



THE DISPATCHER

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Harry Bridges Statueto be unveiled July 28 at the Local 13 Dispatch Hall [page 2](#)



Photos by Harry Braun



Tentative Agreement: ILWU Canada longshore workers reached a tentative agreement with the British Columbia Maritime Employers' Association after a brief lockout on May 30. The agreement will now be sent to the ILWU Canada longshore locals for discussion and a ratification vote.

ILWU Canada longshore workers reach tentative contract agreement

Eighteen months of difficult negotiations concluded on May 30 with a tentative agreement between ILWU Canada longshore workers and the British Columbia Maritime Employers' Association (BCMEA). The proposed contract covers almost 7,000 dockworkers employed at Vancouver, Prince Rupert and other ports.

The settlement followed an all-night negotiating session and early-morning employer lockout that was imposed by the BCMEA. Employers

closed the nation's west coast ports for the day shift, but operations resumed that night. ILWU picket lines lasted between five minutes to three hours, depending on the location.

"Reaching this agreement required discipline and unity from the membership, and they delivered on both," said ILWU Canada President Rob Ashton, who also thanked the Negotiating Committee for their hard work and determination.

Details of the agreement won't be released until a ratification vote later this month, but Ashton said the package included what he described

as, "fair language in the collective bargaining agreement around automation."

Ashton thanked the ILWU International and International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) for their expressions of solidarity, along with support from a range of Canadian unions.

As *The Dispatcher* was going to press, "stop-work" membership meetings were being organized at Longshore locals to discuss the tentative agreement and answer questions prior to the ratification vote that will be announced by the end of June.

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Workers win organizing victory at Pier 80 in San Francisco

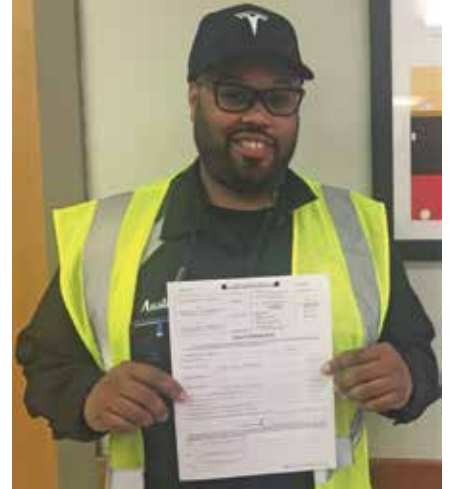
Workers who prepare and process Tesla vehicles on San Francisco's Pier 80 for shipment to Asia voted to join the ILWU in an election held on May 29 and certified by the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) in June.

The effort dates back to a more ambitious plan envisioned by terminal operator Pasha in 2016, when Ford planned to import Mexican-built cars for sale to the U.S. – an

effort that would have employed 80-100 workers. Poor vehicle sales killed the project after just a few deliveries.

That left Tesla as the remaining customer with enough business to employ 16 workers, including Austin Vann, who served as an election observer for his new union. Workers have elected Vann and Henry Ormeno to serve on the Bargaining Committee, and they will now prepare for negotiating their first contract.

An effort by the Teamsters union to represent the same group of workers fell short when the votes were counted, as did an earlier effort by Teamster officials who arranged for Pasha workers from San Diego to pose as San Francisco employees. The Teamsters backed-down from that strategy after the ILWU filed charges with the NLRB.



Proof in hand: Austin Vann, who works at Pier 80 in San Francisco, holds the official NLRB document showing a majority of co-workers voted to join the ILWU.



Progress at Northwest: After a year long and hard won victory at Northwest Veterinary Specialists (NWVS) have a certified union and are preparing for negotiations. In an early show of their commitment to representing the membership, and a recognition of the injustice members face now, the bargaining team (pictured) surveyed the membership about their struggles with ever increasing bills and rent. The team made no secret of the fact - "The Bills Won't Wait, And Neither Should We". In a surprising turn of events, VCA agreed to make an immediate inflationary wage increase offer and the bargaining team accepted the offer. Negotiations are just beginning and there are many more issues to be resolved. But for now, at least, workers are not falling behind and they are collectively at the bargaining table, to make improvements for the future. Pictured left to right: Jenna Pinkney, Rebecca Rasmussen, Jameson Burger, Jordan Misfeldt-Wallis, Chelsea Bennett, Danielle Maffei, Lisa Meyer.

Harry Bridges Statue to be unveiled July 28 at the Local 13 Dispatch Hall



Local 13 Dispatch Hall
1500 E Anaheim St, Wilmington, CA 90744
Sunday, July 28 at noon

A life-sized bronze statue of ILWU co-founder Harry Bridges will be unveiled at the ILWU Local 13 Dispatch Hall on July 28, Bridges' birthday. The statue is being created by San Pedro sculptor Eugene Daub and was commissioned by the Southern California Pensioners. Daub also sculpted the bust of Bridges at the ILWU memorial on Harbor Boulevard in San Pedro.

