upon each other. With the settlement concluded, the two opposing camps were comparatively free to step up their attacks upon each other for control of the MFPC and, possibly, the national maritime labor movement.

By and large, the strike situation also managed to push the high profile conflict between the AFL and CIO into the background of MFPC politics. With the strike settled however, the future of the maritime labor movement would become inextricably intertwined with the nationwide discord and factionalism between the AFL and CIO. Given Lundeberg's estrangement from the AFL, the SUP boss had naturally greeted the formation of John L. Lewis's committee and its outspoken advocacy of industrial unionism with enthusiasm. In contrast, Bridges and his allies responded far more tepidly to the emergence of a rival body to the AFL. According to an April 1937 copy of the

Voice, “The Sailors Union of the Pacific was the first union on the Pacific Coast to back the CIO... The ILA, on the other hand, stressed its wish to remain with the American Federation of Labor.”¹

Surprisingly, by the time the dust settled, it was the West Coast longshoremen who were awarded a CIO charter while Lundeberg embarked on a circuitous route that would result in SUP re-affiliation with the AFL. So, with Bridges’ support for Lewis and his CIO much more reserved in contrast to Lundeberg’s enthusiasm, why did the Lewis select Bridges’ longshore union for a CIO charter? The philosophical inclination of the CIO towards broad based alliances was central to the scenario that unfolded. By early 1937, Lewis, a lifelong Republican who had never taken an active role promoting any revolutionary agenda, fully embraced the advantages of incorporating members of the CP into the CIO coalition.

Lewis had decided early on during the CIO struggle with the AFL to welcome anticapitalist radicals, including CP members into the CIO fold. After all, the decision to incorporate outwardly radical labor leaders allowed him to pursue Bridges, perhaps the most popular and recognizable laborite in the maritime industry. In return the CP readily supplied the CIO with such members who, having survived amid the hostile milieu in America during the 1920’s and 1930’s, were battle tested. In addition, due to the expansion of fascism in Europe, the Party had jettisoned much of its militant rhetoric, thereby making the Party faction less objectionable to Lewis. Nevertheless, the CIO’s

¹ *Voice of the Federation*, 22 April, 1937, 1.

willingness to incorporate CP members was the most controversial of the Committee's innovations. Lewis, always convinced of his leadership ability and confident that the CP would be unable to dominate his organization, remained unfazed by a wide range of attacks on the CIO by anticommunist forces, including the AFL.²

The Curran-Lundeberg Meeting

Ironically, just as the CIO was reaching out to incorporate CP members into a grand coalition, Lundeberg was defining anticommunism as the foundation of any future West Coast sailors' alliance. The SUP boss's reaction to Joe Curran's attempt to ally with his union is a case in point. In the aftermath of the strike, Curran ventured to San Francisco in an attempt to gain Lundeberg's support for the Atlantic Coast rank-and-file seamen's movement. The only witness to the meeting, MFGC president and Texas longshoreman Gilbert Mers recalled:

Lundeberg greeted Curran and me cordially.... Curran made his pitch. He was looking for allies...an alliance with the SUP.... He believed the seamen should form a new union. Would the SUP support such a move?

Instead of asking what kind of support he expected, Lundeberg ripped into him about his Communist Party connections.... Curran readily admitted to having worked with the CP faction, but pointed out that he had come west to try to win support for an independent union, a program in opposition to the Party line. Lundeberg was not influenced. Curran's previous collaboration made him suspect.... Lundeberg wouldn't budge. Curran had tarred himself with the Commie brush.³

Curran and Mers jointly maintained that the East Coast situation was infinitely more complex; thus East Coast seamen were forced to form pragmatic alliances and

² Zeigler, *American Workers, American Unions*, 54.

³ Mers, *Working the Waterfront*, 190.

make compromises. In response, Lundeberg merely belittled his East Coast rival and the heroic struggle of the East Coast rank-and-file.⁴ Curran responded to Lundeberg's position by appealing directly to the West Coast rank and file for an intercoastal alliance in a letter that appeared in the *Voice* in March 1937:

It was my intention in coming to the West Coast to explain the entire situation, as it existed on the East during the recent strike.... It was my hope in doing so it would promote unity and harmony that must exist between the men on both coasts. It seems that after pointing out the difficulties we were faced with on the East Coast such as the scab-herding tactics of the ex-union officials of the ISU, Joe Ryan and his gangsters and the shipowners together with...the brutality of the police...we wonder what some men would do under similar circumstances.... Unless we get together soon we will not have to get together at all. The shipowner will be the victor and the seamen the victims, as they have been so many times in the past.⁵

Lundeberg's intractable unwillingness to form a coalition with Curran left his East Coast rival with few options. On 5 May 1937, his self-styled Rank-and-File Seamen's Committee hastily transformed itself into the National Maritime Union (NMU). It was evident from the new union's inception that it intended to cast its lot with the CIO. Not only did Curran's insurgent actions and CP ties make AFL affiliation incompatible; but his rebellious leadership had decimated the AFL-affiliated ISU. Predictably the seamen along the East Coast voted overwhelmingly for NMU representation. Gilbert Mers recollected the moribund state of the ISU at this junction, "Beyond question, the power of the ISU had been broken. The shipping companies were

⁴ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁵ *Voice of the Federation*, 18 March 1937, 10.

no longer concerned about their contract.... By contrast, one or two had formally repudiated their former contract and were dealing the 'ISU rank and file.'"⁶

In May 1937, the ISU, desperate to resist Curran and the CIO onslaught, attempted to lure Lundeberg back into the AFL fold by capitulating to virtually every one of his demands, including a suspension of all amendments adopted at the 1936 ISU convention, and the removal of Scharrenberg as a legislative representative.⁷ However, Lundeberg rejected the generous ISU offer because he had a meeting with Lewis and was led to believe the CIO would grant him the first charter in the maritime industry.⁸

Lundeberg's rejection of the ISU offer proved to be yet another nail in that union's coffin. However, the SUP boss might not have been so quick to reject the ISU offer had he not been led by Lewis to believe that the CIO would grant him the first charter in the maritime industry. Much to Lundeberg's chagrin, the combination of Bridges' longshore union and Curran's newly formed union would eventually prove more attractive to the CIO. John L. Lewis, seeking a CIO wedge into the maritime industry, had the final decision on affiliation and as events unfolded, he progressively viewed Lundeberg's SUP as less valuable.

