

December 1, 1949

Mr. Andre Fressinet, General Secretary
Trade Union International of
Seamen, Inland Waterways Workers
Fishermen and Port Workers
5, Place de la Joliette
Marseille, France

Dear Brother:

We have your special delivery letter dated November 26, and must first ask to be excused for our failure to reply earlier and give the information asked for in previous correspondence. Our basic difficulty has been a tremendous work load and a number of strike situations which were developing so rapidly as to require the continued attention of both Brother Bridges and myself, at most times away from headquarters.

Let me first try to give you a round-up of union developments;

As you know, at the time of the maritime conference in Marseille, the strike of the Hawaiian longshoremen was still in progress. This strike was finally ended on October 23, after 178 days of unremitting struggle. The workers won a smashing victory, in spite of the most complete mobilization of employer and government attack that any strike has undergone.

To specify some of the moves made to break the strike, the following are some examples: The newspapers and radio in Hawaii and most organizations, such as the Chambers of Commerce, etc., under the control of the employers (the infamous Big Five) in Hawaii, carried on an unrelenting attack against the union and its leadership,

When the strike had been in progress thirty days the Governor of Hawaii, who is an appointed governor and viciously anti-labor, proposed the establishment of a so-called fact-finding board, whose recommendations would not be binding and whose composition would be anti-labor and under the control of the Governor. This was rejected by a vote of over 90% through a secret ballot of the striking workers.

When the strike had been in progress some 50 days the Governor arbitrarily appointed a fact-finding board, in spite of the objections of the union. The board conducted its hearings and made

recommendations which were contrary to the wishes of the union, and there followed an unprecedented campaign of propaganda and pressure in an attempt to force the union to bend and accept those recommendations.

The Governor of the Territory, the Assistant Governor, the President of the United States, the Secretary of State, Krug, Chambers of Commerce of Hawaii, the Philippine Consulate and the Catholic Church all urged acceptance of the fact-finding recommendations. During this period every effort was made by the employers to keep up mass hysteria against the strikers, including the picketing of the union offices by a so-called "women's brigade" made up of the wives of the executives and wealthy people of Hawaii. In spite of all this pressure, the membership, under the supervised secret ballot election, voted by almost 90% to reject the recommendations of the fact-finding board and continue the strike. By that time the strike had already been underway for 60 days.

There followed thereafter a series of strike-breaking moves in the form of the establishment of scab stevedoring companies, the diversion of ships from the East Coast to Hawaii, provocation of riots and arrests of strikers by the hundreds. The ranks still held firm and the strike continued.

Early in August the Governor of Hawaii convened a special session of the Territorial Legislature and they passed a series of laws providing for the seizure of the docks and for Government strike-breaking operations. The entire apparatus of the Government was used to recruit strike-breakers and work the ships, with the owners guaranteed their profits. The strike breakers were paid the old rate of pay. They attempted to outlaw all picketing. They declared it a violation of law, subject to arrest and imprisonment, for anyone to support the strikers in any way or to give them any encouragement or financial assistance. Many complicated court battles ensued, In spite of these attacks the men still held firm.

The next step taken by the shipowners was an attempt to force the West Coast stevedores to handle cargo for Hawaii. This they refused to do and a series of injunctions was secured by the shipowners under the Taft-Hartley Law to try to compel the West Coast longshoremen to act as strike-breakers. In this regard, a situation arose almost identical with that which prevailed in London when the London dockers supported the Canadian seamen. A barge-load of scab pineapple was hauled to the West Coast and workers throughout the Northwest refused to work this cargo and the repeated efforts to haul the barge into some port where it would be unloaded all failed. Finally, the barge was taken to a little river port, almost 200 miles from the ocean above the locks of some dams and in the very foothills of the Cascade mountains. Even there, the attempt to unload the barge met with failure, although violence

was provoked by the employers, and there are presently 24 members of our union under criminal indictment on charges of rioting, etc.

