

day, June 18, Seattle and all other locals except Los Angeles voted no. Longshore spokesmen told reporters the June 16 agreement failed to consider the demands of the other striking maritime unions.<sup>71</sup>

The failure of the June 16 agreement marked the end of the first phase of the 1934 maritime strike. Forty-one days of bargaining at both the district and local levels had failed to settle the strike. Government intervention had not succeeded. ILA officers, employers associations, and government officials recognized the futility of negotiating agreements that proved unacceptable to the West Coast ILA membership. Although the goals for both sides would remain the same, employers decided to implement new strategies to win the strike. Show-down time was coming.

## CHAPTER XIII

### SHOWDOWN

*They got me boys! They got me!*

– *Shelvy Daffron, June 30, 1934<sup>1</sup>*

Three weeks after the creation of the Joint Northwest Strike Committee, ten San Francisco maritime unions created a Joint Marine Strike Committee. On June 13, delegates elected ILA Local 38-79 strike chairman Harry Bridges as presiding officer.<sup>2</sup> On June 19, Bridges asked Mayor Rossi to arrange a conference with employers for the purpose of a speedy settlement. The marine committee set two preconditions. There must be absolute assurance of no blacklisting because of strike activities, and joint settlements for all unions involved. The next day the marine committee amplified its demands. Strikebreakers must be discharged, the hiring halls under ILA control, and gang committees created to discipline men for drunkenness, pilfering, or shirking of work. Wages and hours would be submitted to arbitration.<sup>3</sup>

Charles Cutright, who had played an important part in Local 38-12's involvement in the Seattle 1919 general strike, was also elected a delegate from Local 38-79 to the Joint Marine Strike Committee. Along with other members of the marine committee, Cutright addressed a mass meeting of 10,000 strikers and their sympathizers in the Municipal Auditorium on June 19. Cutright advocated a general strike by all unions in sympathy with the maritime unions.<sup>4</sup>

On the day of the San Francisco mass meeting, Congress approved a joint resolution empowering President Roosevelt to establish boards of investigation and arbitration for labor disputes. The next day Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins wired Thomas Plant and Joseph Ryan proposing that they submit control of the hiring halls, "the one point still in

dispute," to DOL arbitration. Plant replied that waterfront employers would appreciate the Secretary's endorsement of the June 16 agreement.<sup>5</sup> On June 27 Roosevelt appointed a National Longshoremen's Board (NLB) composed of Archbishop Edward J. Hanna, O. K. Cushing, and Edward F. McGrady. NLB could serve as a voluntary arbitrator as well as investigator of issues, facts, practices, and activities obstructing the free flow of interstate or foreign commerce.<sup>6</sup>

In Seattle, Mayor Charles Smith decided on June 20 to force open the Port of Seattle. Smith ordered Police Chief George Howard to concentrate his forces at Pier 40. In the police headquarters' assembly room that morning, Chief Howard told his men, "We are not looking for trouble, but we are prepared for it. Some of you are armed with tear gas, some with guns. See that your guns are in good shape, but use them only as the last extremity, for the protection of life and property. A strike council was appointed in this city weeks ago. The man at the head of it is one of the most prominent Communists on the Pacific Coast. That's all." A mile-long caravan of taxicabs, police cars, trucks, and sight-seeing buses serpentine through downtown streets to Smith Cove. Aboard were 300 police officers and special deputies.<sup>7</sup>

In coordination with Mayor Smith's directive to police, the Tacoma Citizens' Emergency Committee tried to open the Port of Tacoma. At 5:00 a.m. on June 20 the motorship *India* circled Commencement Bay waiting for a signal to land seventy strikebreakers. Meanwhile, fifty special deputies arrived from Seattle in a chartered bus. After arming themselves, the deputies motored through a foggy murk to the Milwaukee dock. At the pier gate to meet the deputies were 400 unarmed Tacoma longshoremen. The Milwaukee Dock gates were locked, and the scabherders did not have a key. A tense parley occurred between spokesmen for the deputies and longshoremen. When police arrived, they searched everyone. After lawmen relieved the special deputies of their weapons, the deputies got into the vans and returned to Seattle.<sup>8</sup>