DISPATCHER

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ILWU honorary member Paul Robeson memorialized at Rutgers University

One hundred years ago, a remarkable young man graduated from Rutgers University in the spring of 1919. At the time, Paul Leroy Robeson was only the third African-American allowed to enroll in the New Jersey campus during its 150-year existence. Robeson entered with an academic scholarship and left the university as class valedictorian. He went on to become one of America's most celebrated and controversial public figures of the 20th Century.

Man of many gifts

Robeson achieved extraordinary success as a scholar. He was fluent in Greek and Latin, and had a command of classic literature. He was a two-time All-American athlete and gifted operatic and popular singer. He graduated from Columbia University Law School while simultaneously playing for the NFL. He astonished audiences with his knowledge of 20 languages and was a gifted Shakespearean actor. A devoted social activist, he was also an honorary lifetime member of the ILWU.



Family: Paul Robeson's granddaughter, Susan, spoke at the dedication. Today she is an accomplished author, film producer and teacher.

Despite all these and other astounding accomplishments, Robeson died in relative obscurity – due to the color of his skin and his unwavering devotion to unions, the working class and dreams of a more just society – causes that made him a target for vicious attacks during most of his life.

Honors & praise

A century after graduating, Robeson's accomplishments and struggles were finally honored on April 12, 2019, with the dedication of "Paul Robeson Plaza" at the Rutgers University campus in New Brunswick, NJ. The ILWU joined other organizations and individuals who donated funds for the project that features panels of black granite, etched with descriptions of Robeson's achievements – along with details of the many barriers that he encountered.

"We want a new generation of young people to understand this great man who was unfairly pushed to the margins of history," said ILWU Local 10 Pensioner Lawrence Thibeaux, the ILWU's official representative who attended the dedication at the request of International President Willie Adams.

"Paul Robeson is among the greatest of the hundreds of thousands of Rutgers alumni – simply one of the greatest," said Rutgers President Robert Barchi, who added that the University is now undertaking a painful but necessary examination of the many ways that centuries of racism have impacted New Jersey's leading public university. Robeson's granddaughter, Susan, also spoke at the dedication, noting that her grandfather surprised many by becoming more passionate about unions, social justice and civil rights as he grew more famous, wealthy and accomplished as a singer and actor.

New generation steps-up

Perhaps the most important attendees were Rutgers students from the class of 1971, along with members of the Rutgers African-American Alumni Alliance. The groups pushed hard for the Robeson memorial, overcoming occasional resistance, and raising money for the effort. Former student leader Jim Savage, who Chairs the Class of 1971 Paul Robeson Milestone



New friends: Kendall Hall is head of the Rutgers African American Alumni Alliance. She contacted the ILWU to support the initiative. The ILWU contributed to the Paul Robeson Plaza memorial and International President Willie Adams sent Local 10 Pensioner Lawrence Thibeaux to attend the dedication. "I'm so grateful for the chance to meet Lawrence and learn more about the ILWU," she says.

Project, played a key role, as did former student Claude White, who serves as the 1971 Class President.

"We hope Robeson Plaza will inspire future generations to take a stand against all forms of injustice," said Savage, who is credited with conceiving the memorial and involving others to join the effort.

The power of Robeson's legacy to inspire new generations was confirmed earlier this year when Black Lives Matter co-founder Opal Tometi told a Rutgers audience that today's civil rights movement wouldn't be possible without Paul Robeson and Martin Luther King Jr. "Robeson is so important because he paved the way for us to have a global perspective on our movements," she said.

The man and his times

Robeson's mother, Maria, was blind and died in a house fire when he was six years-old. His father, William, was born a slave in 1845 and escaped from a plantation as a teenager. Armed with a fierce hunger for knowledge, the father secured two advanced degrees after the Civil War, studied and mastered ancient Greek and Latin, plus classical literature and philosophy – knowledge that he shared with his five children, including Paul, who was born in 1898.

Revolution and repression

When Robeson graduated from Rutgers in 1919, the world had just been turned-upside by the Russian Revolution in 1917 and First World War that ended the following year. The overthrow of an aristocratic regime by a new working class inspired Robeson and many Americans – along with millions around the world – to embrace the promise of a democratic state run by and for workers that would end racism, hunger and war. The Russian Revolution also fueled a bitter backlash by conservatives and anti-union business leaders who feared something similar could spread to America. They launched a vicious crackdown on unions, civil rights leaders and socialists. The FBI's J.

Edgar Hoover rose quickly through the rank while attacking "the red menace." During the same time, membership in the Ku Klux Klan exploded, along with lynchings and other horrors that the organization promoted.

Bridges and Robeson

Across the globe in Australia, the Russian Revolution inspired Harry Bridges who was just 16 in 1917. He left home that year to work at sea before entering America in 1920. Both men lived their entire lives believing that the Soviet Union was a beacon of hope for workers – and both paid heavily for their views during the Cold War. Bridges and Robeson were charged separately with being Communists, which was a crime until courts overturned the laws decades later. Bridges overcame three decades of government efforts to jail and deport him. Robeson was "blacklisted" from working on film, radio, television or theaters. His recordings were removed from store shelves and movies weren't shown. The government revoked his passport and banned him from traveling abroad. When his travel ban was finally lifted, the FBI and State Department orchestrated a smear campaigns to ruin his reputation at home and abroad.

