

Bridges Press Conference:**Strike Continues on All Items, Including Wages; ILWU Opposes Pay Freeze**

Below are transcript highlights of ILWU President Harry Bridges' press conference on the morning of August 18:

BRIDGES: Ladies and Gentlemen, the purpose of this short session is to bring to you, in view of many, many inquiries over the period since our strike, our position on the many questions that have come up because of President Nixon's recent order. I am speaking for the whole union and beside me here are my fellow-officers of the union, and I speak for them as well in this statement.

We put together a plan of action in a statement which has already been mailed to our industry-wide strategy committee and to all locals. This was prior to director Counts' further order and decision in a telegram outlining that decision, received this morning. (Note: the wire, from J. Curtis Counts, director of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service, ordered a halt to the dock strike.) I will read the telegram to President Richard M. Nixon sent on August 17 on the wage freeze.

(See Text of Wire to Nixon, Below.)

Wire To Nixon

President Richard M. Nixon
The White House
Washington, D.C.

August 17, 1971

Dear Mr. President: The International Longshoremen's & Warehousemen's Union is opposed to your executive order of August 15, 1971, freezing wages. By your action the burden of fighting inflation is placed on the backs of the working people of the United States. The executive order favors the rich, creates a new tax bonanza for U.S. corporations, allows interest rates to run scot-free and hurts millions of American workers and small businessmen.

The fact of the matter has been that companies have been raising their prices over the past few years whenever they can get away with it. We are with you in your desire to stop inflation in our country, but it is wrong to pick on the workers who suffer first and most from inflation. Your order ignores this fact. The exorbitant profits of the last five years and the continuous rise in prices prevents organized labor from catching up with what has been lost through inflation, let alone improving the standard of living of the American people.

The International Longshoremen's & Warehousemen's Union's strike against the Pacific Maritime Association will continue in full force and effect until such time as a collective bargaining agreement is ratified by the membership.

Harry Bridges, President
International Longshoremen's &
Warehousemen's Union

Statement

August 17, 1971

TO MEMBERS OF THE COAST STRIKE STRATEGY COMMITTEE

Dear Sirs and Brothers: The following statement is sent to you, and represents the unanimous recommendations of the titled officers and the Coast Committee. Copies of this letter are being sent to all longshore and clerk locals, and they are free to reprint it in local bulletins and use it in any way they so desire.

The Coast Strike Strategy Sub-Committee adopts the following position:

- 1) To vigorously condemn the Presidential Order freezing wages for 90 days. This action we consider to have a definite adverse effect on possible negotiations seeking to end our current longshore strike, and places the burden of fighting inflation on the workers.
- 2) To call the Coast Strike Strategy Committee into session on Monday, August 23rd at 10 a.m. to act upon the above position of the Sub-Committee, plus the following recommendations:

A) To make it clear to all concerned, particularly PMA, that the longshore strike continues in full force and effect on all items, including wages.

B) To consider the question of resuming negotiations with PMA depending on the circumstances after the committee is reconvened, and with the union taking the position that all the union's strike demands including wages be negotiated, and if necessary, sufficient sums of money to pay wage increases be placed into escrow to be available at the end of the 90-day freeze period.

C) To reconsider the question of allowing all cargo to be cleared from docks with the distinct understanding, however, that no cargo moves on or off ships and barges other than those exceptions voted by the caucus, namely passenger vessels, mail, baggage, and military cargo and perishables.

D) Reaffirm the union's position of December 15, 1970 and May 12, 1971 in referring certain items to local negotiations. PMA shall be notified that efforts by their organization to have the items that were referred to local negotiations brought back to the coast level will not be successful, and will only serve to delay resumption of negotiations and settlement of the strike.

Fraternally yours,
Harry Bridges, Chairman

"The following message outlines our position on the President's order. I think it will suffice to cover the more recent wire I received from Mr. Counts, too.

(See Text of Letter to Coast Strike Strategy Committee in Box, Lower Left.)

This statement was sent to all members of our Longshore Coast Strike Strategy Committee and to all locals of our International Union, specifically, those in the longshore division and other areas and divisions of our union.

BRIDGES: That's all. Any questions?

Q: Was this position taken before or after the "no strike" statement from Washington?

BRIDGES: Before.

Q: What motivated you to take this stand?

BRIDGES: Because we are on strike, and the way we go on strike—the workers vote to go on strike and they are the only ones who can vote to go back.

Q: What about the President's economic plan?

BRIDGES: I haven't studied it enough to comment.

Q: About longshoremen being exempt, do you believe all Americans should be exempt?

BRIDGES: Workers should be exempt from sacrifices, unless they are necessary, and the workers proved that during World War II with wage freezes and other things.

Q: What about the public sentiment now? Are you concerned that labor may be alienating a large segment of the American public?

BRIDGES: That could be.

Q: What if the government goes to court to force you to go back?

BRIDGES: Whether the government goes to court or not, our workers will be asked to vote by secret ballot, and that is the only way they will go back to work.

Q: You would ignore a court injunction?

BRIDGES: I never said that. If the government goes to court and asks the judge for an order for the union to go back to work, let's see what happens.

Q: Does the President have the authority to order you to go back to work?

BRIDGES: Not under the Constitution.

Q: Will you submit to the members a return to work for a certain limited period of time?

BRIDGES: No, not until the settlement offered is satisfactory.

Q: Would you be willing to risk a possible \$5000 daily fine for defying the order?