Two hours after their arrival on Seattle's Pier 40, police and deputy sheriffs stood in a long thin line for a half-mile in front of Smith Cove docks. Armed with riot clubs, sawed-off shotguns, tear gas grenades, and side arms, police faced a crowd of 200 pickets. A squad of twenty mounted policemen watched from behind a wooden screen. The *Admiral Rogers* docked and 50 strikebreakers disembarked. Another 50 workers alighted from tugboats. Strikers watched the flotilla from a launch circling the end of the pier. The scabs could not start working. Engineers still had to get up enough steam to drive winches on the *Everett* and *Admiral Chase*. That night, special deputies stood in front of the two ships to repel any surprise attackers.<sup>9</sup>

During the evening of June 20, Seattle Local 38-12 sent a large delegation to the Central Labor Council meeting to ask, "The Council [to] go on record favoring a general strike if police and armed guards were not withdrawn in twenty-four hours." After long debate, the council adjourned without voting on the motion.<sup>10</sup> During the following week a telegram arrived from AFL President William Green. "The Central Body would be violating laws of the A. F. of L. if it either directly or indirectly gave comfort and support to such a sympathetic strike."<sup>11</sup> Strongest support for a Seattle general strike continued to come from the *Voice of Action*. The *Voice* sought to further the Communist goal of general strikes up and down the coast.<sup>12</sup>

During the night of June 20, pickets stood around bonfires under the Garfield Street bridge. By morning 600 pickets faced the police line. Huge piles of junk covered railroad switching gear. Axle grease and crude oil coated rails leading into the cove. Telephone lines had been cut. At the Garfield Bridge ramp leading into Smith Cove pickets turned back trucks and cars.<sup>13</sup> During the afternoon of June 21, the Joint Northwest Strike Committee recessed to go to Smith Cove to prevent hotheads from making a frontal assault on the police line.<sup>14</sup> As the committee arrived at Pier 40, Mayor Smith

ordered mounted police to move strikers sitting on the tracks and others who were blocking the ramp. As mounted police came within range, pickets threw rocks and bricks. In the melee that followed three strikers received severe scalp wounds. As a switch engine slowly approached Pier 40, strikers crawled aboard. They talked the engineer out of entering the dock area.<sup>15</sup>

That evening a delegation representing the Joint Northwest Strike Committee and the Central Labor Council's Advisory Board met with Mayor Smith. The labor leaders accused Smith of breaking his promise to remain neutral in the waterfront dispute. Labor representatives warned the mayor that unless he removed police from the docks, all work would cease on Alaska ships. After three hours of very hot arguing, the delegation reported back to the strike committee that Smith would not budge. The strike committee voted to pull the men from Alaska ships at once.<sup>16</sup> Incensed that longshoremen had cancelled the agreement, Alaska shipping lines appealed to AFL President William S. Green to get the men back on the job. Green promised to look into the situation.<sup>17</sup>

At Smith Cove, teamsters and railroad engineers continued to refuse to handle unfair cargo. Both unions claimed the work too hazardous. On June 24 a switch engine and car manned by supervisors broke through picket lines with food and supplies for strikebreakers, special deputies, and police. The train crew made no attempt to take out freight cars loaded with cargo.<sup>18</sup> By June 29, all of Pier 40's warehouses were filled. Scabs and their protectors moved to Pier 41.<sup>19</sup>

In downtown Seattle, pickets began patrolling entrances to the Alaska Building and Smith Tower where maritime employers hired strikebreakers and guards. When suspected scabs or special deputies emerged from either building, they were accosted and beaten.<sup>20</sup> On June 28 tear gas grenades exploded at the entrance to the ILA hall. Two hours later grenades were hurled at picket patrols stationed on four waterfront piers. The Seattle Citizens' Emergency Committee



*Shelvy Daffron, Courtesy of Frances Daffron*

and police blamed Communists for the gas attacks. Longshoremen blamed the employers' goon squad led by "Tanker" Smith.<sup>21</sup> The next morning a dynamite bomb exploded in front of a Northern Pacific Railway yardmaster's home. Police again accused Communists.<sup>22</sup>