⁶ Mers, *Working the Waterfront*, 181.

⁷ Markholt, *Maritime Solidarity*, 323, 324.

⁸ *Voice of the Federation*, 22 May 1937, 1.

The CIO Woos Bridges

There appears to have been several reasons for the CIO's inclination towards Bridges and Curran over Lundeberg, but given the fact that the AFL and CIO were clearly competing for workers, numerical strength alone may have dictated Lewis' eventual decision. The SUP simply did not have the membership size to entice the CIO. On the West Coast, ILA longshore workers outnumbered SUP seamen 18,000 to 7,000.⁹ Along the East Coast and Gulf Coast, over 18,000 seamen had pledged their loyalty to Curran and his NMU.¹⁰

The momentum of NMU towards CIO affiliation appears to have increasingly pushed Bridges towards Lewis' camp. Furthermore, the willingness of Lewis to embrace communists within his ranks led to increasing attacks upon the CIO, not only by employers, but more importantly, the AFL. Such attacks by the AFL made it ever more difficult for Bridges to maintain his stance in favor of AFL-CIO reconciliation. Nevertheless, the longshore leader continued to advocate the overriding goal of bringing the CIO unions back into the AFL as evidenced by Bridges' statement at the 1937 Seattle

⁹ *Ibid.* , 11 February 1937, 1.

¹⁰ Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*, 231.

ILA convention on 4 May: “The position of the ILA is for a united labor movement. We are opposed to divisions within the labor movement.”¹¹

On the surface, such positioning by the Bridges seemingly contradicted the rebellious and independent direction of the CIO, but Bridges had shrewdly cast himself as a unifier of workers with diverse philosophical beliefs, which the CIO urgently sought. Despite his alleged ties to the CP, the longshore leader had an established track record of forsaking doctrine and theory in favor of attempting to form broad alliances. Recall that Bridges rejected the isolationist stance of the CP and MWIU during his early days with the *Waterfront Worker* in favor of forming a united front with the ILA. In contrast, Lundeberg’s inability to play a unifying role among diverse forces was highlighted in May 1937 as the SUP began publishing its own official organ, *West Coast Sailors* to propagate its anticommunist, anti-Bridges positions.

In addition to the SUP and ILA, several other MFPC unions began seriously to consider applying to the CIO, thus compelling MFPC president Fischer to write Lewis on 28 April requesting that an “accredited delegate” be sent to the upcoming June convention in Portland to explain the benefits of CIO affiliation.¹² Lewis responded to Fischer’s request by agreeing to send CIO organizer John Brophy to address the MFPC

¹¹ *Voice of the Federation*, 6 May 1937, 7.

¹² MFPC Records, Box 6, Third Convention Reports, (no.1), Fischer letter to Lewis, 28 April, 1937, 1.

convention at length on the merits of CIO affiliation. With the convention only days away, an editorial in the 3 June edition of the *Voice* reflected the momentum of the CIO:

The CIO is sweeping the country. Everywhere it goes, workers get better wages and working conditions. Thousands go eagerly into the CIO every day. Whole unions are leaving the deadening atmosphere of the AF of L to get protection and democracy in the CIO.

And the Maritime Federation unions must take their choice in the convention. Will it be for progress, security and Democracy? Or will it be for reaction, fascism and barbarism?¹³

Despite the ardent anticommunist stance of Lundeberg, Lewis ideally sought to enlist him, Bridges and Curran to form a broad coalition of national maritime unions. However, the CIO, looking to establish an impressive foothold in the maritime industry, was willing to consider either Bridges or Lundeberg if a choice for West Coast representation needed to be made. After Lundeberg privately made it clear to Brophy that he would not join the CIO if Bridges or Curran did, it became evident that he would be unable to enlist both West Coast labor leaders into the CIO fold. Though Brophy initially favored recruiting Lundeberg over Bridges, whom he viewed as “too AFL-minded,” when he was forced to choose between the two, Brophy recalled, “I had no trouble deciding, Bridges was head and shoulders above Lundeberg in ability.”¹⁴

Lundeberg’s determination to accept CIO affiliation on his terms, specifically the exclusion of Bridges and Curran, made Bridges the more desirable choice to represent the CIO on the West Coast. Lewis continued to hold out hope that Lundeberg would

¹³ *Voice of the Federation*, 3 June 1937, 1.

¹⁴ Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*, 227-238; Larowe, *Harry Bridges*, 110.

reconsider. Thus, he proposed a CIO-sponsored unity conference of maritime unions in Washington D.C. to pave the way for a national maritime federation. According to the *Voice*: "The long-sought National Maritime Federation came one step nearer today with a call by John L. Lewis...for a conference July 7.... Invited to the conference were... Lundeberg...Bridges...Curran."¹⁵

Rather than attend the maritime unity conference proposed by Lewis, Lundeberg sent seaman Robert Stowell as the SUP representative. The conference failed to achieve the desired unity. In addition to awarding a CIO charter, Bridges was rewarded with the position of CIO West Coast director for his willingness to abandon the AFL. Moreover, Curran's NMU was awarded a charter. With Lundeberg's arch rival now the West Coast director, there was little possibility he would accept a CIO charter. Officially, however, the SUP rejected the CIO offer on the basis that Lewis' terms would require the SUP to be submerged into the NMU, thereby robbing the West Coast seamen of their treasured autonomy.¹⁶

Lewis' wish to recruit both Lundeberg and Bridges into the CIO attests to his desperate desire for a national maritime union. However, when the CIO officially issued the charter to the West Coast longshoremen on 11 August 1937 and the ILWU was born, further fragmentation of the maritime labor movement occurred. The West Coast longshore vote was by and large a foregone conclusion in favor of the CIO. As Henry

¹⁵ *Voice of the Federation*, 1 July 1937, 1.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 7 July 1937, 7; Mayes, "Autobiography," 694.

