

# How The Union Works



## THE STRUCTURE OF THE INTERNATIONAL LONGSHORE & WAREHOUSE UNION

The International Longshore and Warehouse Union has approximately 42,000 members in over 60 local unions in the states of California, Washington, Oregon, Alaska and Hawaii. An additional 3,500 members belong to the Inlandboatmen's Union of the Pacific, which constitutes the Union's Marine Division. Another 14,000 members belong to the autonomous ILWU Canadian Area.

The organization of the ILWU began in 1934 when it was the Pacific Coast District of the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA), with headquarters in New York. The ILA was affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL), which was identified with conser-

vative politics and an approach to organizing narrowly focused on skilled craft workers.

The membership of the Pacific Coast District voted to disaffiliate from the ILA in the summer of 1937, and formed itself into the ILWU as an independent union. The new union soon affiliated with the militant Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO)—based primarily in the newer mass production industries like auto, steel and rubber—which sought to unionize all the workers in an industry, skilled and unskilled, into one union for maximum unity and strength. This approach was known as industrial unionism.

# STRUCTURE OF THE UNION



## THE INTERNATIONAL UNION

The ILWU's internal structure was put in place by delegates to the Union's first International Convention in 1938, and later modified by the 1945 Convention.

The highest governing body of the Union is the International Convention, which, since 1985, meets every three years. The Convention is made up of delegates elected by direct rank-and-file vote in each local or affiliate.

The Convention has the authority to adopt resolutions and statements of policy on political, economic, and other issues, and to amend the International Constitution which, according to the Preamble, serves to "guide our conduct and protect our democracy within the union" by defining the rights and responsibilities of ILWU members, local unions, International Officers, affiliates, and decision making bodies such as the International Convention and Executive Board.

International Officers and members of the International Executive Board are nominated at the Convention and elected later in direct rank-and-file vote by secret ballot. At the present time there are four such officers (an International President, two Vice Presidents, and a Secretary-Treasurer) who run the day-to-day affairs of the Union and supervise the staff. The Titled Officers also make up the National Organizing Committee, which coordinates and administers

funds and personnel used in organizing activities throughout the Union.

The International Executive Board, which meets at least three times a year, is the highest governing body of the Union between conventions. The Board has the authority to take all actions necessary to implement the provisions of the Constitution and the decisions of the Convention delegates, including any necessary adjustments in the budget.

## ILWU INTERNATIONAL HEADQUARTERS

The "International" of the ILWU is made up of the Titled Officers, field staff, professional staff, and clerical workers. The International coordinates the many constituencies of the ILWU: divisions, regions, locals, and industrial/occupational groupings. In practice, the International centralizes and digests the knowledge and experience of the membership—primarily as expressed in delegated bodies such as caucuses, conventions, district councils and the International Executive Board—and brings that collective wisdom to bear on contract administration, organizing, and the implementation of policy.

Since 1945, the principles underlying the role of the International have been service to the locals and strengthening unity between the many parts of the Union. The current concept of the role of the International derives from the post-World War II era when the ILWU came into its organi-

zational maturity as an international union with a solid foundation in many industries beyond its base in longshoring. Between 1945 and 1949 the International Convention authorized reorganization of the International into a departmental structure to better serve the membership. Division of work into departments such as Administration, Publicity, Research and Education, and Organizing, allowed for effective use of the International's resources and personnel and a more timely response to requests for assistance from the locals and the rank and file. In each department, staff and clerical workers are assigned to work under the direction of International Officers. Duplication of effort is minimized, and it is easier to identify and fulfill organizational priorities.

These changes were accompanied by other innovations in 1945 to more effectively represent the needs and interests of the ILWU on a national and international level, such as the creation of the Washington Office in the nation's capital. To more effectively represent the International Union in local areas, and to coordinate the implementation of ILWU policy and programs, particularly in the realm of organizing and political action, the Union also put in place a field staff of organizers and International Representatives under the supervision of Regional Directors, all of whom work under the direction of the Titled Officers.