At the June 30 Joint Northwest Strike Committee meeting, Seattle delegate Shelvy Daffron reported, "There was Hell to pay out at Pier 41." Action had to be taken before hot-blooded pickets got themselves slaughtered attacking police positions. The meeting temporarily adjourned while delegates hustled to Smith Cove.<sup>23</sup> That same evening Daffron accompanied striking sailors and longshoremen to Point Wells to check on a rumor that nonunion crews were about to sail two oil tankers. Thirty strikers rushed the main gate. On the other side guards waited with axe handles. One of the guards yelled, "Let's give it to them." As the two groups clashed, shots rang out from bushes behind the longshoremen. Striker Shelvy Daffron cried out, "They got me boys! They got me!" Daffron died several hours later in a Seattle hospital of gunshot wounds in his back.<sup>24</sup> On July 6, 1,320 longshoremen and marine workers

attended Daffron's funeral in Eagles' Hall. Forming a line four abreast, thousands marched behind the hearse and union banners to Lakeview Cemetery. For fifty-five years, Seattle longshoremen have placed a wreath on Daffron's grave on July 5.<sup>25</sup>

Since the pulling of the longshoremen off the Alaska ships on June 21, National Labor Board Representative Charles A. Reynolds had been trying to get Seattle longshoremen back to work. Reynolds had not been able to persuade Mayor Smith and waterfront employers to accept the strikers' offer to lift the ban on Alaska ships in exchange for withdrawal of police and armed guards at Smith Cove. After the mayor and Waterfront Employers of Seattle refused on July 2, Judge Reynolds began informal negotiations with the Joint Northwest Strike Committee.<sup>26</sup> On July 4, Northland Transportation President William Semar met with a delegation from the strike committee. Semar pointed out that he had already agreed to the demands of other marine groups. The next day, the strike committee voted to work Alaska ships in any port where there were no armed guards. District Secretary John Bjorklund suggested that Alaska ships be loaded in Tacoma where there were neither police nor deputies on the waterfront. It was understood by the shippers that the terms of the June 8 Alaska Agreement would prevail.<sup>27</sup>

As dozens of Seattle motor trucks began to pick up Alaska-bound cargo from warehouses, Teamsters set up a picket line at Tacoma's Eleventh Street bridge. Only union truck drivers could proceed across the bridge to shipside.<sup>28</sup> During the week, Teamsters delivered 20,000 tons of supplies from Seattle's uptown and waterfront warehouses to Tacoma docks.<sup>29</sup> After Shelvy Daffron's funeral on July 6, ILA men began loading the *Evelyn Berg* and *Yukon*. Within a week union gangs from all western Washington ports were stowing five ships every two days. Seattle, Everett, Olympia, and Tacoma gangs rotated so that earnings were equalized. The men

received half the wages, a quarter went into to his local's strike fund, and another quarter to fund hard up unions.<sup>30</sup>

In Seattle during the first week of July, waterfront employers doubled the number of ships handled at Smith Cove. Two hundred strikebreakers worked securely behind a wall of police guards. Trains passed through to Piers 40 and 41 without opposition. Only a handful of pickets stood on vacant ground at the entrance to Pier 40. Teamsters continued to refuse to touch hot cargo. Militant strikers at other Seattle docks and uptown hassled police, guards, and strikebreakers.<sup>31</sup> On July 9 Deputy Sheriff Steven Watson was fatally shot in an altercation near the scab hiring office downtown. In the midst of the confrontations, bosses mailed straw ballots to all registered Seattle longshoremen. The men were asked to return by mail their preference on whether or not to accept the employers' June 16 offer.<sup>32</sup> Of the 1,182 registered longshoremen who received ballots, 260 replied. Twenty-one refused to accept the June 16 agreement, twenty returned blank ballots, and 219 voted in favor of the agreement. John C. Bjorklund called the ballot "camouflage." "Any vote, before we will recognize it, must be taken on the Pacific Coast as a unit, and must include seamen as well as longshoremen."<sup>33</sup> Bjorklund appealed to Atlantic and Gulf coasts ILA locals to "place an embargo on all ships and cargoes loaded by scabs on the Pacific Coast, also on all ships and cargo destined to the Pacific Coast." The Eastern and Southern locals never responded.<sup>34</sup>

