

ILWU Passes Resolution Against US Blockade of Cuba, Donates Syringes

<https://www.randomlengthsnews.com/archives/2021/08/10/ilwu-against-us-cuba-blockade/34972?v=7516fd43adaa>

The history of the ILWU, the record of its origins and traditions, is about workers who built a union that is democratic, sometimes militant and dedicated to the idea that solidarity with other workers and other unions is the key to achieving economic security and a peaceful world.

The origins of the ILWU lie in the longshore industry of the Pacific Coast – the work of loading and unloading ships' cargoes. In the old days of clipper ships, sailings were frequently unscheduled and labor was often recruited at the last minute by shoreside criers calling: "Men along the shore!" – giving rise to the term "longshoremen." The work was brutal, conditions unsafe, employment irregular, and the pay too low to support a family.

In 1933 the economic depression that started in 1929 hit the nation full-force. West Coast longshoremen, who had long suffered their own special kind of depression through chronic job insecurity, now experienced even deeper hardship. Genuine union organization became a matter of survival.

Their demands were simple: a union-controlled hiring hall that would end all forms of discrimination and favoritism in hiring and equalize work opportunities; a coastwise contract, with all workers on the Pacific Coast receiving the same basic wages and working under the same protected hours and conditions; and a six-hour work day with a fair hourly wage.

The shipowners consistently refused each demand, determined to divide and destroy the unions in each port. The members of both longshore and seafaring unions voted to strike in May 1934. In response, the employers mobilized private industry, state and local governments, and police agencies to smash the unions and their picket lines. (*Sound familiar---they do the same today-mf*)

The ranks held firm throughout the historic strike. In July of 1934, when it was clear the longshoremen and their seafaring allies were not going to give up their struggle for justice on the waterfront, the employers decided to open the struck piers using guns, goon squads, tear gas, and the National Guard. They provoked pitched battles in San Francisco, Portland, Seattle, and San Pedro. Hundreds of strikers – and bystanders – were arrested and injured. On July 5, know ever after as Bloody Thursday, two workers were shot and killed. A total of six workers were shot or beaten to death on the West Coast by police or company goons during the course of the strike.

Rather than breaking the strike, these terrible events galvanized public support, and prompted the unions of San Francisco to declare a brief but historic General Strike to support the longshore and maritime unions and protest strikebreaking by employers and police.

The new kind of unionism born of the 1934 maritime strike was not confined to the docks. The warehouse workers, with their close ties to the waterfront that in the early days of the union came from working near the docks and handling cargo brought on and off the ships by longshoremen, also helped build the ILWU and they too shared in its achievements.

A later organizing drive among vessel planners – who determine the load, weight, and balance of a ship's cargo was successful.

These organizing successes did not come easily, and employers have not only resisted unionization, but have also sought to bypass or curtail traditional ILWU jurisdiction on the waterfront.

Today, the ILWU represents dockworkers primarily on the U.S. West Coast with approximately 40,000 members in 50 local unions in California, Oregon, Washington, Alaska and Hawaii, as well as British Columbia, Canada.

The ILWU has organized, in addition to economic strikes, several political actions of international importance.

ILWU Local 10 members helped put the anti-apartheid struggle in the national spotlight in 1984 when they refused to unload South African cargo from the Dutch ship, *Nedlloyd Kimberly*, at San Francisco's Pier 80.

Although they unloaded the rest of the ship, the South African "bloody" cargo of steel, auto parts and wine remained in the ship's hold for 10 days while community supporters held daily demonstrations outside protesting South Africa's apartheid regime.

Employers tried to find another West Coast port to take the ship, but because of solidarity from other ILWU locals, no port was willing to accept the *Nedlloyd Kimberly*. The cargo was finally unloaded on the 11th day under threat of a federal injunction and fines for Local 10 and individual members. (*Sound familiar- bosses using the courts to break strikes-mf*) See RLnews article <https://www.randomlengthsnews.com/2020/02/07/94-million-judgement-threatens-ilwu/>

West coast ILWU members stopped work June 9, 2020 for an 8 minute and 46 second moment of silence in honor of George Floyd and all victims of police brutality.

ILWU International President Willie Adams said "Our union has a long history of confronting racism on the job, in our communities and around the world. Today we're joining millions of people who are demanding justice and fundamental change."

ILWU members are also leading an effort to expel police "unions" from the AFL-CIO; only to meet opposition from the former mineworker's militant, now conservative head of the nation's AFL-CIO.

The ILWU national convention resolution, printed below, is an important contribution to ending the US blockade of Cuba. Other unions should follow their lead. While Biden continues Trump's 243 sanctions against the island (reversing his campaign promises) tens of thousands have rallied and caravanned world wide demanding the US adhere to the UN resolution, a vote of 184- 2 (US & Israel) to end the blockade and normalize relations.

For more information on this effort contact: <http://ushandsoffcubacommittee.com/>