Honored by the ILWU

In 1943, Harry Bridges led International Convention delegates and Executive Board members to unanimously grant Robeson a lifetime honorary ILWU membership for his "steadfast devotion and service to the cause of democracy and to the economic and cultural advancement of all peoples." Robeson was especially honored for his support of sugar cane workers in Hawaii who were organizing and joining the ILWU to improve conditions. Another ILWU honorary membership was granted at the same time to the famous artist and activist Rockwell Kent, who illustrated the first issue of The Dispatcher, in December 1942, and remained an ILWU supporter his entire life. Like Robeson, Kent was also persecuted by the government for

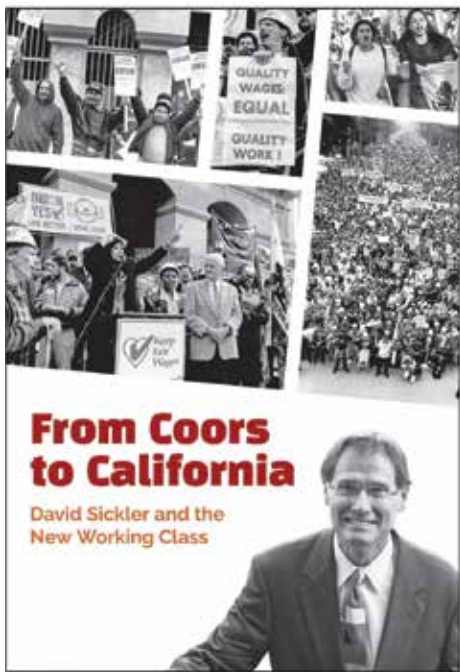
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Inspiring a new generation: Seven year-old Kristopher Dabrowski at the Paul Robeson Plaza dedication.

Photo by: Nick Romanenko/Rutgers University

BOOK REVIEW



Beer tycoon William Coors and his brother Joe used to say that one of their biggest mistakes was hiring Dave Sickler to work at the brewery in Golden, Colorado. Sickler probably didn't seem like much of a threat when he entered the plant at the age of 18, trading his dream of owning a horse ranch for standing on the bottling line.

Within a few years, Sickler emerged as a respected rank-and-file leader who nearly brought the mighty corporation to its knees.

Those who didn't know Dave Sickler during the past five decades missed one of the brightest lights in the labor movement—beginning with his leadership of the ten-year Coors beer boycott, followed by years of organizing and advocating for minority and immigrant workers. Fortunately, a new and easy-to-read book allows anyone to quickly learn from Sickler's experience and insights that are detailed in *From Coors to California: David Sickler and the New Working Class*.

Sickler was a rank-and-file worker when he started at the Coors plant. Co-workers soon chose him to be their shop steward for Brewery Workers Local 366. Before long he was their Business Agent and eventually a key figure in the 1977 strike that Coors provoked by demanding massive take-aways and administering lie-detector tests to rid their plant of workers believed to be gay or radical. Sickler opposed a strike because he knew Coors had already used the same tactic to defeat 18 previous unions. Instead he suggested a strategy of having most workers remain on the job while a smaller team left to campaign for a boycott that could put outside pressure

on the company. Sickler's advice was ignored and the failed strike soon led to the union's decertification. Sickler responded with a boycott plan that won backing from the AFL-CIO. The national labor coalition felt Coors was one of the worst employers in America with a history of bigotry, racism, homophobia, hatred toward independent women and unions that made them a good target.

Early in the boycott, Sickler decided to build support for the boycott from gays and ethnic minorities in Coors' largest market—California—where he built relationships with leaders and organizations in both groups, explaining how Coors was funding attacks against their communities. He received help from experienced boycott organizers in the United Farmworkers Union and connected with gay rights leaders. The strategy soon led to the shutdown of San Francisco's Coors distributor—and the boycott continued despite many ups and downs during the next decade until Coors called for a settlement. Sickler's coalition work wasn't warmly received by all labor leaders. Many were uncomfortable with the campaign's embrace of gay rights and calls for racial justice that raised uncomfortable questions in some unions about their own racist practices.

In contrast, ILWU International President Jimmy Herman warmly welcomed Sickler and backed the boycott from beginning to end. *The Dispatcher* featured updates about the Coors boycott, beginning with a front page report in November, 1978.

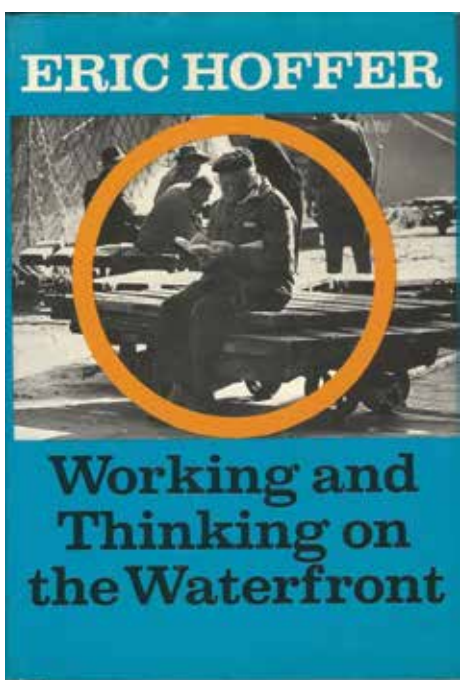
After the Coors boycott, Sickler launched a series of campaigns to help unions organize workers, especially in Southern California, where he made many allies—but also ruffled feathers by urging labor leaders to embrace new immigrant workers, African-Americans and others who had been excluded from many unions, especially the building trades.