BRIDGES: One day would take everything I've got. As Harry Truman said, "If you can't stand the heat, stay out of the kitchen."

Q: You are quoted as stating that wage disputes are not as important as other disputes. What do you feel are most important?

BRIDGES: Wages rank right up there as No. 1 in importance, although other matters are important.

Q: How would the PMA go about settling, without getting into trouble with the Teamsters?

BRIDGES: I don't know, possibly they will get in trouble with the Teamsters. Our position is that we are dealing with PMA, and PMA will



have to take its chances with the Teamsters.

Q: Your response to the President comes very rapidly. Have you had time to poll your membership?

BRIDGES: This is so far a decision of the executive subcommittee. The full committee is coming to San Francisco Monday and it is up to that committee to support our recommendation. They could reject it. We have not yet gone to our membership. I don't know what their reaction will be, but I am sure the membership will support us.

Q: How do you know the rank and file don't want to go back, if you won't put it to a vote?

BRIDGES: If all the government is asking is that we take a vote of the workers whether they want to obey his order or not, I am pretty sure the answer of the workers will be "We are sorry, Mr. President, but we don't agree."

(Applause from the Audience.)

Q: The statement says the strike will continue until a collective bargaining agreement is ratified by the membership. Will the members stay on strike until a new agreement is negotiated?

BRIDGES: Until a new agreement is negotiated.

Q: Why not go back to work for 90 days, and then go back on strike? Why stay out for three months?

BRIDGES: I don't know about that. We asked the PMA that any wage increase will not be paid but to put the money in the bank even without interest—that is a good capitalist institution—we plan to collect later on.

Q: In a letter to Flynn you said very good progress was being made on the local level. In what areas?

BRIDGES: Some good progress in some areas, in other areas not so well. Attempts by PMA to refer certain matters to industrywide negotiations will not be successful, and they should stay in local negotiations until they are settled.

Q: About the strike running a long time and the ILA contract terminating the end of September: Will both coasts be tied up? Do you think the President's action will quicken or delay the termination of the strike?

BRIDGES: It will delay, it could have that effect. If you have to go in and negotiate with handcuffs, it is a little difficult to do.

Q: Are you saying it will be put in the bank and that there will be a retroactive increase at the end of the strike?

BRIDGES: I would not worry too much about having the money in the bank as long as they agree to increase wages and the only thing standing in the way is the prohibition of the President. We have to find a way out of that. We get an agreement in writing that they will pay providing they can go ahead according to the government.

Q: Has the President replied to your telegram?

BRIDGES: Not yet, he is a busy man.

Q: What sacrifices have the longshoremen made which makes them any different from other workers?

BRIDGES: I did not say they are different or exempt. They are like all other workers and should not be called upon as workers to make this sacrifice. Our telegram says it seems to us that the President is putting the main burden on the backs of the workers. Our workers are not exactly starving to death. I did not mean to imply they are, but they should not be bound by such an order. The wage freeze is definitely unfair. We had a convention in April in Honolulu which took a determined stand against the freeze on wages. During the war, the workers demonstrated what sacrifices, they could make.

Q: What is the name of the ILA man you talked with?

BRIDGES: President Teddy Gleason of the ILA, and we discussed our position.

Q: The position regarding the East Coast strike?

BRIDGES: No. We discussed our position regarding this coast strike. He was going into the executive council meeting of the AFL-CIO—so he would be up to date on our position.

Q: Does "perishables" include all the vegetables...?

BRIDGES: No, as far as we know we are through with perishables. The main point of that language is that all cargo unloaded off the ships and on the docks should be moved off the docks. It's very clear, "no cargo on and off ships."

Q: The stuff on the docks is what was unloaded before the strike began?

BRIDGES: There is a lot of freight in the various areas unloaded before the strike.

Q: The meeting on Monday, what is that?

BRIDGES: That is the Coast Negotiating Committee.

Q: Do you think it would be appropriate for other unions' leadership to advocate similar courses of action on the President's program?

BRIDGES: I don't know what other unions will do. Many other unions are not necessarily in the same position. It so happens that in our case you are talking about a small group of workers with tremendous economic power. Other unions may feel they are—but those ships will not sail.

Q: What about opening grain elevators?

BRIDGES: We notified our northwest locals on Monday to let that wheat come in and fill up those grain elevators.

Q: They are overflowing, is that the problem?

BRIDGES: Yes, that is the problem. When the farmer puts his grain in a boxcar to go to those elevators, he gets paid. That takes care of the farmer. When the boxcar full of grain comes to the elevators, the elevator gets paid storage for that grain. The only one who gets hurt is the grain speculator.

Q: How will the rest of the labor movement respond to your position?

BRIDGES: I have a hunch that they will respond in a similar fashion. I can't speak for them, but if they don't support our position I am sure they will be sympathetic to it.

UAW Supports Dock Strike

The United Automobile Workers sent the following wire of support for the longshore strike, signed by Leonard Woodcock, UAW president, and Doug Fraser, vice president. It was addressed to Harry Bridges:

The skilled tradesmen of UAW meeting in Boston, Mass. on Aug. 18, 1971, unanimously voted to send this expression of support in your union fight to gain economic justice on the docks. We are aware that the new Nixon control adds a measure of injustice to all workers, but particularly to those currently on strike. We are also aware that this makes winning your strike more difficult. It is imperative that all unions in America maintain the greatest solidarity to achieve not only economic justice from the employers, but bear an equitable treatment from our own government as well.