Schmidt recalled, “The thing I remember most clearly is a meeting where Harry was explaining the issues. He didn’t have to do much explaining about continuing our membership in the ILA because the main office in New York, with Joe Ryan heading the thing up, was quite unpopular with the men on the West Coast, especially in San Francisco.”¹⁷

The Maritime Hodgepodge

As was expected the AFL expelled all unions accepting a CIO charter and the New York-based ILA president Joe Ryan did not follow Bridges in seeking CIO affiliation. The CIO did attempt to organize the remaining AFL longshoremen, but Ryan managed to fend off the CIO assault on his East Coast stronghold. The newly formed ILWU managed to make a few inroads by capturing the Gulf Coast ports of Mobile and New Orleans, but the CIO effort stalled and was largely abandoned during the next year.¹⁸ In addition, Bridges was unable to exert total control along the West Coast; longshoremen in Tacoma and a few small Northwest ports, under the thumb of Ryan’s ally, Paddy Morris, remained loyal to the AFL.¹⁹

On the other hand, the majority of MFPC unions along the West Coast followed Bridges’ lead into the CIO. However, there were exceptions. The Marine Firemen

¹⁷ Henry Schmidt, *Secondary Leadership in the ILWU*, interviewed by Stein 3 January 1975, 214.

¹⁸ ILWU Convention Proceedings, San Francisco, 9 April 1938, 113.

¹⁹ *West Coast Sailors*, (San Francisco), 10 June 1937, 2;

abandoned the AFL, but followed the SUP by remaining independent of the CIO.²⁰ The Masters, Mates and Pilots were the lone coastwise Maritime Federation union to remain loyal to the AFL. The union's 1938 report to the MFPC convention stated: "The members of the Maters, Mates, and Pilots know what they want. They have perfected their organization and they don't intend to change its make-up or policies."²¹

As we shall see, the refusal of the Tacoma local to align with Bridges and the CIO would play a central role in the unraveling of the Maritime Federation. However, it should be noted initially that there was a concerted effort to maintain unity between the new ILWU locals and the few ports that elected to remain under the jurisdiction of the ILA. According to the convention proceedings of the first ILWU convention:

We were called upon by the Tacoma local to assist then in getting the work on the ore boats.... The district interceded for them before the employers.... This is definitely an indication of our sincere policy of cooperation with all longshoremen regardless of whether they are AF of L or CIO....

The example of the Tacoma local to assist the longshoremen in Seattle during their recent lockout is an example how, in the main, we have stood together whether AF of L or CIO, when the critical hour was at hand.²²

An AFL-CIO checkerboard unfolded in the maritime industry with the new ILWU dominating the West Coast docks under the CIO banner, the AFL-affiliated ILA governing the East Coast docks, and Curran's CIO-affiliated NMU representing seamen

²⁰ *Voice of the Federation*, 19 August 1937, 3.

²¹ MFPC Records, Box 7, file Fourth Convention Reports (no.7), Report of Masters, Mates, and Pilots, 7, June 1938.

²² ILWU Convention Proceedings, San Francisco, 9 April 1938, 106-117.

along the Gulf Coast and East Coast. However, Lundeberg's SUP remained independent for roughly the next year as the SUP boss consistently claimed to be disturbed by the anti-democratic "top down" methods of both the AFL and CIO. A Lundeberg editorial in a January 1938 *West Coast Sailors* reflected his stand: "There is no fundamental difference between the old ISU (AFL) District Committee set up and the new NMU.... Both function on the same plan, control from the top. 'To hell with the rank-and-file seamen!'...is their motto."²³

Even if Lundeberg continued to espouse the benefits of a democratically run, independent SUP, the West Coast seamen were given no choice on the matter of CIO affiliation; the ballots of the SUP referendum on CIO affiliation were burned. The SUP justified its decision to burn the ballots in the 5 August 1937 issue of the *Voice*:

Following six weeks through study...of the question of CIO affiliation, and what gains it would give the Sailors' Union; the membership took action on a coastwise scale Monday night August 2, by voting to destroy the former ballot taken. To join the CIO at this time would mean we would receive a CIO Charter through the NMU and under that set up we would lost all our fundamental rights to bargain and sign agreements for intercoastal boats.... The NMU would flood the West Coast with men who scabbed on us.... We do not believe if out membership had this information at hand they would have taken a CIO vote, but would have moved along very slowly in whatever they would do. It is true that the membership did take a CIO vote, but we are certain that none of them understood the real motive behind the vote.²⁴

²³ *West Coast Sailors*. , 28 January 1938, 1.

²⁴ *Voice of the Federation*, 5 August 1937, 7.

In the meantime, Bridges exploited the obvious hypocrisy of the self-styled democratically run SUP by taunting Lundeberg for burning the CIO affiliation ballots and demanding that the SUP boss allow a referendum on the CIO issue. On 12 August, one day after receiving a CIO charter for his longshore local, the following appeared in the *Voice*:

Leaders of the Sailors' Union of the Pacific...were challenged to permit their membership vote in a referendum on the question of affiliation with the Committee of Industrial Organization. This challenge was issued by Harry Bridges, West Coast director of the CIO...Lundeberg of the SUP charged that the CIO was not democratic. Bridges replied, "The CIO is democratic enough to let the rank and file vote and abide by the result. We haven't descended to burning ballots to prevent the membership from expressing itself."²⁵

Despite being surrounded by Bridges' flourishing and hostile CIO unions along the West Coast, Lundeberg continued to shun AFL affiliation until May 1938. Throughout the year, the SUP took great pride in its principled status as an independent union. However, the nature of seafaring ensured that jurisdictional disputes between the SUP and NMU would occur; such conflict highlighted the need for steadfast allies. Intercoastal routes guaranteed that NMU members would enter West Coast ports, while SUP-manned ships would dock along the East Coast ports.

In order to facilitate replacements in ports, rival unions would simply issue permits. Permits served as an authorization given to by one union to a member of another union to work temporarily a job without joining their specific union. This procedure became infinitely more difficult and the possibility of jurisdictional conflicts were

²⁵ *Ibid.* , 12 August 1937, 5.

exponentially heightened as the SUP opened union halls in Baltimore and New York over the objections of NMU officials. The NUM countered by opening an office in San Francisco to represent East Coast sailors.²⁶

“The Shepard Line Beef”

Increasing tensions between the two seafaring unions led the SUP to suspend the practice of issuing SUP permits to NMU men. Thereafter, NMU seamen were routinely pulled off ships on the West Coast and replaced by SUP members. Roland Perry, the NMU representative in San Francisco, sent a letter that appeared in the 7 January 1938 edition of the NMU official organ *The Pilot*:

Seven NMU men, deck and engine were pulled off ships yesterday.... A week ago 12 men were forced off in one day....