During his last two decades, Sickler worked with unions on political campaigns and tried to move the building trades in a more progressive direction. Both experiences are full of lessons for curious and committed union members. Sickler and his wife Carole—also a lifelong union organizer—are now retired and living in Monterey County.

The book is published by UCLA's Labor Center, with chapters written by Kent Wong, Julie Monroe, Jaime Regalado and former ILWU Organizing Director Peter Olney. At just over 100 pages, it's an easy and fascinating read with plenty of inspiration and insights.

BOOK REVIEW

60th Anniversary Review of *Working and Thinking on the Waterfront* by Eric Hoffer



This year marks the 60th anniversary of the writing of *Working and Thinking on the Waterfront* by Eric Hoffer (1898-1983), an author and active member of Local 10 from 1943 until his retirement in 1964. *Working and Thinking* was the result of a journal Hoffer kept from June 1, 1958 to May 21, 1959.

In his observations, Hoffer commented on a variety of personal matters and public issues, including the manner of economic and social change. His statements that “Drastic change juveniles” and can even cause “dehumanization” may help explain Internet trolls, social media mobs and the polarization that now afflicts American politics and journalism. His 1958 claim that “If an American businessman had displayed a fraction of such megalomania [of foreign tyrants] he would have been made the laughingstock of the world” leaps off the page when we consider that such a businessman now occupies the White House.

Unfortunately, Hoffer's insights into social change are limited to analysis of change in general. Nowhere in *Working and Thinking* does he mention the approaching containerization that would soon haunt the futures of longshore workers.

Hoffer was a working class philosopher. Among ourselves, working people have always discussed issues of the day or of eternity with perspectives and insights unfamiliar to many professional scholars. Unfortunately, our wisdom rarely breaks out of our ranks. In addition to having limited time to

write or otherwise express our experiential wisdom, we face prejudices from publishers and other cultural gatekeepers who often stereotype us before seriously considering us. Hoffer was one exception who managed to break into the wider culture with *The True Believer*, his 1951 study of fanaticism. This book launched Hoffer on a successful career as an author. He wrote nine more books along with magazine articles and penned a syndicated newspaper column. Yet, unlike most successful working class writers and artists, he never quit his “day job.” Indeed, in *Working and Thinking*, he credited his longshore work as an assistance to his creativity. And he used the flexible schedule made possible by the ILWU hiring hall to gain chances to write that workers in other trades did not have.

His statements about working people stand as vigorous assertions about our deeds and dignity. To Hoffer, “Honor Labor” was more than a slogan. It was an integral part of his artistic expression and daily life. In these times, media portrayals of working people are relatively few and rarely with awareness or solidarity. Most newspapers and magazines no longer

even print once obligatory Labor Day articles about working people and our unions. In contrast to today's neglect of workers (especially those who do physical labor), Hoffer's words from the past are a timeless affirmation of the inherent dignity of labor and a repudiation of postmodern corporate so-called values. Hoffer believes that in general, “common people have a better opinion of mankind than do the educated” and expresses “confidence in the competence of the run-of-the-mill American” while crediting “the masses” with the building of America. Much of this confidence comes from his experience in union meetings. And on the waterfront he experiences “a strong feeling of belonging.” Hoffer does not over romanticize workers, either as individual persons or as a class; he finds shortcomings including some among himself and his colleagues.

The waterfront and America have changed much since the late 1950s. Rather than looking back nostalgically or endorsing all change uncritically, we should read Hoffer for what we might regain in order to face the opposition to our basic rights as workers and as people.

—Howard Isaac Williams, Local 6

A History of America in Ten Strikes

Erik Loomis, *The New Press* (2018)

The assault on American workers by employers, government and the courts has increased recently, making it more difficult to organize and negotiate contracts. At the same time, sympathy toward unions from the general public has also increased – along with growing support for some strikes.

The Supreme Court's ruling in *Janus v. AFSCME* makes it harder for public sector unions to collect dues. The court decision marked a 70-year effort by the National Right to Work Foundation to weaken unions, funded by billionaires who hate unions.

Their victory contrasts with the recent wave of teacher strikes earlier this year in West Virginia, Arizona, Colorado, North Carolina and Kentucky. These strikes occurred in so called “right to work” states where workers in the private-sector have few rights and strikes by public workers are illegal. These are the same conditions that existed 100 years ago, prior to passage of the National Labor Relations Act in 1935.

A new book by historian Erik Loomis, *A History of America in Ten Strikes*, gives historical context to the current labor movement. The book is one-part introduction to labor history and one-part introduction to the history of America as made and experienced by the working class.