Areas of work since 1945, with

only slight modification, have been:

- Publicity/*The Dispatcher*
- Research/Education/Health and Safety
- Political Action
- Administration/Finances
- Organizing/Field Services

Operating under constitutional limits on executive authority, the departments do not and cannot impose policy or programs on the locals. Local autonomy in this context means that the locals are responsible for requesting and making use of International services, and for implementing ILWU programs.

In relation to organizing, for example, the collective wisdom through the 1950s was that rank and filers were the most effective organizers, and that the most successful organizing campaigns were those involving the mobilization of an entire local. In this framework, the development of staff services to supplement and complement the work of the Titled Officers was not to take the place of organizing efforts by locals and the rank and file, but to make local activity more effective through efficient allocation of the International's resources in response to local requests for assistance—and through coordination with other locals and regions.

## THE LOCAL UNIONS

Each local has its own constitution, which guarantees democratic procedures, controlled by the rank and file, and spells out the duties of the various officers and commit-

tees. In general, most locals have one or more full-time elected officers, as well as a series of elected committees, including an executive board, a board of trustees (which administers the local's finances), and others such as publicity and sports.

The locals set their own dues structure, and pay a per capita to the International. International per capita payments are determined by the individual's basic wage rate, with lower-paid workers carrying a smaller percentage of the load.

In general, the only limits on the autonomy of the local union—or any caucus or division—are the provisions of the International Constitution, decisions of the International Convention, and results of an international referendum.

### THE LONGSHORE DIVISION

The core of the union, historically, has been the Longshore Division, which established the Union through its victory in the 1934 West Coast maritime strike.

The Longshore Division is made up of approximately 30 locals, divided among longshore workers, clerks and foremen. The larger locals are in Los Angeles/Long Beach, San Francisco/Oakland, Seattle, Tacoma and Portland.

The basic documents of the Longshore Division are the Pacific Coast Longshore and Clerks Agreements which are negotiated by the ILWU and the Pacific Maritime Association (PMA), an organization of stevedore companies, ports and shipping companies. These contracts establish uniform rates of pay, hours of work, and benefits such as pensions, health insurance, holidays, vacations, and pay guarantees, and define the longshore jurisdiction of the ILWU: the right of the union to represent all workers engaged in longshore and clerks work on the Pacific Coast.

Just as the Longshore Division is autonomous within the International, the separate locals are autonomous within the Longshore Division. They are responsible for negotiating local agreements and working rules, and for making sure local employers abide by the contract. They administer the grievance procedure on a local level through the Local Labor Relations Committee. Together with the employers, the locals jointly administer the procedure whereby members are dispatched from the union hiring hall to their work assignments.

The Division is governed by the Longshore Caucus, which is a representative body of longshore workers, clerks and foremen elected by the membership. Each local has a number of votes determined by its size. The Longshore Caucus sets its own rules and procedures, and discusses questions of Longshore Division policy.

The executive body of the Longshore Division is called the Coast Labor Relations Committee. It has four members: the ILWU International President and Vice President, who are elected by the entire membership of the union, and two additional members called "Coast Committeemen," who are elected for three-year terms by members of the Longshore Division: one representing California, the other representing Oregon and Washington.

The primary purpose of the Longshore Caucus is to meet before contract negotiations and develop a list of demands and improvements. The Caucus then elects from among its number a negotiating committee of rank-and-file longshore workers who remain in San Francisco during the course of negotiations. The negotiating committee also includes the International Officers and the Coast Committeemen.

If the negotiating committee

reaches agreement with the employers' committee, the contract must be presented to the Caucus which will debate it and vote on it. If the Caucus votes it up, it is sent out to the members for a ratification vote. If the Caucus votes it down, it may call for a strike vote by the membership. In order for a contract to be approved it must win a simple majority vote among the rank and file. However, if the membership of a major local, a geographical unit of smaller locals, or the clerks locals, vote against the agreement, then ratification requires a 60% vote of the entire voting membership.