In every East Coast port the members should know what chance they have of getting by... West Coast ports. All agents should be instructed to tell all NMU men when a job is given out for a West Coast vessel that despite strike clearance and whole union record, NMU sailors will be pulled off West Coast ships.²⁷

After several months of jurisdictional clashes between the SUP and the NMU, a conflict known as the “Shepard Line Beef” finally pressed Lundeberg to seek AFL affiliation. The SUP, having secured a closed shop agreement with the Shepard Line,

²⁶ *Ibid.* , 18 March 1937, 1; *West Coast Sailors*, 6 May 1938, 1.

²⁷ *Pilot*, 7 January 1938; reprinted in *West Coast Sailors*, 14 January 1938, 3.

claimed jurisdiction over all East Coast-based Shepard Line freighters. Notwithstanding the contract, the National Labor Relations Board, suspected by many to have a pro-CIO bias, conducted elections in which the NMU triumphed in a Shepard Line vote while the SUP was left off the ballot. According to *West Coast Sailors*:

In the fall of 1937, without notifying the SUP... who had closed shop agreements with the company, the NMU... asked for and got an election on these ships without letting the name of the SUP appear on the ballot.... The Shepard Line called for a full crew from the NMU ignoring their agreement with the SUP, although the SUP had men available, and Mr. Shepard gave the lame excuse that he had been "notified" to deal with the NMU. The NMU has no signed agreement with the Shepard Line.²⁸

Not unexpectedly, the intercoastal Shepard Line vessels that departed from East Coast ports manned with NMU crews were greeted by SUP pickets with AFL unionists providing additional support. The ILUW dockworkers were in an untenable position. To work the Shepard Line cargo would certainly endanger the future of the MFPC. On the other hand, CIO longshoremen could not stand by and allow CIO seamen to be forced off a ship. The ILWU dockworkers, accustomed to autonomy within their locals, could not solve the dilemma in a unified manner as Shepard Line ships docked in Seattle and Portland in early April 1938. Though many worked the cargo under police protection, seamen claimed that veteran dockworkers defied their officials by honoring the picket lines of their SUP brethren.²⁹ The attention of the maritime workers naturally focused on

²⁸ *West Coast Sailors*, 15 April 1938, 1; 4.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 19 April, 1938, 1.

the upcoming arrival of a Shepard Line vessel due to dock in Bridges' stronghold of San Francisco.

The demise of the MFPC was assured after the NMU- manned Shepard Line freighter *Sea Thrush* docked in San Francisco on 18 April 1938. As expected, the *Sea Thrush* was greeted by SUP pickets attempting to force the NMU crew off the ship. Speaking over a loudspeaker, ILWU stalwart Henry Schmidt pleaded with the SUP to desert their picket line and refer the matter to the MFPC, but to no avail. Finally, the longshoremen crossed the SUP picket line and a riot ensued, injuring scores of unionists and hospitalizing three before the longshoremen, with police protection, managed to commence unloading the cargo. According to *West Coast Sailors* Lundeberg heroically led the seamen in the battle:

Although the Sailors line was crashed, their heads bloody, but unbowed! That line was made up of fighters.... Nobody can steal ships under SUP agreements without the SUP having something to say about it! That's all! It's as simple as that!... Fists started to fly, and the battle was on.... For once...the official organ of the Communist Party had a truthful statement. It said, "Lundeberg struck the first blow."

Yes indeed! Brother Lundeberg pleads guilty...to that-and he clipped the first fink that attempted to cross the line-right on the button! And right in with his men, where he belonged fought Harry Lundeberg. Fighting for his union! ³⁰

Similar SUP-ILWU conflicts continued to occur along the West Coast while along the East Coast NMU seamen picketed the SUP halls. To make matters worse, a rumor circulated that the NMU was likely to join the MFPC "in hope for a freeze-out of

³⁰ *Ibid.* , 1-2

the SUP.”³¹ Eventually, the Shepard Line agreed to honor their SUP agreement; however, the SUP triumph over the NMU splintered the MFPC beyond repair as ILWU longshoremen were branded strikebreakers by the SUP seamen.³²

While various members of the Maritime Federation attempted to fashion a truce to save the MFPC, Lundeberg increasingly realized the importance of an alliance with the AFL. Moreover, he realized the tremendous value his presence would have for the AFL in the maritime industry along the West Coast. According to Barney Mayes’ memoirs, “Harry realized there was only one way to turn-rejoining the AFL.... With Bridges appointed as CIO representative... the AFL desperately needed a competing force in the maritime industry.”³³

The Birth of the SIU

Lundeberg openly began bargaining with William Green, president of the AFL, in regards to SUP re-affiliation. Though he was willing to ally with the AFL president, any re-affiliation between the SUP and the AFL would have to be on SUP terms. Lundeberg devised a list of stipulations including complete autonomy, complete control of funds and property, total power to negotiate and sign agreements, the right to call strikes on and off, and the right to elect officials by referendum. Following the shifting of Lundeberg’s stance towards the AFL, *West Coast Sailors* began a steady campaign to sell the idea of

³¹ *Ibid.* , 13 May 1938, 1.

³² *Ibid.* , 6 May 1938, 1.