“The workplace is a site where people struggle for power,” Loomis writes, and his book places that conflict at the center for an understanding of American history. Loomis notes that work is one of the few experiences that tie peo-

ple together. “Fighting for better wages and conditions unites workers across industries and generations,” he says.

Each of the ten chapters are framed around one major strike. The strikes are laid out chronologically, starting with the organizing by workers in the mills of Lowell, MA in the 1830s and 1840's, that was led by women when America was beginning to industrialize—and ending with the immigrant-led Justice for Janitors campaign of the 1980s and 1990s. In between, Loomis discusses many of the country's most famous strikes, including the Flint Sit-Down of 1936-1937 and the most successful strike in American history—the self-emancipation of the millions of enslaved people during the Civil War.

One could argue about which strikes are spotlighted and which are not—the 1934 West Coast longshore strike gets only a few pages. But these “ten strikes” are only a window that Loomis used to view the historical and economic context surrounding each strike. It is here that Loomis really shines by giving readers a comprehensive understanding of the issues facing workers and the complex political and social landscape that workers were organizing in.

For Loomis, workers are not mere spectators to history who are shaped by forces beyond their control. He sees workers as political and economic actors who shape the world around them, and Loomis does it without romanticizing the history of working class struggle.

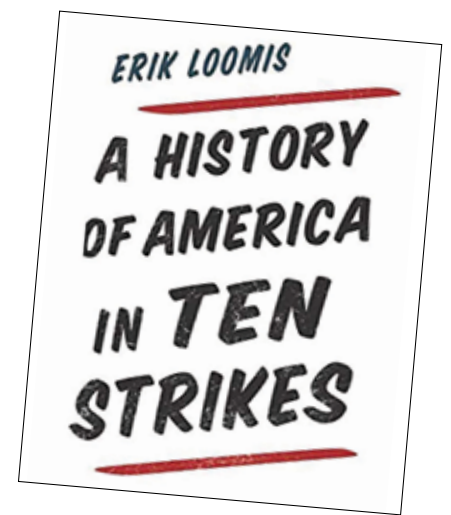
Working class movements have long struggled with their own internal divisions based on racial, ethnic, gender and craft differences – which is a

recurring theme in the book. While many of these divisions have been exploited by employers to weaken labor movements, Loomis notes that many workers and unions have willingly embraced and maintained these divisions. While exceptions exist, such as the ILWU's push of racial integration in the 1930s, other unions openly supported Jim Crow segregation in their locals and promoted anti-immigrant legislation such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

Racist and nativist sentiments, lack of democratic practices and corruption have all worked to undermine the strength of the labor movement. Loomis doesn't avoid this dark history, but shows how rank-and-file movements have risen to fight discrimination and promote democratic reforms.

Another theme that emerges in *A History of America in Ten Strikes*, is the importance of political action by workers in order to neutralize government-employer alliances. From the beginning of industrialization, employers have used the courts, legislature, police, military and private security and mercenary forces to crush strikes and unions.

“There is simply no evidence from American history that unions can succeed if the government and employers combine to crush them,” Loomis writes. The chance of success for labor struggle increases dramatically if the state remains neutral and doesn't put its finger on the scale in favor or the employer. Loomis continues, “After decades of struggle, in the 1930s, a new era of government passed labor legislation that gave workers the right



to organize, the minimum wage, and other pillars of dignified work for the first time. While employers' power never waned in the halls of government, the growing power of unions neutralized the worst corporate attacks until the 1980s.”

Members of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) would learn this lesson in dramatic fashion when Ronald Reagan fired over 12,000 air traffic controllers during an illegal strike in 1981. The crushing of that strike ushered in a new era of attacks on organized labor. Ironically, PATCO had endorsed Reagan during the 1980 election, despite his anti-union record. Their faulty assessment ended in a catastrophe.

Loomis is clear that politicians won't lead the charge to protect workers. That's up to the working class, who must take collective action to challenge employer power. Now we're living in times like the 1920s with extreme inequalities of wealth and corporate power at the expense of workers. Loomis's book argues that our only hope is to challenge this new “Gilded Age” by building inclusive, democratic unions that understand how government can be leveraged to benefit the working class.

BOOK REVIEW

A children's book about working on the docks

Few children's books tackle the topic of work, and fewer offer much sympathy and respect for the people involved. Author Kristina Bowden's picture book does both and sets her story on the docks – creating a novel and welcome children's picture book, especially for ILWU families and friends.

Kristina Bowden works on the waterfront as a safety and health consultant, while her husband Scott is a crane mechanic who's been with Local 13 since 2005. The result is book with many details that would have been lost without their firsthand experience.