### Thermidor

In San Francisco, the Industrial Association announced its intention to open the Embarcadero on July 3 at 3 p.m. The association's nonunion subsidiary, the Atlas Trucking Company, was ready to move cargo from piers to warehouses. The association asked Mayor Rossi to provide police protection.<sup>35</sup> At 10:00 p.m. on July 2, President Roosevelt's National

Longshore Board volunteered to arbitrate, but both sides refused. On July 3 out-of-town scab drivers rolled five trucks out of Pier 38 behind eight police cars. Waving a pistol at pickets, Police Captain Thomas M. Hoertkorn yelled, "The port is open!" Strikers surged forward and threw bricks, cobblestones, and railroad spikes at the men in the trucks. Police retaliated with nightsticks, tear gas, and bullets. Pickets retreated and merged with spectators.<sup>36</sup> July 4 was quiet. On the morning of July 5 at Rincon Hill, hundreds of ILA men threw bricks and stones. Police shot tear gas into the crowd and charged with riot sticks. Finally the battle ended and police cleared the area. During the afternoon, a bloody, four-hour battle raged on the Embarcadero. Near the ILA hall, striker Howard Sperry and sympathizer Nickolas Bordoise fell from shotgun blasts fired by a plainclothes policeman.<sup>37</sup> Today, West Coast longshoremen commemorate "Bloody Thursday," on July 5. It is a stop-work day in memory of the seven union men killed during the 1934 strike.

Within hours after the Rincon Hill battle, national guardsmen established positions along the San Francisco waterfront. The Golden Gate city was particularly tense on July 9. Thousands of longshoremen, other union men and women, and sympathizers walked silently up Market Street in the funeral procession for the two martyrs. The long, solemn march awed many who saw it. The employers' historian of the strike credited the procession with turning the tide of public opinion in favor of the strikers.<sup>38</sup>

To forestall a general strike, the NLB's Hanna, Cushing, and McGrady again offered to arbitrate all outstanding issues. On behalf of San Francisco, Seattle, Portland, and Los Angeles employer associations Thomas Plant agreed on July 11 to submit all items of contention with the ILA to NLB and to be bound by the decision of the board.<sup>39</sup> Representing the Joint Marine Strike Committee, Harry Bridges told NLB that the ILA must have full control of the hiring halls. Furthermore,

the men would not return to work until the demands of other striking unions had been satisfied.<sup>40</sup>

Police attacks on strikers and the emplacement of the National Guard on the Embarcadero galvanized San Francisco labor unions into demands that the Central Labor Council call a general strike. On July 11, San Francisco Teamsters voted to walk out. The next morning 500 Teamsters blockaded all southern roads leading into San Francisco. On July 12, butchers, cleaners, dyers, boilermakers, and taxi drivers voted to hit the bricks. The general strike had begun. By July 16, almost every union in San Francisco had quit work. Governor Merriam doubled the number of National Guardsmen from 3,000 to 6,000, but there were no confrontations. Police raided Communist meeting places, arresting everyone in the halls and offices. On July 19, labor's General Strike Committee debated a motion calling for NLB arbitration of all outstanding issues by employers, longshoremen, and marine workers. An amendment removed the requirement that employers must accept NLB terms. The motion passed as amended. The next morning Teamsters began hauling cargo to and from the waterfront. The San Francisco General Strike was over.<sup>41</sup>

Portland unions were also heading for a general strike. On July 7, Rose City waterfront employers failed for the third time to force open the port. Train crews turned back rather than face 500 longshore and maritime pickets.<sup>42</sup> Two days later the Portland Central Labor Council asked eighty locals to canvas their membership on whether to call a general strike in support of the maritime workmen. At the same time Ben Osborne, executive secretary of the Oregon State Federation of Labor, sent letters to San Francisco and Puget Sound labor councils proposing that organized labor declare a coastwide general strike.<sup>43</sup>