³³ Mayes, “Autobiography,” 694.

an AFL charter to the rank-and-file, including a 13 May report on a so-called debate on the topic:

In one of the finest debates...the question of affiliation with the American Federation of Labor was thrashed out.... Numerous examples were specified wherein ...the CIO had failed to support the SUP.... On the other hand, attention was invited to the fact that the Tacoma ILA refused to cross a SUP picket line.... At no time was a constructive alternative offered.³⁴

Lundeberg continued to inch closer to receiving an AFL charter as the 1938 MFPC convention commenced in San Francisco during June. Without doubt, the aftershocks of the Shepard Line incidents could still be felt. AFL-CIO jurisdictional wars had been flaring up across the nation, and the ILWU had could no longer idly proclaim their solidarity with the AFL-affiliated West Coast locals after ILA dockworkers in Tacoma sided with the SUP in the Shepard Line controversy. Accordingly, the Maritime Federation's CIO affiliates pointed out a stipulation in the MFPC constitution that forbade the seating of any convention delegates who did not belong to a coastwise organization. As one of the first matters of convention business, the three Tacoma delegates were denied seats at the convention by a vote of 66 to 17. The representatives of the Masters, Mates, and Pilots, the SUP and the Marine Firemen, Oilers, Watertenders, and Wipers followed the Tacoma delegation out the door, sealing the fate of the MFPC.³⁵

The decision of the CIO affiliates to expel the AFL delegates provided Lundeberg a perfect opportunity to proclaim his solidarity with the AFL thereby strengthening his

³⁴ *West Coast Sailors*, 13 May 1938, 1-2; 4.

³⁵ *Voice of the Federation*, 9 June 1938, 1.

bargaining position vis-à-vis Green and AFL officialdom. On 10 June he released the following statement in *West Coast Sailors*:

It is the opinion of the membership of the SUP that this attempted unseating of the Tacoma longshoremen is discrimination of the worst variety. It is and has always been the consistent policy of the SUP membership that regardless of any organization's affiliation, we will always have and always will give bonafide workers our support against the bosses, but as an organization we will not be party to the attempted use of the Federation as a whole to club other organizations into accepting other national affiliations today offered by labor³⁶

There was little reason to be optimistic about the future of the MFPC prior to the convention. Lundeberg was compelled to exploit any chance to impress AFL officials. The ILWU was increasingly bothered by the tendency of the Tacoma ILA local to engage in jurisdictional disputes with various CIO affiliates. The AFL-affiliated Masters, Mates, and Pilots submitted a report prior to the convention that warned of their possible departure and condemned the aggressive actions of the CIO: "We were hopeful that the differences... would be adjusted. Rather...it appears that they were broadened. The CIO issue appeared to be more important than any effort to set a policy for closer relationships...legislative programs."³⁷

In retrospect, the demise of the Maritime Federation seemed certain. Nonetheless, the militants who had worked so hard to forge an industrial federation of maritime workers seemed unable to accept the reality. Although the CIO tactic of shutting out the

³⁶ *West Coast Sailors*, 10 June 1937, 2.

³⁷ MFPC Records, Box 7, file Fourth Convention Reports (no.7), Report of Masters, Mates, and Pilots, 7, June 1938.

Tacoma delegation effectively destroyed the MFPC as a viable agent on the waterfront, its strategy soon proved successful in luring the remaining ILA locals into the CIO fold. On 21 June the NLRB found the ILWU the appropriate collective bargaining agent for the entire Pacific Coast and the ILWU and the CIO became the exclusive representative of the longshoremen.³⁸

The ability of the CIO to acquire the rights to the entire longshore membership on the West Coast put additional pressure on the AFL to obtain a maritime industry ally on the West Coast. Though Green was desperate, Lundeberg was demanding complete control of the new AFL seamen's union that would be named the Seafarers' International Union (SIU). The decision to elevate Lundeberg was bitterly opposed by Ryan and other conservatives. Barney Mayes recalled the negotiations:

Apparently the AF of L had decided to give Harry the charter for the new international union, overriding the opposition, which would have to join or be eliminated, for they would not be welcome by Curran and they were incapable of surviving on their own.... It took several hours before we worked out the size of the subsidy the AF of L would have to give us to launch our new organization whose name was to be the Seafarers International Union.... Harry, as president would remain on the West Coast and direct the work there.³⁹

Lundeberg accepted a position as president of a national seamen's union, but in contrast to Furuseth and other West Coast seafaring union officials who attained national prominence, he refused to relocate to New York. Even if Lundeberg wasted little time in initiating an offensive against Curran in an attempt to gain AFL adherents along the East

³⁸ Henry Schmidt, *Secondary Leadership in the ILWU*, interviewed by Stein 29 November 1974, 181.

³⁹ Mayes, "Autobiography," 709-712.

Coast, his views seem to have been colored by bicoastal jurisdictional rivalries, persistent syndicalism and sectarianism, and West Coast provincialism. Therefore, his primary concern would inevitably continue to be the welfare of the West Coast sailors.

In view of the fact Lundeberg was appointed president of the new International, SUP rank-and-file acceptance of the AFL charter was a mere formality. The SUP boss may have proven to be jealous, petty, argumentative, stubborn, and divisive, but none could deny that Lundeberg commanded the loyalty of the rank-and-file. Moreover, his resiliency was extraordinary. Bridges' appointment as West Coast CIO director was unquestionably a humiliating experience. Though Lundeberg was staggered by the development, he managed to emerge from the entire ordeal in an ideal position to once again challenge Bridges for control of the maritime labor movement.

With the demise of the MFPC, the stakes had been raised, for the two labor leaders were not merely contending for power over the maritime industry along the West Coast, but rather, the maritime movement of the entire United States. The bulk of the nation's maritime workforce may have resided along the East Coast, but the heart of the maritime labor movement was always in San Francisco. Thus, even though Curran and Ryan remained significant players, the spotlight continued to focus on Bridges and Lundeberg. The MFPC would become a memory of the past, and the philosophical outlooks of its two former major leaders would endure many twists and turns. However, the rivalry between Bridges and Lundeberg for control of the maritime labor movement would continue to command the attention of the nation's maritime workforce until Lundeberg's death in 1957.

XI Conclusion

The creation of the MFPC was a dignified attempt by maritime workers to coordinate their strategies, thereby fortifying their position through numerical strength. However, the inability of the MFPC to act in unison was ensured during the hastily arranged opening convention in Seattle. Though both Bridges and Lundeberg were outspoken advocates of industrial unionism, they and the other founders refused to throw caution to the wind. Bowing to age-old craft rivalries and attempting to mollify traditional unionists, the Maritime Federation decided to allow a great deal of autonomy within its component unions. Therefore, the MFPC was nothing more than a conglomerate of craft unions with the potential to strike as one large industrial union. Such a blueprint, though moderately effective in tempering AFL opposition, guaranteed confusion and invited factionalism.