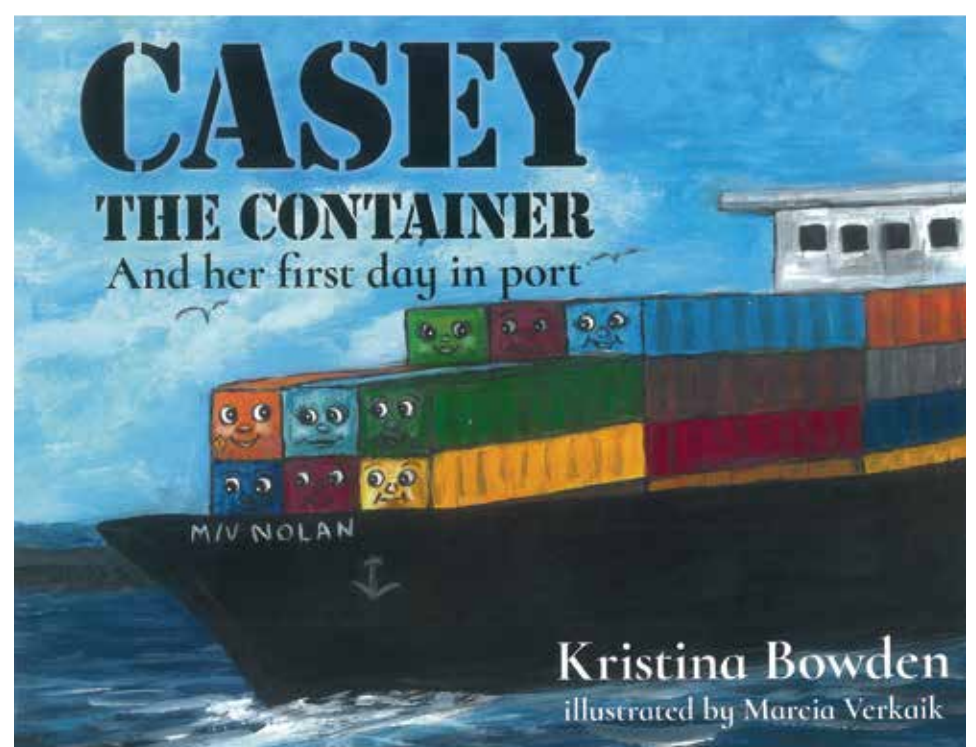
Bowden says she got the idea for the children's book after their son was born in 2014 and their home library grew to include many children's classics, “but I couldn't find a book about the industry I loved and knew so well,” she says.

The illustrations by Marcia Verkaik are filled with rich colors and creative touches that will spark young imaginations and delight fans of the children's classic, “Thomas the Tank Engine.”

The 24-page softcover book contains 18 pages of rhyming verse surrounded by beautiful illustrations. The back of the book contains a glossary of terms that will be familiar to longshore families – a feature that highlights Bowden's commitment to detail and the educational process.

She hopes the book will “provide a platform for thousands of individuals who work across the world” and help everyone understand the details of work on the docks and our place in the logistics chain.

The book is self-published by “Twin 20 Publishing” of Los Alamitos and can be reached via caseythecontainer.com and hello@caseythecontainer.com



Family effort: *Casey the Container* was written by longshore family member Kristina Bowden.

Book reviews continued on page 8

Ryan Takas: new Columbia River Organizer



Longtime Local 5 leader Ryan Takas has been named Lead Organizer for the Columbia River Region. The appointment was announced by ILWU's National Organizing Committee, consisting of International President Willie Adams, Vice President (Mainland) Bobby Olvera, Jr., Vice President (Hawaii) Wesley Furtado, and Secretary-Treasurer Ed Ferris.

"Ryan's rank-and-file experience and organizing ability made him a perfect pick for this important position," said President Adams.

In accepting the assignment, Takas stepped down from his position on the International Executive Board where he was elected in 2009 and 2018 by members of the Oregon and Columbia River Region.

Takas joined the ILWU on August 10th, 2000, along with other employees at Powell's Books in Portland who

organized for union representation and formed Local 5. He has since been elected by co-workers to serve as Local 5's Business Agent, Vice-President and Secretary-Treasurer along with service on the Local's Organizing and Safety Committees. Takas also served three years on the Portland Convention Host Committee and as a delegate to the Oregon Area District Council, where he and others coordinated regional political action efforts. He has been elected six times since 2003 as

a delegate to the ILWU International Conventions. Besides serving in elected posts, Takas has made presentations at several ILWU trainings, including the 2017 LEAD Conference and the 2019 Secretary-Treasurer Training Conference.

"I'm passionate about the ILWU's democratic traditions and progressive ideals," said Takas, "and honored to help more workers organize so they can improve their conditions and make the ILWU stronger."



SFVS workers win support with community outreach



Workers from San Francisco Veterinary Specialists voted last year to join the ILWU and are now negotiating their first contract with the VCA Corporation that's owned by Mars – the holding company known for their M&M candy that has quietly cornered much of America's growing and lucrative pet care market.

Workers have been winning community support for efforts to raise care and working standards at the City's largest specialty animal hospital. On May 25-26, volunteers staffed a booth at San Francisco's Harrison St. Carnival event that was attended by thousands.

Many signed a petition expressing concern about the company's sudden closure of full-time oncology services at the hospital last month. Workers have also done client outreach in front of the hospital, accompanied at times by community supporters.

ILWU honorary member Paul Robeson memorialized at Rutgers University

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also persecuted by the government for his political views and had his foreign travel rights revoked. Kent later won a 1958 case before the Supreme Court that overturned the travel bans.

