

On May 24, Joseph P. Ryan, International President of the ILA, arrived in San Francisco and issued the following statement:

"The recognition of the ILA by the employers in collective bargaining is the most important, the only vital point at issue. Once the employers do this we can begin to talk about wages and working conditions. Until they do this, I can see no hope for peace."¹⁵

For whatever reason, Ryan failed to realize that recognition was not the central issue. As far as the rank-and-file were concerned their demands remained the same.

On May 26, after two days of conferences with the employers, and without consulting the longshoremen, Ryan issued the following statement: "We are making progress." Later the same day he said: "We don't give a hoot for the closed shop. All we are interested in is recognition and preference." Ryan was so out of touch with the situation that he didn't know of a meeting held that same morning during which the longshoremen reaffirmed their determination not to return to work until all other unions settled, and furthermore, not to go back unless they had a closed shop and a union-controlled hiring hall. As a result of Ryan's statements he and Bridges were publicly at odds.

¹⁵Ibid., p.55.

McGrady listened to Ryan, rather than Bridges, and on May 28 requested a meeting between the shipowners and group of ILA officials that did not include Bridges. When the meeting ended the newspapers were informed that an agreement had been reached, and the basis for settling the strike was as follows: The employers would recognize the union as the bargaining agent on a port-by-port basis; hiring halls would be established, at the employer's expense; union and non-union men would be hired without preference; each port would negotiate rules governing registration and dispatching of longshoremen; the union could place one member in the hiring hall to see that there was no discrimination against members. Wages and working conditions would be settled later, by arbitration. Following the meetings, McGrady praised the "spirit of cooperation and give-and-take." Ryan claimed to have "exactly what the longshoremen have fought for," and said he hoped and believed it would be "adopted unaminously by the locals." San Francisco's Mayor, Angelo Rossi, assuming this was the end to the strike issued the statement: "To my knowledge, with the exception of the minor localized disturbance of Monday, this is the most peaceful waterfront strike in San Francisco."¹⁶

It appeared that everyone was happy with the agreement except the longshoremen. They considered the agreement a

¹⁶Charles P. Larrowe, Harry Bridges: The Rise and Fall of Radical Labor in the U.S., Lawrence Hill and Co., New York, 1972, p.50.

sell-out. Bridges claimed the employers were attempting to sound out weak spots in the union, and the rank-and-file shouted the agreement down at a meeting the next day. They also wired other locals to follow suit.

At McGrady's request a secret ballot on Ryan's proposal was scheduled for May 31. That same day, peace on the waterfront came to an abrupt end when the police decided to enforce an anti-picketing ordinance enacted after the strike of 1919. Longshoremen parading down the Embarcadero were met by police on foot and horse back.

The San Francisco Examiner reported the following:

"Gas bombs exploded; a sawed-off shotgun roared; clubs smashed against heads; and cobblestones flew along San Francisco's waterfront yesterday as police and strikers clashed in the fiercest battle yet produced by the coast-wide maritime strike."¹⁷

When it was over a police lieutenant was quoted as saying: "If bricks start floating at us again, somebody will end up in the morgue, and I don't think it will be any of us."¹⁸

This new police policy did not appear to affect the outcome of the vote. Only eighty-eight of the 2492 San Francisco longshoremen voted to accept Ryan's proposal, and 2154 voted to stay out until the demands of the other unions were met.

¹⁷Mike Quin, The Big Strike, Olema Publishing Company, Olema California, 1949, p.58.

¹⁸Ibid., p.59.

At this point in the strike, the Industrial Association of San Francisco, who had been meeting in secret since May 13, decided to usurp the shipowners authority and deal with the strikers their way. They implemented their plan to open the port. They rented warehouses, leased a small fleet of trucks, and obtained assurances from the police that drivers would be protected. According to a retired Matson executive, the shipowners even attempted to buy Bridges off with a \$50,000 bribe. The next move of the Association was to take the May 28 "agreement", modify it slightly, and call a meeting in the office of the Mayor.

The June 16 meeting was attended by the following: ILA President, Ryan; Mayor Rossi; Industrial Association President, J. Forbes; Industrial Association Members, C. Coldwell and A. E. Boynton; members of the President's Mediation Board; President of Pacific Coast District of ILA, W. J. Lewis; ILA Executive Committee members, A. H. Peterson and J. J. Finnegan; and M. Casey, J. P. McLaughlin and D. Beck of the Teamsters Union. At the end of a four hour conference, Ryan and Casey were called upon to repeat their assurances that if the document was signed the longshoremen and teamsters would return to work immediately. Everyone in the room was aware that the strikers had decided no agreement could be signed until submitted to the rank-and-file for approval. Everyone present at the meeting signed the agreement without considering that no one in the room had the authority, or the power, to sign or guarantee anything.

The strikers responded to the June 16 agreement by regrouping their forces and forming a joint strike committee, consisting of five delegates from each of the ten striking unions. At the longshoremen's meeting Bridges questioned Ryan about why he had not reported the progress of negotiations to the membership. Based on Ryan's answer the men, by another unanimous vote, severed all salaried officials from negotiations and decided to elect members of the Joint Strike Committee to contact the employers and open negotiations.

On June 18, the signatories and witnesses to the June 16 agreement again met in the Mayor's office, and Ryan told them that the union had been taken over by communists and was completely out of control. That afternoon the Industrial Association decided to go ahead with their plan to "open the port." The plan was to start trucking to and from the docks using scab drivers in defiance of both longshoremen and teamsters. A final ultimatum was sent to President Roosevelt in the form of a long telegram which read in part:

"We understand there is evidence in hands of Department of Labor that Communists have captured control of the Longshoremen's Unions with no intention of strike settlement. We have reached crisis threatening destruction of property and serious loss of life in various ports on Pacific Coast unless you act to compel performance of the part of the Longshoremen's Unions of the agreement signed by their International President."¹⁹

¹⁹Ibid., p.87.