After more than five months of striking and the attempts of the powerful shipowners to break the Hawaii strike by every known weapon and some new ones of their invention, they finally realized that the union would not crack and then steps were taken which finally led to a settlement and a tremendous victory on the part of the workers. The agreement calls for an increase of 21¢ an hour, 14¢ payable on return to work and 7¢ effective March 1, 1950, with the agreement to expire June 15, 1951, which is the expiration date of the agreement of the West Coast longshoremen and other maritime unions.

All strikers were returned to work and all strike breakers hired by the employers or by the government were discharged. Shortly after the strikers returned to work an attempt was made to hire some individuals who had worked as strike-breakers for the territorial government. When this occurred, the entire membership walked off the job in Honolulu and these strike-breakers were fired and assurances given that there would be no further attempts of this kind.

Throughout the entire strike not a pound of cargo moved from any West Coast port to Hawaii, except such relief cargo as had been agreed to by the union. We had an excellent demonstration of International support when the Australian ship, the Aoranga, and the Australian seamen refused to put into Honolulu unless they were sure that they would not have to stay on board ship while the ship was worked by strike-breakers.

The new basic wage of the Hawaiian Longshoremen is \$1.54 an hour and shall become \$1.61 an hour on March 1. All work at night and on Saturdays, Sundays and holidays is paid for at the rate of 1½ times the basic rate. A copy of the agreement is enclosed with the amendments on wages and the expiration date as noted in this letter.

It should be borne in mind that a large section of the members in Hawaii are Filipinos and Japanese; consequently, the word of this victory over the feudal and colonial empire of the Big Five will have its impact, and benefit the organization of labor in the Philippines and Japan.

Racial solidarity throughout the strike was complete and unbroken. As a result of this victory and the set-back to the union-smashing plans of the Hawaii employers, we are now in the process of negotiating improvements and an extension of the agreement for all sugar workers of the Hawaiian Islands. We expect that these negotiations will bear fruit shortly.

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While the strike in Hawaii was going on, there was also a strike of the Northern California Warehousemen, also members of our union. This strike lasted 110 days and likewise ended in victory.

Another strike which began on September 1 and lasted 72 days was a strike at Crockett, California. This plant is owned by the sugar interests of Hawaii. Immediately following the end of the Hawaiian strike we entered into negotiations for the settlement of the strike at Crockett and won the finest wage increases of any union on the mainland of the United States during the year 1949. The workers secured an increase of 17¢ an hour — 10¢ effective on return to work and 7¢ to go into effect automatically September 1 of next year, with the contract running to September 1, 1951. Numerous other guarantees were secured, including a guarantee that there would be no reduction in the work force during the life of the contract.

These strike activities occupied every bit of the time, energy, strength and resources of our entire International Union through to the end of October. These were crucial battles for the survival of our union and there was no doubt that the employers in Northern California and the financial interests of the biggest shipping company on the West Coast, the Matson Company, and the full power of all the employers of Hawaii were joined together in a determined effort to smash our union. We are happy to report victory on all fronts.

Immediately following these strikes, we were confronted with the problems arising out of the situation within National CIO and the "rule or be wrecked" policy of the administration of CIO.

The Convention of National CIO began October 31, and extended through November 4, in Cleveland, Ohio. President Bridges and other officers of the ILWU had to carry the brunt of the progressive fight on the floor of the Convention. You have undoubtedly seen some of the publicity on the persistent battle of this union for democracy in the labor movement on the floor of the CIO Convention.

Under separate cover, we are sending the proceedings of the first four days of the Convention, with a notation as to the principle speeches of Brother Bridges.

Our International Executive Board met on November 10 and 11 and adopted the enclosed statement of policy on the National CIO attack against the Union.