Persecution takes a toll

Decades of persecution, beginning before WWII, took a heavy toll on Robeson. In 1961 he attempted suicide by cutting his wrists while traveling abroad. His recovery took several months and was plagued by severe depression that was treated in Europe with heavy drugs and electroconvulsive "shock" therapy. He returned to the U.S. in 1963 where he lived in seclusion. He briefly considered joining the Civil Rights movement, but refused because it would have required him to renounce his political support for the Soviet Union. A Carnegie Hall tribute was held on his 75th birthday that he was unable to attend, sending a taped message instead: "I want you to know that I am the same Paul, dedicated as ever to the worldwide causes of humanity for freedom, peace and brotherhood." He died in 1976.

"Everyone here knows that Robeson was a 'renaissance man' in the truest sense of the word," said Lawrence Thibeaux. "He is remembered for many things, but we in the ILWU remember him for his elegant outspokenness on the rights of working people. Robeson may have achieved fame on many fronts, but for us, he is most famous for being a Union Brother."



Inspired to act: Former Rutgers student and Paul Robeson Milestone Project Committee Chair Jim Savage spent five years organizing with others to make the Robeson memorial a reality.

John Fisher, Jr. is still diggin' the downbeat



Thirty-five years ago, Fisher was still working on the docks as a Local 34 Clerk while playing at San Francisco jazz clubs, including three nights a week at Pasand's on Union street that featured music in front and Indian food in the back. He recalls columnist Herb Caen being a regular customer who sat by the window with a cocktail and listened to their band, called "Classax."

Thanks to the ILWU, I've been able to pursue my passion as a jazz musician with performances in the San Francisco Bay Area and around the world.

Learning from jazz giants

My love for music—especially jazz—began at a young age. My Dad was a Local 34 Ship's Clerk who drew cargo plans mostly at the Oakland Army Base in the 1950's and 60's. He would go down to Melrose Records in San Francisco's Fillmore District and buy Jazz and Blues records. He loved Lionel Hampton's Band. I remember learning to play jazz brushes to those old 78's. The musicians who inspired me back then included Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Gene Krupa and Cozy Cole. I took lessons with some of the great musicians and studied music theory. I still practice on my drums every day. I remember how nervous I was when I first performed on stage, singing with the St. Dominic's Boy's Choir when I was 7 years old.

Unions helped musicians

In 1969, I became a registered member of Ship Clerks Local 34. I put a second union card in my wallet a year later when I joined Local 6 of the American Federation of Musicians. The good pay and flexible work schedule on the docks allowed me to perform and tour with bands in the U.S. and Europe. When we played Bay Area clubs in the 1970's, most of those venues had union contracts with good wages. There were so many clubs then in San Francisco with great jazz, including The Blackhawk, Both And, the The Jazz Workshop, El Matador and Keystone Korner, just to name a

few. My band was at the Starlight Roof of the Sir Francis Drake Hotel for over 2 years. One especially memorable performance was a gig with the legendary trumpeter, Chet Baker.

Change in wrong direction

When I retired from the ILWU in 2007, I couldn't wait to get back into the music full-time and play in my favorite clubs again. What I found on the scene was far different from what I left behind a few decades before. A "race to the bottom" had turned the local music scene upside down for performers. Collective Bargaining Agreements for musicians in nightclubs had mostly disappeared. I learned that members of the Musicians Union found themselves struggling on hard times, just like other union beginning in the 1980's - when President Ronald Rea-

gan declared war on unions by crushing a strike led by PATCO - the Professional Air Traffic Controller's Union. Unlike steel factories and auto plants, our music clubs didn't move to Mexico or China, but musicians faced working conditions that were sub-standard and non-union.

Musicians barely scrape by

Jazz is still being played today in San Francisco for audiences in bars, restaurants, and coffee houses. But instead of getting paid union scale, musicians have to beg with tip jars. You're lucky today to get a free sandwich or an occasional meal and a beer. It's not unusual for good jazz musicians to leave a gig with \$40 or \$60 in their pocket - and on an exceptional night it might be \$100 bucks. The Musician's Union is still maintaining good contracts at large city symphonies and opera houses, but most of the smaller clubs and venues no longer have union contracts. Even the famed S.F. Jazz Center in San Francisco is not yet a union house - despite spending \$41 million on a new building and raising an impressive annual budget from many large and small donors.

New tech benefits big biz

Another difference today is the way new technology is impacting the music industry. We have the ability to share our music and interact with loyal fans through live-streaming, Twitter, Facebook, Snapchat and other social media platforms. We also have to contend with apps like Spotify that give away our music for free to the public with little or no compensation for musicians. Just like the rest of society, big corporations and Wall Street seem to be the ones who profit most from new technology.

Cool union project

One of the real bright spots that I'm excited about is an organization called "Jazz in the Neighborhood." This group is lining-up local venues who promise to pay fair wages for musicians who perform there. The organization also raises funds to help underwrite those

venues and ensure musicians will be paid fairly. It's important to note that this project is endorsed and supported by the Musicians Union, because they recognize how important it is to help the larger group of unorganized musicians who extend beyond the narrow ranks of union members in the symphony and opera.