The design of the MFPC resulted in its elected officials identifying primarily with their component union as opposed to the Maritime Federation as a whole. By and large MFPC officials were viewed within leadership circles as representatives of their respective unions, and more specifically, their local. Political allegiances tended to align with the politics of the local's leader. Certainly, CP leanings, if not membership, appear to have been almost a prerequisite in some left-leaning locals. Accordingly, historically

entrenched craft rivalries that were exacerbated by philosophical and political differences consumed the leadership of the Maritime Federation, thereby producing shameful infighting and eventually, to the delight of the shipowners, the demise of the MFPC.

The MFPC was both a success and a failure. Arguably, the success of the Maritime Federation can be attributed to the rank-and-file. By and large it was the workers who proved determined to adhere to the overall principle of unity during the 1936-37 strike. While the leadership halfheartedly presented a transparent façade of solidarity, the rank-and-file never lost sight of the ultimate goal of winning economic benefits and improved working conditions. As the strikers congregated on the picket lines, the soup kitchens, and their recreation center, their well-entrenched traditional craft rivalries and political differences seemed to have fallen by wayside. Simply put, the workers refused to allow the cynics, hypocrites, and manipulators that permeated the Maritime Federation's administration to derail their struggle against the employers. The employers, frustrated with their inability to benefit from on the quibbling leadership of the MFPC, eventually elected to capitulate.

Surprisingly, the employers, after enduring nearly 100 days of the 1936-37 strike, began to offer concessions just as the MFPC internal strife was reaching a crescendo and the AFL-CIO war was gaining momentum. Given the rancorous infighting within the MFPC and labor's civil war between the AFL and CIO nationwide, why did the shipowners yield? Conceivably, they may have sensibly realized that opposition to the shipowners was the glue that held the Maritime Federation together. Every component of the MFPC united behind Resolution #47 in the aftermath of the *Point Clear* controversy.

The Maritime Federation integrated its position in support of the SUP and Charles Brenner in his attempt to remain on the crew of the *President Hoover*. The MFPC rallied behind Joe Curran's insurgent strikers in the spring of 1936. The entire Maritime Federation stood united behind Bridges and the ILA during the *Santa Rosa* lockout. The membership solidly backed Bridges in his public debate with Roger Lapham. The employers found no support within the Maritime Federation in their attempt to isolate Bridges and the ILA. The SUP, despite its provocative negotiations, pledged not to settle independently without MFPC approval.

Finally, after enduring a strike that lasted almost 100 days, the employers may have shrewdly understood that the most economically feasible way to defeat the Maritime Federation was to abandon the battle, thereby depriving the MFPC of a common foe. If indeed the employers conceded defeat to break the Maritime Federation, it was a wise decision as the MFPC imploded shortly after the contracts were signed. By contrast, an employers' decision to prolong the struggle presented the possibility of a worse case scenario, the formation of a national maritime federation. Given that Curran successfully usurped the compliant ISU officials, and Ryan's position as ILA president appeared tenuous, the momentum seemed to be favoring a national maritime union.

Without doubt, the most conspicuous failure of the MFPC was its inability to capitalize on its strike victory. Presented with a tremendous opportunity to form a national maritime federation, Lundeberg and Bridges preferred to align with opposing camps of the AFL-CIO clash, thereby ensuring the fragmentation of the nation's

maritime workers. The scars of the schism have yet to heal; the ILWU and the ILA, as well as the ISU and the NMU, continue to function as separate entities.

Paradoxically, both Bridges and Lundeberg were awarded prestigious leadership positions by the CIO and AFL respectively for their willingness to devastate maritime unity. It has been argued that both labor leaders were merely careerists seeking to exploit the AFL-CIO clash for personal gain at the expense of the rank-and-file. But in the fratricidal climate of 1937-38, Bridges and Lundeberg simply appear to have allowed the momentum of the AFL-CIO conflict to dictate the direction of their respective unions.

It should be added that despite their acrimonious relationship, Lundeberg and Bridges seem to have maintained hope for a year that the MFPC could somehow be preserved. However, both labor leaders held out hope for maritime unity on differing terms. What is more, the power struggle had become multifaceted. In the wake of the strike the battle for control of the maritime labor movement had expanded beyond the West Coast and the MFPC. Hence, Bridges and Lundeberg increasingly appear to have viewed, not only each other, but also their East Coast rivals, Ryan and Curran respectively, as additional stumbling blocks to national maritime unity.

Lundeberg certainly realized that an alliance with Curran would reduce his capacity to dictate strategy. Regardless of Lundeberg's rhetoric praising the benefits of a democratically run, rank-and file-controlled union, he had demonstrated a proclivity to burn ballots. Yet, as his self-styled "emergency program" demonstrated after the ISU revoked the SUP charter, Lundeberg did command a great deal of loyalty among West Coast seamen. However, Curran was unquestionably popular among an enormous

segment of the East Coast seamen. The SUP boss undoubtedly feared that an alliance with his East Coast rival and the numerically stronger East Coast membership would lead to further democratization, thereby jeopardizing his ability to dictate strategies and terms for the West Coast seamen.

Paradoxically, Bridges was fighting to attain rank-and-file representation for the East Coast longshoremen. Although there can be little doubt that the longshore leader's prestige was enhanced tremendously with his appointment as West Coast director of the CIO, was it worth splintering the ILA? In the final analysis the longshore leader seems to have had little choice. While Bridges had consistently striven to maintain good relations with AFL officials, his relationship with ILA president Joseph Ryan seems to have deteriorated beyond repair. It seems to have been a foregone conclusion early in their dispute that Bridges' longshore followers would not harmoniously handle cargo under a Ryan-led ILA banner. As West Coast director of the rival CIO, Bridges could cast aside the pretense he was Ryan's deferential underling and begin challenging the ILA president directly for control of the nation's longshore workforce. In fact, Bridges' first deed as CIO West Coast director was to dare Ryan to agree to a national longshore referendum on longshore affiliation with the CIO, a challenge the ILA president predictably declined to accept.¹

Obviously, Lundeberg could not accommodate himself to the changing flow of a CIO policy that snubbed him while welcoming CP members and elevating Bridges to

¹ Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*, 237.

such a lofty position. Just as Bridges was left with no other pragmatic alternative other than aligning with Lewis, Lundeberg had no other realistic option besides Green's AFL. Independence may have allowed the SUP boss to depict his union as the militant and dynamic alternative to Bridges' CIO, but Lundeberg was increasingly forced to depend on the assistance of AFL workers in supporting his moves against the CIO. Affiliation with the AFL offered steadfast rather than tenuous alliances. Moreover, the SUP boss understood that he was in a strong position to dictate terms to Green. As president of the new SIU, Lundeberg was in a much stronger position to challenge Curran for the loyalties of the nation's seafaring force.