It is clear, however, that the anti-labor forces in this country will continue their unrelenting attack to destroy this union and its leadership. Beginning November 14, which was only a few days after the end of the CIO Convention, President Bridges, Vice-President Roberston and International Representative Henry Schmidt went to trial before the Federal Courts on the charge of conspiracy to commit perjury. Once again they are trying to imprison and deport

Bridges. There have been three previous trials on this same issue and the case went as far as the Supreme Court in 1945, which ruled in favor of Harry Bridges, and thereafter he became a Citizen.

I am enclosing a copy of a pamphlet entitled Why? The Fourth Frame-Up of Harry Bridges which gives the full story of the case. We feel confident that this frame-up, like the previous ones, will be smashed, but here, again, the officers, such as President Bridges, are involved full time in the trial, considerable expense in putting up a proper defense is entailed, and the union must organize its entire power to smash this frame-up. Beginning with the 11th, President Bridges has been occupied at all times either in the court room or in other work in connection with the trial.

As you can well tell, our union has been thoroughly occupied and to put it mildly — rather busy.

To address ourselves to some of the specific questions raised in your letter of November 26 and some previous correspondence:

Biographical data on President Bridges was forwarded on September 2nd, in accordance with your request. We made a request of March of Labor that they forward copies to you, but in the event you haven't gotten them, a set of the first three issues are on their way. We have also asked them to send the publication to you regularly, however, the magazine has not been coming out regularly.

Arrangements have been made to send five copies of each issue of the DISPATCHER to your office.

The calendar of work and the tremendous problems with which our union was confronted explains why it was impossible for Brother Bridges or any other officer to attend the meeting scheduled October 7 by the Maritime Trade Department. During that entire period and previous to it, both President Bridges and I were directly involved every moment of our time in the Hawaii longshore strike and the strike of the Northern California warehousemen.

With reference to the meeting scheduled for January 1950, we know now that it will be impossible for President Bridges to attend. The current court trial will still be going on in January and further, as you know, in view of these charges against President Bridges, he has been refused permission to leave the country. As to whether any one else will be able to attend still remains to be seen, although as of this time, it is very doubtful, in view of the court case, which will still be going on, and because three of the officers are compelled to devote all their time to the trial, and consequently the load on the balance of the officers is considerable.

With reference to the printing of the booklet with the rules and the report on the Marseille conference, as you know, we have already

printed the appeal in our newspaper, the DISPATCHER, and we have distributed copies of the rules at various meetings of our union. I am sure that copies of the booklet can be used for effective distribution.

As to the writing of the introductory text by President Bridges, this matter will be discussed further with him, in the event you have not already gone ahead with the printing, to secure his opinion, in the light of developments within the CIO.

As you can tell from the enclosed statement of policy, we intend to fight with all our power to stay within CIO and at the same time get the CIO to return to its founding principles of democracy in the trade union movement. As to whether we can, under these circumstances, carry our full share of the load, in the building of the Maritime Federation of the World, remains to be seen. We are fighting to secure permission from CIO to continue affiliation with the Maritime Federation of the World. We still don't know what will be the outcome of this struggle.

There have been numerous developments in the maritime industry, particularly in the NMU in the past month. There is a wholesale revolt against the dictatorship and high-handed control by Curran, President of the NMU. At the moment, Curran is in control of the national headquarters with the help of the New York police. He is attempting a wholesale expulsion of anyone who disagrees with his policy. All of the New York officers have been suspended. The rank and file is fighting back and one of the issues raised by the rank and file is affiliation with the Maritime Federation of the World. I will try to secure a full report for you as to just what is happening in the National Maritime Union.

Because of the tremendous work load of the International, and the developments which called for considerable attention to the CIO Convention and the court trial of Harry Bridges which followed immediately thereafter, it was impossible for us to send a representative to the conference in Peking, China. The Executive Board of the International did vote to send greetings to the conference. We had already notified Brother Saillant of the situation which in all probability would make it impossible for us to send a delegate.

Hoping this supplies the information you want, and assuring you that we will try to keep you informed thereafter, I am, with warmest fraternal greetings,

Louis Goldblatt
Secretary-Treasurer

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Enclosures