The Coast Labor Relations Committee members are collectively responsible for running the affairs of the Longshore Division between caucuses. Specifically, they serve on the negotiating committee, administer the top level of the grievance procedure, and respond to requests from locals for assistance and information.

The same group of officers, under the title of the Coast Pro Rata Committee, conduct the financial affairs of the Longshore Division.

The Coast Pro Rata Committee pays the salary of the two Coast Committee members, the support staff, and all costs of the Longshore Division, including the Caucus, legal fees, negotiating contracts and conducting strikes.

These activities are funded by members of the Longshore Division, who pay their share to their local. The payment is collected with the local's dues and sent to the Coast Committee at the International Headquarters in San Francisco.

### LONGSHORE IN HAWAII, ALASKA AND CANADA

Longshore workers in Hawaii ports are not officially part of the Longshore Division. They are members of Hawaii's Local 142 and negotiate their own contract in much the same manner as the Longshore Division, with demands set by a special caucus and a negotiating committee. In general, the Hawaii longshore contract follows the pattern of the Pacific Coast Longshore Contract Document, with allowances for specific operations and local conditions.

Alaska longshore workers—also not officially part of the Longshore Division—negotiate their own contract, which closely follows the pattern of the Pacific Coast Contract.

Finally, the longshore workers in Canada's Pacific Coast ports are also members of the ILWU, and are part of the ILWU Canadian Area, which is entirely autonomous. The Canadian longshore contract roughly follows the West Coast contract, although it is subject to Canadian laws that contain elaborate provisions for government intervention in the bargaining process, and other aspects of a legal structure very different from the United States.

### OTHER AREAS AND DIVISIONS OF THE UNION

After the successful maritime strikes of the 1930s, the longshore union sought to spread its organization inland on the West Coast to protect itself against nonunion workers, and in accordance with the aggressive organizing efforts of that time.

The first area organized included the waterfront warehouses. Organization gradually spread away from the docks in the ports of San Francisco/Oakland, Portland, Seattle and Los Angeles, to form independent locals of warehouse workers. Today, the Warehouse Division includes several composite locals in the areas of the Puget Sound, Columbia River, Northern California and Southern California with members in warehouse, production, food processing,

mining, health care and many other industries.

These locals negotiate their own contracts and have their own structures. In Northern California, many of the members are covered by a warehouse master contract, negotiated jointly by the ILWU and the International Brotherhood of Teamsters.

The Hawaii locals of the International, 142 and 160, are, like any other, led by officials elected by the membership, with an executive board and numerous committees. Today, almost one-half of the ILWU membership is in Hawaii and belongs to Local 142, with headquarters in Honolulu. Until the 1950s, there were many different locals throughout the Islands, but the membership voted to amalgamate into one large local union for more effective and efficient administration and representation. Today, each of the four major counties (Oahu, Hawaii, Maui and Kauai) has a Division Director to lead its union affairs.

Local 142 is organized into five industrial divisions: longshore, sugar, pineapple, tourism and general trades. Members of each division elect delegates to caucus-type bodies, which set demands, elect negotiating committees, and have their own procedures for the ratification of contracts and the conduct of strikes.

A similar regional structure has developed in Alaska, where several local unions and units of local unions in 1983 consolidated into Local 200 for more effective representation and administration. In 2002 several longshore units left Local 200 to establish the Alaska Longshore Division.

The Marine Division of the ILWU began in 1981, when the previously independent Inlandboatmen's Union of the Pacific (IBU) affiliated with the ILWU, and is fully autonomous. The IBU represents members who work on towboats, barges and ferries along the Pacific Coast, including deep sea ports and inland waterways.

The Marine Division also includes IBU Region 37, a group of seafood processing workers with jurisdiction in Alaska and the Puget Sound who originally came into the ILWU in the 1950s from the militant cannery and fishery workers' unions.

Members of the IBU elect two full-time officers (President and Secretary-Treasurer) as well as Regional Directors in Northern California, Southern California, Puget Sound, Columbia River, Alaska and Hawaii, who conduct their local affairs based on the IBU's own constitutions and bylaws.