Lundeberg's tactics proved divisive in the end, but he may have viewed AFL affiliation as the only logical communist-free route to seamen unity. Similarly, though Bridges' decision to formally break with Ryan also proved divisive in the end, he likely viewed the choice as a step towards longshore unity. Both labor leaders were in prestigious and powerful positions supported by large rival organizations that promised financial organizational and moral support in supplanting their rivals and eventually attaining the goal of national maritime unity. Though Bridges and Lundeberg both proved effective in exerting CIO and AFL strength respectively, neither labor leader managed to attain complete control.

Notwithstanding the divisive issue of communism and the apparent disdain that permeated the Bridges-Lundeberg relationship, it seems naive to lay all the blame for the downfall of the MFPC and the fragmentation of the nation's maritime labor movement on the two labor leaders. As we have seen, seamen-longshore jurisdictional conflicts

predated the arrival of the CP on the docks. Moreover, dockworkers along the West Coast, and San Francisco in particular, historically demonstrated a tendency towards autonomy long before the arrival of Harry Bridges. Similarly, the SUP seamen had a long tradition of West Coast provincialism and Wobbly sectarianism long before the appearance of Harry Lundeberg. The task of forming a harmonious, effective, and permanent maritime federation would have been daunting to any labor leader given the waterfront's legacy of craft separation and jurisdictional disputes.

In the wake of the SUP withdrawal from the MFPC, the Maritime Federation lingered on as a shell of its former self, but absent seaman inclusion, true maritime unity could never be achieved. In retrospect, it seems tragic that the militancy of the maritime movement turned inward. The solidarity of seamen and longshoremen had proven strong enough to endure the internal strife between their elected officials during the long strike of 1936-37. Despite their lengthy history of jurisdictional conflict, the rank-and-file never forgot the Maritime Federation's motto, "An Injury to One is an Injury to All." Yet, when lacking the focus of a common opponent in the shipowners, controlling union officials managed to turn brother against brother as longshoremen and sailors fought each other with baseball bats and fists on the docks of San Francisco. The best of friends in 1937 became bitter enemies in 1938.

Despite the dissolution of the MFPC, opportunities for economic advancement and improvements in working conditions did not disappear for the militants that fought so hard to make maritime solidarity a reality via the Maritime Federation. The individual unions remained strong and the members held fast to their unions, their hiring halls and

their leaders. Though Lundeberg and Bridges were subject to the foibles that affect all mortals, accounts of both labor leaders often border on hagiography by their respective unions. For despite their flaws, petty jealousies, arrogance and their somewhat abrasive personalities, the two major leaders presided over the rebirth of their respective unions during the 1936-37 strike.

In the final analysis there is nothing to suggest that Lundeberg did not inherently accept the theory of industrial unionism. Speaking in defense of the MFPC at the ISU convention in January 1936, the SUP boss refused to cower to the “old guard,” opting to accept AFL expulsion over abandoning the Maritime Federation. However, Lundeberg’s greatest idiosyncrasy may have been his obsession with protecting the independence of his West Coast seamen. Once the AFL ties had been cut, the SUP boss realized the union’s autonomy was subject to attack and domination by the numerically stronger longshore union. This perception was exacerbated by Bridges’ meddling in SUP affairs, namely his attempt to infiltrate his union by challenging Lundeberg with a slate of his allies in the SUP elections, as well as his attempt to orchestrate an AFL-SUP reconciliation.

Once Bridges showed an inclination for influencing the direction of the SUP, Lundeberg proved determined to protect and extend the SUP’s jurisdiction, a stance that he maintained for the rest of his life. Lundeberg’s inner circle continued to be dominated by IWW remnants and Trotskyites after Lundeberg’s pact with Green. Throughout the 1940’s, the SUP remained a haven for Wobblies and advocates of industrial unionism. Notwithstanding the union’s militant, even radical rhetoric, the SUP began to revert to

the business unionism preached by Furuseth. For example, Lundeberg, perhaps the biggest advocate of spontaneous job action in 1936, noted in a 1938 edition of *West Coast Sailors*:

I thought it was a god dam silly thing to do-to stick around and protest-when properly the beef should be referred to me and I could handle it...further the SUP was not picketing the ship.... The crew had no business to refuse to work in view of the fact that they were only one-half hour distance from the SUP hall...and it was their duty to call before they started a beef.... They could easily have worked until I came down to see what the score was.... Through such action as this a great deal of harm can be done to the SUP as a whole. The final results will be to put the SUP in a position where they will be move off...and the longshoremen will take over the work.²

By the time of his 1957 death, Lundeberg was an acknowledged conservative and one of the few American labor leaders to proudly claim Republican affiliation.³ Yet, in spite of his steady drift towards conservative unionism, Lundeberg never deviated from regarding the defense of the economic interest and autonomy of his West Coast sailors as his priority. The SUP, in pursuing its own agenda, continued to battle other maritime workers for the remainder of Lundeberg's life, often by "raiding other unions." Ostensibly in an effort to defeat communism, the SUP sabotaged strikes by rival seafaring unions by supplying strikebreakers, and Lundeberg, in a remarkable turnaround, led seamen in crashing an ILWU picket line to seize additional work.⁴

² *West Coast Sailors*, 30 September 1938, 1.

³ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 29 January 1957, Sec. 1, 6.

⁴ Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*, 248, 249.