On the same day Osborne called for the big strike, Portland Strike Committee Chairman Rosco Craycraft presented a settlement plan to the Joint Northwest Strike Committee. Craycraft told delegates the Portland Plan provided for

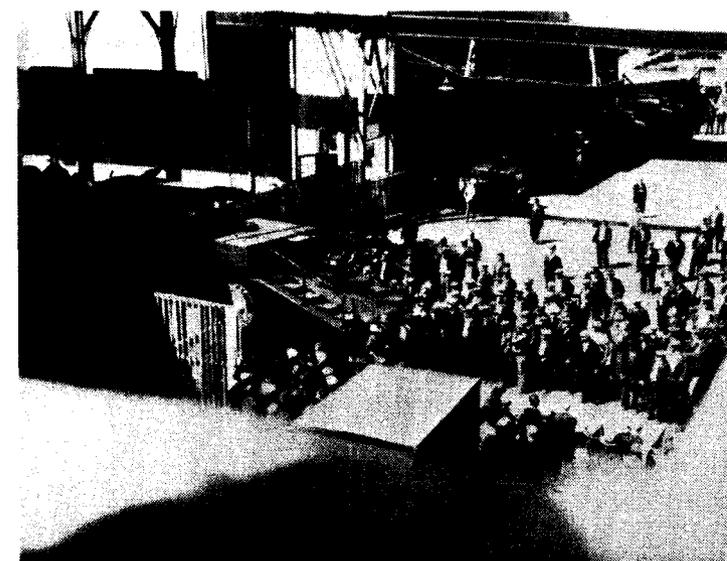
coastwide ILA recognition, joint hiring halls, ILA dispatchers, no discrimination between union and nonunion men, and immediate negotiations between steamship owners and maritime unions. A new clause established a board of arbitration composed of one employer, another designated by the ILA, and a third appointed by the first two. By a vote of 32 to 8, the Joint Northwest Strike Committee amended the Portland Plan. The ILA member on the arbitration panel must be elected by the membership.<sup>44</sup> Similar to other settlement plans, the Portland proposal failed to generate enough membership support to be considered for referendum action.<sup>45</sup>

On July 11 police officers tried to open Portland's waterfront for the fourth time. Police riding on a flatcar towards Terminal Number 4 opened fire on rock-throwing pickets. Four strikers were wounded. That afternoon striker Matt Meehan carried the bloody shirt of one of the wounded into a City Council meeting. The council adopted a motion removing Police Chief B. K. Lawson from duty. When Mayor Carson vetoed the motion, longshoremen nicknamed him "Bloody Shirt Carson."<sup>46</sup> On July 13, railroad brakeman James E. Bateson, was killed when strikers broke the air line on a train heading toward Terminal 4. The train stopped suddenly, pitching Bateson off.<sup>47</sup> On July 16, affiliates of the Portland Central Labor Council began voting on a general strike. Two days later, special deputies mistakenly fired on a car carrying United States Senator Robert Wagner around the Portland waterfront. The next day Governor Meier ordered the Oregon National Guard to encamp at Wythecomb, near Portland. However, no further attempts were made to open the port and the crisis eased.<sup>48</sup>

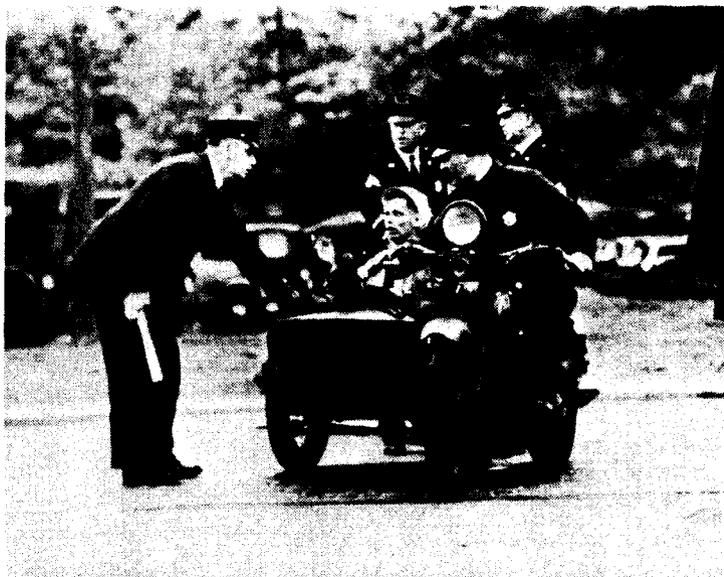
Within Seattle's organized labor movement, the idea of a general strike appealed only to Boilermakers, Flour and Cereal Workers, and Machinists. Led by Teamster delegates, a majority of the Central Labor Council consistently voted down or tabled motions made by longshore and maritime unions to poll locals on calling a citywide sympathy strike.