The autonomous Canadian Area includes 3,500 longshore workers and over 14,000 workers in the retail-wholesale, grain, and inland transport industries. Members elect their own Area officers and have their own constitution. They maintain affiliation with the Canadian Labor Congress. All dues money raised in Canada remains in Canada.

### PENSIONERS' GROUPS AND WOMEN'S AUXILIARIES

Throughout the history of the ILWU the Union has recognized the important contributions made by members' families and retired workers. When the longshore workforce was entirely male, women family members rallied to support the early struggles through actions of Ladies Auxiliaries, which since 1941 have been chartered by the International Union as local branches of the Federated Auxiliaries. Membership was open to daughters, sisters, mothers and wives of ILWU members. The ILWU Auxiliaries built a lasting reputation for militant support of the union, and for numerous activities aimed at carrying out ILWU policies in the community and the legislative

arena—including programs and policies developed at the Auxiliaries' own conventions and delegated bodies.

Unlike the Auxiliaries, which are chartered under the ILWU Constitution, the various pensioners' groups are knit together under the Pacific Coast Pensioners Association, which has been in existence since 1968—or through regional bodies like the Hawaii State Pensioners Association. In 2000, by Convention action, the PCPA was recognized as an "autonomous affiliate" of the ILWU whose members receive lifetime "retired status" in the Union.

Rules governing the participation of pensioners in the life of the ILWU are generally set by the constitutions and bylaws of the local unions from which the members are retired, although pensioners are not allowed to vote in ILWU International elections or on the Pacific Coast Longshore Contract.

Representatives of the Federated Auxiliaries and the PCPA are seated at the ILWU Convention as fraternal delegates, having voice but no vote on matters before the Convention.

### DISTRICT COUNCILS & POLITICAL ACTIVITIES

For purposes of political action, there are District Councils in each area of the ILWU's geographical jurisdiction consisting of elected representatives from each affiliated local.

The District Councils endorse political candidates for state and local office, and for the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate. In presidential election years, the presidential endorsement is usually made by the International Executive Board. The Councils also communicate with state and congressional legislators on matters of interest to the union, engage in "lobbying" activities on behalf of the ILWU's legislative program, and run voter registration and "get-out-the-vote" campaigns during election years.

To finance national political activities, the ILWU has a Political Action Fund. Under U.S. law, unions and companies are prohibited from making contributions to candidates for federal office, but may establish political action funds (PAFs) using voluntary contributions to make such donations. Each year, ILWU members may be asked to authorize a \$1.50 contribution from their March and/or July dues to the ILWU Political Action Fund. These contributions are purely voluntary and membership may choose to donate more or less than \$1.50—or nothing at all. There is no favoritism or reprisals for either making or failing to make such contributions.

On the international level, the Convention resolved in 2000 to establish an International Solidarity Fund for sending and receiving rank and file delegations in support of labor unity across the country and around the world. The Fund is financed by diverting one percent of per capita dues into the Fund up to a maximum of \$200,000. Participation by International officers and staff may not be paid out of the fund.

### ILWU PRINCIPLES

The three principles that emerge from the ILWU's concept of "The International" are:

1) There must be equal measures of leadership from the Officers and initiative by the locals.

2) The International is the thread that weaves together the many regions and constituencies of the ILWU into a unified and progressive force in the ranks of labor and the community.

3) There should be maximum local autonomy consistent with the need for coordinated negotiations and contract administration, democratic procedures, and overall solidarity.

# The Ten Guiding Principles of the ILWU

The ILWU began with a set of cardinal principles upon which it continues to operate. These were memorialized by the unions Tenth Biennial Convention held in San Francisco in 1953. They are reproduced here for the benefit of all generations of ILWU members, who have been and continue to be instrumental to the union's success.