Jazz in the Neighborhood

In the Bay Area, you can support "fair wages for musicians" by patronizing clubs such as Bird and Becket in San Francisco's Bernal Heights, the Marin Outdoor Market, and Boutiki in San Jose. The Jazz School in Berkeley also has performances that pay fair wages by cooperating with "Jazz in the Neighborhood." Check out their website and go out to see some live music in your neighborhood that also provides fair wages to the performers.

Health care & pensions for all

Over the years, I can't tell you how many fundraising concerts I've attended or performed at to help great jazz musicians who are facing serious illnesses and crushing medical bills without any health insurance. As an ILWU Longshore Division pensioner, I share the same medical benefits that the active ILWU members do, and give thanks every day for the rank-and-file struggles and sacrifices that made it possible. I'm also proud to belong to a union that believes everyone in America - the richest nation in the history of the world - has a right to good health care and a decent retirement.

Groovin' high

Because I belonged to two unions, I sometimes joked that "my pocketbook was in Local 34, and my heart was in Musicians' Local 6." Now, more than ever, I appreciate how the ILWU made it possible for me to continue my life-long passion for music. So next time you see me playing on the bandstand with my fellow musicians, you'll know why I'm smiling when we hit a heavy groove.



Fisher is now a veteran jazz drummer with five decades of performing under his belt. Flexible work on the docks allowed him and other artists to pursue multiple careers.



Robeson recognized: ILWU International Union President Harry Bridges presented an honorary ILWU membership to Paul Robeson in 1944, recognizing his service to humanity and the working class.

This month's Transitions will appear next month in our July-August issue.



Summer Book Suggestions

continued from pages 4 & 5

A Helping Hand...

...when you need it most. That's what we're all about. We are the representatives of the ILWU- sponsored recovery programs. We provide professional and confidential assistance to you and your family for alcoholism, drug abuse and other problems—and we're just a phone call away.

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BOOK REVIEW

Protecting veteran's health care from being privatized

Suzanne Gordon is a pro-union journalist who built her career on investigating the flaws in some of America's largest institutions, especially our profit-driven, corporate-controlled healthcare system.

Gordon's new work takes an unexpected turn by defending a large American healthcare institution – the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) – in her latest book, *Wounds of War: How the VA Delivers Health, Healing and Hope to the Nation's Veterans*. She argues that the Veterans Healthcare

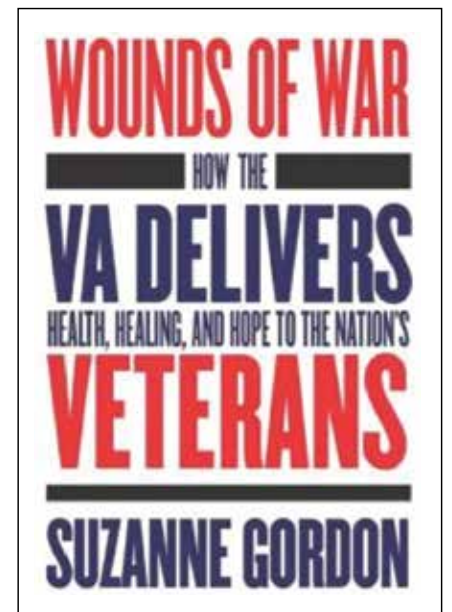
system is actually a remarkable and successful institution that deserves to be supported, not destroyed, for many reasons, including:

- Shorter wait times and scheduling fewer patients per hour than private providers – resulting in high levels of patient satisfaction.
- Deep-discounts from drug companies that have saved patients and taxpayers billions of dollars.
- Massive studies involving up to 500,000 participants are leading to new and better treatments for a wide range of diseases.

- Cutting-edge research that brought us the nicotine patch, pace-maker, Shingles vaccine and high-tech prosthetic limbs.
- Service to 9 million patients nationwide and operating the country's largest integrated healthcare system.

Enemies of the VA painted a different picture several years ago when the agency was attacked during Congressional hearings by anti-union legislators. Gordon says the VA critics exploited a few isolated problems in order to smear and destroy the entire agency. She details how those attacks were carefully orchestrated by business interests that hope to replace the VA's non-profit healthcare with profit-focused providers who are dazzled by the prospect of acquiring 9 million patients with expensive problems. Other VHA enemies include real-estate speculators who hope to build developments on former VA properties, and insurance companies seeking to write policies or handle billing for 9 million patients.

On June 6 of this year, a new law took effect allowing vets to get seen by a private specialist if the VA can't provide a specialist within a 30-minute drive or 20-day wait. Experts think up to one-third of VA patients might meet those criteria and be eligible. Curiously, most legislators who backed this provi-



sion refused to make private insurance companies meet the same standard, a move that could help most Americans. Hopefully, the upcoming presidential election will re-focus attention on our nation's peculiar healthcare system that is both the most expensive and lowest quality among industrial nations. Gordon makes a good case for defending and improving non-profit healthcare provided by the VA, with its proven track record of excellence and high patient satisfaction. The alternative model, built on bloated private profit-making insurance companies, is a proven failure, but remains in place for now. President Trump and his anti-union supporters in Congress raised the stakes after he took office by destroying Obamacare – and not replacing it with “something better” that he promised, but never delivered. Gordon's book is worth reading for anyone who cares about improving America's healthcare.

