

## AFD Ep 344 Links and Notes - The 1934 West Coast Longshoremen's Strike [Bill/Rachel/Kelley] - Recording Jan 24

- [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1934\\_West\\_Coast\\_waterfront\\_strike](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1934_West_Coast_waterfront_strike)
  - A few weeks ago, we talked about one of the three pivotal labor strikes of 1934, the Toledo Auto-Lite Strike (<http://arsenalfordemocracy.com/2020/12/22/dec-20-2020-toledo-auto-lite-strike-of-1934-arsenal-for-democracy-ep-338/>), which happened simultaneously with today's topic. Last week, we talked about the 2002 West Coast ports lockout of the longshoreman union (<http://arsenalfordemocracy.com/2021/01/17/jan-17-2021-the-west-coast-ports-lockout-of-2002-arsenal-for-democracy-ep-342/>). Today's episode is about the 1934 West Coast waterfront strike, which led to the unionization of all the West coast ports.
- Conditions that led to the strike: Weak company unions, open shop, "blue book" system
  - Many groups tried to organize longshoremen, sailors and fishermen: IWW, through Marine Transport Workers Union, Maritime Workers Industrial Union (MWIU)
  - However, passage of the National Industrial Recovery Act of 1933, which protected collective bargaining rights of unions, led to an increase of union membership in the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA)
  - These emboldened union members tore up their company union membership books and refused to pay dues to company unions. They demanded a coastwide contract, a union-run hiring hall and an industry wide waterfront federation.
  - ILA leadership negotiated a weak "gentlemen's agreement", but rank-and-file members rejected it.
- Violence
  - Police clashed with strikers from the very beginning. On May 16, police killed Dick Parker in San Pedro.
  - Bloody Thursday July 5: Police shot into the crowd, killing 2 and injuring many others
  - On July 17, California National Guard and SFPD assisted vigilante raids of union headquarters. An ACLU lawyer was kidnapped and beaten, while 13 radicals in San Jose were kidnapped and turned over to the sheriff in an adjoining county. A police spokesperson suggested that "maybe the Communists staged the raids themselves for publicity"
  - 9 total deaths, >1000 injured, >500 arrests
- General strike
  - Started July 16th, lasted 4 days, prompted by killings of Howard Sperry and Nicolas Bordoise. Involved about 150,000 workers in Bay Area. Many small business closed, posting signs in support of the strike; movie theaters and night clubs were closed; even non-union truck drivers joined the action.
- Aftermath of the strike
  - The ILA cemented their power, controlling hiring on the docks. They also used "quickie strikes" to continue to get safer working conditions and better pay.
- [https://depts.washington.edu/dock/34strikehistory\\_intro.shtml#:~:text=%5B1%5D%20By%20the%20end%20of,strikes%20in%20Portland%20and%20Seattle.](https://depts.washington.edu/dock/34strikehistory_intro.shtml#:~:text=%5B1%5D%20By%20the%20end%20of,strikes%20in%20Portland%20and%20Seattle.)
  - Strike was 83 days
  - At its height included nearly 35,000 West Coast maritime workers and other unions refused to handle waterfront cargo

- “By the end of July 1934, the labor unrest in Western U.S. ports claimed eight lives and hundreds of injuries, engulfed the city of San Francisco in an “insurrection” and “revolt against government” with 130,000 workers out on strike, and almost set off subsequent general sympathy strikes in .Portland and Seattle.<sup>[2]</sup> In the Port of Seattle specifically, only one ship managed to leave the harbor during the whole 83 days that maritime workers were on strike”
- Event is generally credited as reason for labor resurgence on West Coast; ILA went from 1,300 workers in 1926 to 12,000 workers in 1935.
- <https://www.historylink.org/File/1391>
  - Seattle longshoreman had formed the Stevedores, Longshoreman and Riggers Union in 1886 - organization was weak.
  - In 1916 longshoreman had conducted a three month strike, but gains were quickly lost because ports would pit workers against each other.
  - Seattle longshore (from "along shore") workers formed the Stevedores,
  - In 1920s longshoreman from different ports began to organize under the umbrella of the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA).
  - ILA wanted a coast-wide contract with wage increases, and end to unfair practices such as “shape up” and “speed up”, and hiring halls run by unions, not bosses
  - Employers refused to bargain with the ILA.
  - On May 9, 1934 the longshoreman “hung up their hooks”.
  - By mid-June an agreement was offered to ILA, but on June 14th Seattle’s new police chief declared a state of emergency and mobilized police to open the port. On June 16th, all but one of ILA’s local chapters rejected to the agreement.
  - Tensions continue to rise over the month of June
  - In Seattle - “The worst confrontation came on the evening of June 30 at the Standard Oil storage tank farm on Point Wells, in present-day Richmond Beach north of Seattle. Striking workers rushed to the area to prevent scabs from servicing tankers. They were met by armed guards at the fence, and one of the latter was heard to shout, "Let's give it to them." Gun shots rang out and strike leader Shelvy Daffron fell mortally wounded. He died the following day.”
  - “The violence escalated in San Francisco, leading to a riot on July 3. Two days later, on "Bloody Thursday," two strikers were shot dead and many wounded when police cleared the Embarcadero area by force. On July 6 in Seattle, more than 6,000 maritime workers turned out for Shelvy Daffron's funeral at the downtown Eagles Hall. Three days later, tens of thousands of workers marched in San Francisco, and public opinion began to shift to their side.”
  - Press tried to paint Union leaders as communists.
  - President Franklin Roosevelt and the NLRB negotiated an end to the strike.
  - An agreement was reached on July 23rd and work resumed on July 31st. Final settlement came in October.
  - In the end, the ILA was largely successful and got: a wage increase to 95 cents/hour, a 30 hour workweek, hiring through halls jointly operated by union, and recognition as a single, coast-wide union.

- Recent current events references:
  - Chicago Teachers / Covid action:  
<https://chicago.suntimes.com/education/2021/1/24/22247280/chicago-teachers-union-votes-in-person-work-defy-chicago-public-schools-reopening-plan-strike>
  - Teamsters in NYC:  
<https://www.amny.com/business/bronx-produce-workers-back-on-job-after-winning-wage-war/>
  - <https://twitter.com/TeamstersJC16/status/1352085574417592320?s=20>
  - <https://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/nyc-crime/ny-nyc-hunts-point-workers-strike-arrested-20210119-5m3y72tgn5bdrlu7wbcf6hxgjq-story.html>