Though Lundeberg remained controversial and contentious to the end, his leadership proved especially durable and few union leaders could claim to have achieved as many bread and butter gains for their members. Under Lundeberg's leadership, the SUP proved to be an aggressive and militant union without the benefit of any kind of leftist ideology for guidance.⁵ When he died in 1957 of a heart attack the *San Francisco Chronicle* said of Lundeberg in an editorial:

Harry Lundeberg was a throwback to a vanished race of labor leaders: a hard-talking, rough acting, tempestuous but highly effective man in whom diplomacy or the tempered approach had no foothold. He neatly split all mankind into two groups; those with whom he agreed, who were 'all right' and those with whom he disagreed, who were rats, finks, richly described Commie so-and-sos, or any combination thereof.

This newspaper frequently found itself flung into the latter bin as its editorial policy happened to run counter to Lundeberg's views.⁶

Lundeberg's longshore rival proved to be durable as well. Bridges managed to survive a series of deportation hearings despite the damaging testimony of Lundeberg. Speaking in his defense, the longshore leader made no attempt to conceal his radicalism, while adamantly refusing to admit CP membership.⁷ Perhaps we should accept Bridges' statements at face value. On the other hand, as the archives of the Soviet Communist party and Comintern receive further attention from scholars, it may be revealed that Bridges was, in fact, a member of the CP. Though such revelations would verify the accusations of the longshore leader's most vociferous opponent, it makes little difference

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1957; reprinted in Larowe, *Harry Bridges*, 110.

⁷ Larowe, *Harry Bridges*, 230.

in the internal dynamic of the MFPC. Bridges' willingness to openly associate with and sympathize with Party members left him subject to attack whether or not he was a member of the CP.

Regardless of the extent of Bridges' alleged ties to the CP, the longshore leader did seem to follow the lead of the Party towards a united front during World War II. Industrial peace reigned along the docks during the years of World War II. Not once during the entire war was a seaman, longshoreman, teamster, or warehouseman idle due to labor strife during the conflict.⁸ World War II demonstrated that individual agendas and philosophical disparities, political differences, and personal affairs, could be easily set aside in the face of a common foe.

The summer of 1946 saw the nation once again plagued by both AFL and CIO maritime strikes. Bridges renewed attempts to form a federation of maritime unions, the short-lived Committee of Maritime Unity (CMU). The longshore leader was unable to gain, or unwilling to seek, the support of Lundeberg. However, Bridges did incorporate Curran and the NMU into the fold. After a bitter SUP strike, the CMU went on strike for similar gains. During the CMU strike, internal bickering led to the resignation of Curran from the NMU, and the CMU began to tumble and fall apart.⁹

Despite the failure of the CMU, the ILWU prospered under the post-World War II leadership of Bridges; the union numbered more than 75,000 maritime workers and

⁸ Camp, *San Francisco*, 480.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 489, 490.

warehouse workers by 1947. ILWU ports were established in Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis, Hawaii and Alaska. As Bridges' success continued, so did government harassment, and he continued to endure seemingly endless trials and hearings to have him deported as a dangerous alien agitator.¹⁰

Regardless of Bridges' unmatched organizational success, the CIO caved in to the McCarthyism of the era, and in 1950 the ILWU, along with eleven other affiliated unions suspected of communist ties, were expelled. Though Bridges would retire in 1977, his longshore union would remain an independent union until 1988. With the exception of the electrical workers and the West Coast longshoremen, all of the unions expelled by the CIO had purged their leaders and were absorbed by rival unions by the 1960's.¹¹ Despite the controversy that accompanied the longshore leader, few could question the loyalty he maintained among the membership of his union.

The West Coast longshore workers would be frequently associated with their leftist political agenda as seen in its inclusion of African American workers in the 1930's, its support of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950's, its early opposition to the Vietnam War, and its denunciation of American foreign policy under every administration from Eisenhower to Nixon. However, the primary purpose of the ILWU has always been to further the economic interests and improve the working conditions of its workers. During its period of independence, the ILWU continued to be a dynamic

¹⁰ *Ibid.* , 477.

¹¹ Larowe, *Harry Bridges*, 325.

force in the labor movement refusing to allow the lack of official ties or affiliation to prevent it from supporting other unions by raising funds, supporting picket lines, and acting in concert with other unions.

Likewise, Bridges' alleged ties to the CP have overshadowed the fact that he was, at all times, primarily a labor leader who sought to advance the causes of the working class. Bridges never rested on his laurels. In spite of numerous health problems and persistent government harassment, he would not, he could not, give up the fight to advance the cause of labor. Accordingly, although significant faction of the longshore rank-and-file may have had their political disagreements with their leader, Bridges remained in power for one simple reason: he consistently delivered at contract time.

As the boss of an independent union, Bridges never deviated from the philosophy that initially brought him success in 1934: the willingness to subsume political ideologies and forge new alliances or federations between unions representing workers in the same or related fields. At times, Bridges was unable to succeed. In spite of a long history of jurisdictional disputes, the Teamsters' James R. Hoffa and Bridges attempted to establish a federation of transport workers in the United States in 1957. In addition, regardless of his stance against the Vietnam War, Bridges attempted to engineer a 1971 reunification with the ILA, which was under the leadership of the hawkish, Nixon supporter Theodore Gleason. However an inability to coordinate bicoastal strike strategies doomed the chances of an ILWU-ILA merger.¹²

¹² *Ibid.* , 361; 380.

At times, Bridges may have been wrong in his beliefs and actions. But he believed sincerely in improving the lives of workers through industrial unionism and his occasional failures could not derail him. The Teamster-ILWU merger negotiations were periodically revived throughout the 1960's. However, talks between Bridges and Hoffa were hindered as Hoffa was contending with his own battles with government officials. The possibilities of a Teamster-ILWU alliance appeared take a more serious turn after Hoffa's release from prison in 1971, but the Teamster leader's 1975 disappearance and Bridges' 1977 retirement seem to have brought them to an end.¹³ Obviously, the longshore leader never gave up the dream envisioned at Seattle during the first MFPC convention in 1935, the dream of a national federation of transportation workers that followed the motto, "An Injury to One is an Injury to All."

¹³ *Ibid.* 380, 381.

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