**I. A Union is built on its members.** The strength, understanding and unity of the membership can determine the union's course and its advancements. The members who work, who make up the union and pay its dues can best determine their own destiny. If the facts are honestly presented to the members in the ranks, they will best judge what should be done and how it should be done. In brief, it is the membership of the union which is the best judge of its own welfare; not the officers, not the employers, not the politicians and the fair weather friends of labor.

Above all, this approach is based on the conviction that given the truth and an opportunity to determine their own course of action, the rank and file in 99 cases out of 100 will take the right path in their own interests and in the interests of all the people.

**II. Labor unity is at all times the key for a successful economic advancement.** Anything that detracts from labor unity hurts all labor. Any group of workers which decides to put itself above other workers through craft unionism or through cozy deals at the expense of others will in the long run gain but little and inevitably will lose both its substance and its friends.

No matter how difficult the going, a union must fight in every possible way to advance the principle of labor unity.

**III. Workers are indivisible.** There can be no discrimination because of race, color, creed, national origin, religious or political belief. Any division among the workers can help no one but the employers. Discrimination of worker against

worker is suicide. Discrimination is a weapon of the boss. Its entire history is proof that it has served no other purpose than to pit worker against worker to their own destruction.

**IV. "To help any worker in distress" must be a daily guide in the life of every trade union and its individual members.** Labor solidarity means just that. Unions have to accept the fact that the solidarity of labor stands above all else, including even the so-called sanctity of the contract. We cannot adopt for ourselves the policies of union leaders who insist that because they have a contract, their members are compelled to perform work even behind a picket line.

Every picket line must be respected as though it were our own.

**V. Any union, if it is to fulfill its appointed task, must put aside all internal differences and issues to combine for the common cause of advancing the welfare of the membership.** No union can successfully fulfill its purpose in life if it allows itself to be distracted by any issue which causes division in its ranks and undermines the unity which all labor must have in the face of the employer.

**VI. The days are long gone when a union can consider dealing with single employers.**

The powerful financial interests of the country are bound together in every conceivable type of united organization to promote their own welfare and to resist the demands of labor. Labor can no more win with the ancient weapons of taking on a single employer in industry any more than it can hope to win through the worn-out dream of withholding its skill until an employer sues for peace. The employ-

ers of this country are part of a well-organized, carefully coordinated, effective fighting machine. They can be met only on equal terms, which requires industry-wide bargaining and the most extensive economic strength of organized labor.