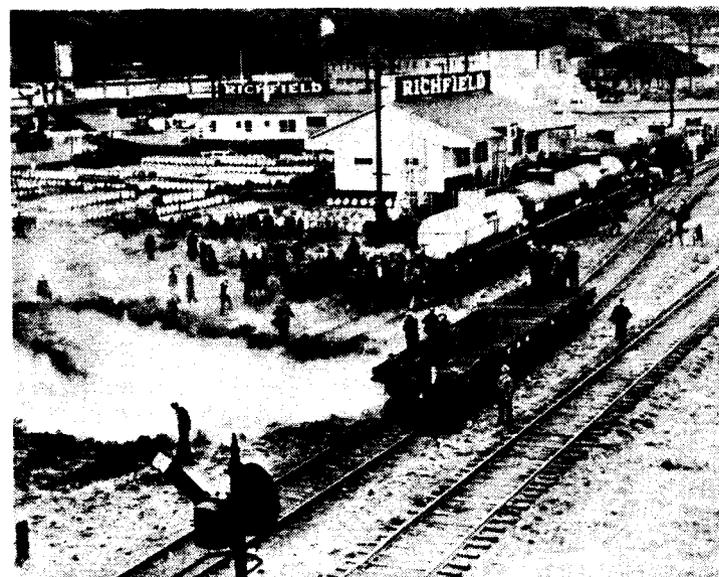
*The beginning of the Battle of Smith Cove, July 19, 1934,  
Museum of History and Industry*



*Stopping the train.  
Museum of History and Industry*



*Longshoreman arrested for trespassing.  
The Seattle Times*



*Gas attack at Smith Cove, The Seattle Times*



*Longshoremen-Seamen sit down strike at rail junction.  
Museum of History and Industry*



*The end of the Battle of Smith Cove, The Seattle Times*

The council did approve a motion to recall Mayor Smith.<sup>49</sup> On July 9, Dave Beck warned Governor Martin not to send the State Patrol into Smith Cove. Any action similar to California Governor Merriam's would spread so much unrest among the rank and file that Seattle's labor leadership would lose control.<sup>50</sup>

The Seattle Citizens' Emergency Committee announced on July 16 its plans to increase the number of ships and strikebreakers to be worked. The next day at Smith Cove police turned back 300 demonstrators trying to get through the gates.<sup>51</sup> During the evening 3,000 strikers and sympathizers attended a mass rally sponsored by the Joint Northwest Strike Committee at the Civic Auditorium.<sup>52</sup> On July 18, Seattle, Tacoma, Everett, and Bellingham flying squads led 1,200 strikers and sympathizers against police lines at the cove. Police hurled tear gas bombs at the charging men. The strikers retreated from the fumes, but came back a second time holding handkerchiefs over their faces. Breaking through police lines, strikers encamped on the railroad tracks in front of the dock gates. Police made no further attempt to remove the strikers from the premises.<sup>53</sup> The next day, police raided the Marine Workers Industrial Union and Communist Party halls.<sup>54</sup> Later in the week the "Red Raider Squad" attacked the Workers' Bookstore and the *Voice of Action* office. Twenty-eight were arrested.<sup>55</sup>