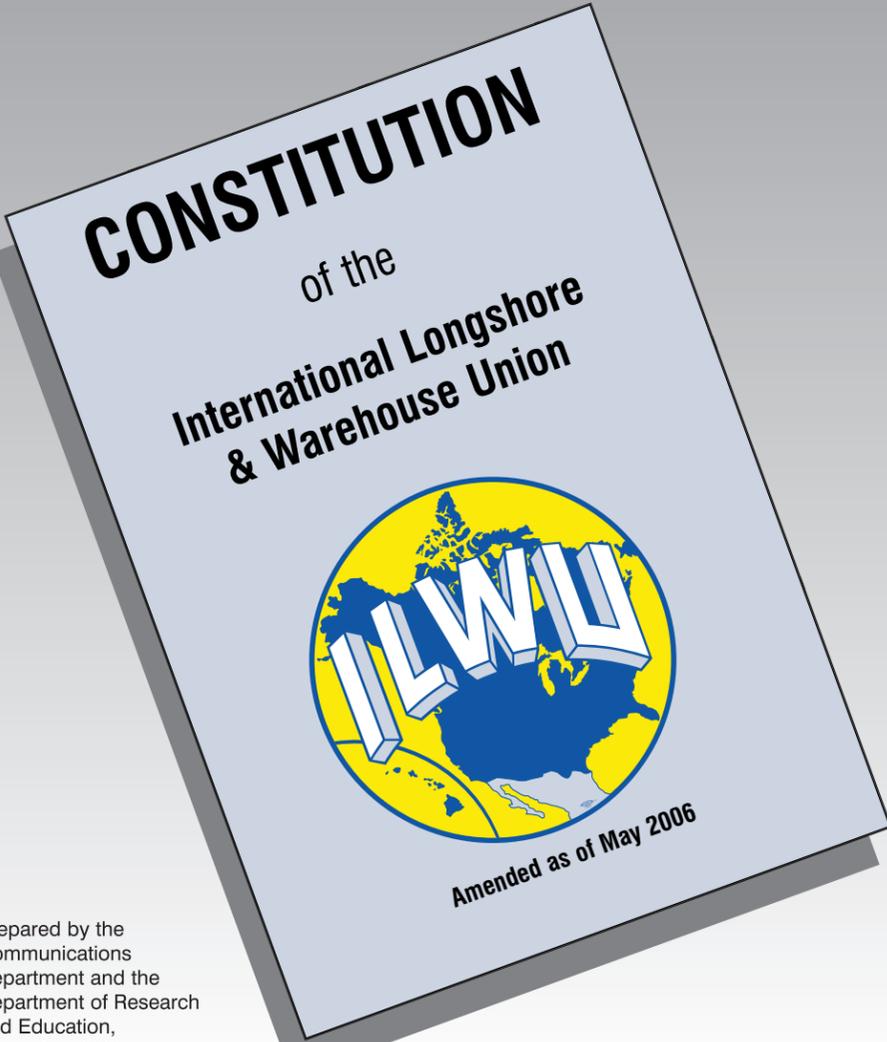
**VII. Just as water flows to its lowest level, so do wages if the bulk of the workers are left unorganized.** The day of craft unionism – the aristocracy of labor – was over when mass production methods were introduced. To organize the unorganized must be a cardinal principle of any union worth its salt; and to accomplish this is not merely in the interest of the unorganized, it is for the benefit of the organized as well.

**VIII. The basic aspiration and desires of the workers throughout the world are the same.** Workers are workers the world over. International solidarity, particularly to maritime workers, is essential to their protection and a guarantee of reserve economic power in times of strife.

**IX. A new type of unionism is called for which does not confine its ambitions and demands only to wages.** Conditions of work, security of employment and adequate provisions for the workers and their families in times of need are of equal, if not greater importance, than the hourly wage.

**X. Jurisdictional warfare and jurisdictional raiding must be outlawed by labor itself.** Nothing can do as much damage to the ranks of labor and to the principle of labor unity and solidarity as jurisdictional bickering and raiding among unions. Both public support and strike victories are jeopardized by jurisdictional warfare.

**This code for rank and file unionism is implemented by the membership's participation in organization, negotiations, strike machinery, contract enforcement and every other aspect of union life. Thus, its discipline springs out of participation, conviction and the right of the membership to decide its own course of action. The above principles and steps to implement them, and an informed and alert membership make the union what it is.**



**CONSTITUTION**  
of the  
**International Longshore  
& Warehouse Union**

**ILWU**

Amended as of May 2006

Prepared by the  
Communications  
Department and the  
Department of Research  
and Education,  
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**PREAMBLE**

*Since the beginning of history mankind has struggled individually and collectively for political, economic and cultural betterment, and has the greatest ability to make such advancement through democratic organization to achieve common aims.*

*Therefore, we who have the common objectives to advance the living standards of ourselves and our fellow workers everywhere in the world, to promote the general welfare of our nation and our communities, to banish racial and religious prejudice and discrimination, to strengthen democracy everywhere and achieve permanent peace in the world, do form ourselves into one institution to guide our conduct and protect our democracy within the union.*

**The ILWU Constitution: Article III, Objectives**  
The objectives of the organization are:

**First, to unite in one organization, regardless of religion, race, creed, color, sex, political affiliation or nationality, all workers within the jurisdiction of this International:**

**Second, to maintain and improve the wages, hours and working conditions for all of its members without discrimination;**

**Third, to educate the membership of this organization in the history of the American labor movement and in present day labor problems and tactics;**

**Fourth, to secure legislation in the interests of labor and to oppose anti-union legislation.**