At midnight on July 19, Seattle Police Chief George Howard argued with Mayor Smith over the use of force against strikers. Howard resigned. Then Smith took personal command. At 5 a.m. Tacoma, Everett, Aberdeen, and Bellingham reinforcements marched in semimilitary formation into the strikers' enclave in front of the pier gate. At 6:45 a. m. the Mayor gave the order to drive pickets from the entrance to Smith Cove. Longshoremen in the front ranks yelled, "Come on men, hold your ground!" Police Captain George H. Comstock shouted from the top of the bridge, "All right, let 'er go!" Tear gas pellets rained down from the bridge

superstructure on the pickets. A half dozen strikers with gloves picked up pellets and tossed them back on the bridge. Police on foot closed in on the strikers, shooting tear gas and wielding riot sticks against those who tried to hold their ground. A few pickets, not yet affected by the gas, threw stones at the advancing police. Their resistance was met by police clubbings. Olaf Helland, a Sailors' Union striker, fell mortally wounded from a hit in the head by an unexploded gas grenade. In fifteen minutes the police chased pickets from the gates to the railroad tracks where a last stand was made. Then mounted police chased the men up the slopes of Queen Anne Hill. As the battle ended, Mayor Smith and Chamber of Commerce President Alfred Lundin congratulated each other.<sup>56</sup>

At the same time that the Battle of Smith Cove occurred, San Francisco waterfront employers, steamship owners, Industrial Association, and newspaper publishers met privately. That evening they issued a statement. The business leaders urged the steamship companies to accept arbitration of their disagreements with seamen, provided that the ILA voted to submit all of its differences with employers to NLB.<sup>57</sup> The next day, forty-two shipping lines agreed to arbitrate wages, hours and working conditions, and to hold elections on all vessels.<sup>58</sup> On July 21, the ILA district office agreed to submit to the membership the following question:

*Will the I. L. A. agree to submit to arbitration by the President's Board the issues in dispute in the Longshoremen's strike, and be bound by the decision of the Board?*

NLB conducted the elections at all ports and counted the ballots. In Seattle 762 voted for NLB arbitration and 103 opposed. Coastwide, 6,504 favored and 1,525 rejected arbitration.<sup>59</sup>

By the terms of an NLB agreement, all strikebreakers hired after May 9 had to be discharged by midnight, July 30. At 8 a.m. July 31, Seattle waterfront workers and seamen began working forty-five ships that had been waiting up to eighty-five days. The strike was over.<sup>60</sup>

### The 1934 Award

On October 12, 1934, the National Longshoremen's Board announced its decision in the form of an Award. On the most important issue, NLB ruled "The hiring of all longshoremen shall be through halls maintained and operated jointly." The dispatcher shall be selected by the International Longshoremen's Association." Longshoremen recognized that they had won a major victory. The dispatcher was the key to job control, as waterfront employers and the ILA had learned from the 1917 National Adjustment Commission Award. During that earlier time, dispatchers elected by the rank and file sent only union men to the job.<sup>61</sup>

NLB also created joint Labor Relations Committees (LRC) composed of three employers and the same number of longshoremen to operate each hall. This committee must maintain a list of registered longshoremen who would receive employment preference over casuals. LRC would also resolve grievances submitted by either workers or employers. Additional ILA gains included wage increases to 95 cents an hour straight time and \$1.40 overtime, a workweek of thirty hours, and a six-hour day.<sup>62</sup>

The longshoremen's allies in the 1934 strike made significant gains. Marine elections resulted in recognition and collective bargaining rights for unions on most coastwise and deep-water shipping lines. However, tanker fleet men voted to remain outside the unions.<sup>64</sup> Overall, the 1934 maritime strike was the greatest victory ever achieved by a group of West Coast unions. The triumph gave the men confidence and a sense of solidarity. There was a feeling that the momentum

would carry the partners to further victories when the maritime federation came into existence.

Employers did not come away from the NLB Award empty-handed. Shipowners and dock managers "shall be free, without interference or restraint from the International Longshoremen's Association, to introduce labor saving devices and to institute such methods of discharging and loading cargo as he considers best suited to the conduct of his business, provided such methods of discharging and loading are not inimical to the safety or health of the employees." This was the first major Pacific Coast maritime settlement to address the problem of mechanization. As new machines replaced men on the docks and in ship's holds, longshoremen began to regret the day they voted for arbitration.<sup>63</sup>