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## The Ten Guiding Principles of the ILWU

The ILWU began with a set of cardinal principles upon which it continues to operate. These were memorialized by the union's Tenth Biennial Convention held in San Francisco in 1953.

**1.** A Union is built on its members. The strength, understanding and unity of the membership can determine the union's course and its advancements. The members who work, who make up the union and pay its dues can best determine their own destiny. If the facts are honestly presented to the members in the ranks, they will best judge what should be done and how it should be done. In brief, it is the membership of the union which is the best judge of its own welfare; not the officers, not the employers, not the politicians and the fair weather friends of labor.

Above all, this approach is based on the conviction that given the truth and an opportunity to determine their own course of action, the rank and file in 99 cases out of 100 will take the right path in their own interests and in the interests of all the people.

**2.** Labor unity is at all times the key for a successful economic advancement. Anything that detracts from labor unity hurts all labor. Any group of workers which decides to put itself above other workers through craft unionism or through cozy deals at the expense of others will in the long run gain but little and inevitably will lose both its substance and its friends.

No matter how difficult the going, a union must fight in every possible way to advance the principle of labor unity.

**3.** Workers are indivisible. There can be no discrimination because of race, color, creed, national origin, religious or political belief. Any division among the workers can help no one but the employers. Discrimination of worker against worker is suicide. Discrimination is a weapon of the boss. Its entire history is proof that it has served no other purpose than to pit worker against worker to their own destruction.

**4.** "To help any worker in distress" must be a daily guide in the life of every trade union and its individual members. Labor solidarity means just that. Unions have to accept the fact that the solidarity of labor stands above all else, including even the so-called sanctity of the contract. We cannot adopt for ourselves the policies of union leaders who insist that because they have a contract, their members are compelled to perform work even behind a picket line.



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## The Ten Guiding Principles of the ILWU

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Every picket line must be respected as though it were our own.

**5.** Any union, if it is to fulfill its appointed task, must put aside all internal differences and issues to combine for the common cause of advancing the welfare of the membership. No union can successfully fulfill its purpose in life if it allows itself to be distracted by any issue which causes division in its ranks and undermines the unity which all labor must have in the face of the employer.

**6.** The days are long gone when a union can consider dealing with single employers. The powerful financial interests of the country are bound together in every conceivable type of united organization to promote their own welfare and to resist the demands of labor. Labor can no more win with the ancient weapons of taking on a single employer in industry any more than it can hope to win through the worn-out dream of withholding its skill until an employer sues for peace. The employers of this country are part of a well-organized, carefully coordinated, effective fighting machine. They can be met only on equal terms, which requires industry-wide bargaining and the most extensive economic strength of organized labor.

**7.** Just as water flows to its lowest level, so do wages if the bulk of the workers are left unorganized. The day of craft unionism – the aristocracy of labor – was over when mass production methods were introduced. To organize the unorganized must be a cardinal principle of any union worth its salt; and to accomplish this is not merely in the interest of the unorganized, it is for the benefit of the organized as well.

**8.** The basic aspiration and desires of the workers throughout the world are the same. Workers are workers the world over. International solidarity, particularly to maritime workers, is essential to their protection and a guarantee of reserve economic power in times of strife.

**9.** A new type of unionism is called for which does not confine its ambitions and demands only to wages. Conditions of work, security of employment and adequate provisions for the workers and their families in times of need are of equal, if not greater importance, than the hourly wage.

**10.** Jurisdictional warfare and jurisdictional raiding must be outlawed by labor itself. Nothing can do as much damage to the ranks of labor and to the principle of labor unity and solidarity as jurisdictional bickering and raiding among unions. Both public support and strike victories and jeopardized by jurisdictional warfare.

This code for rank and file unionism is implemented by the memberships participation in organization, negotiations, strike machinery, contract enforcement and every other aspect of union life. Thus, its discipline springs out of participation, conviction and the right of the membership to decide its own course of action. The above principles and steps to implement them, and an informed and alert membership make the union what it is.

### The Preamble to the ILWU Constitution

Since the beginning of history mankind has struggled individually and collectively for political, economic and cultural betterment, and has the greatest ability to make advancement through democratic organization to achieve common aims.

Therefore, we who have the common objectives to advance the living standards of ourselves and our fellow workers everywhere in the world, to promote the general welfare of our nation and our communities, to banish racial and religious prejudice and discrimination, to strengthen democracy everywhere and achieve permanent peace in the world, do form ourselves into one, indivisible union and adapt the following constitution to guide our conduct and protect our democracy within the union.



# A Quick look at the ILWU

## A different kind of union

"A union is built on its members. The members who work, who make up the union and pay dues, can best determine their own destiny. If the facts are honestly represented to the members in the ranks, they will best judge what should be done and how it should be done.,,

from the "Ten Guiding Principles of the ILWU"

## Where we came from

### Democracy works

The longshore workers who founded the ILWU learned union the hard way. The men who did the backbreaking work of loading and unloading ships' cargo started organizing at the turn of the century. In 1916, 1919 and 1921 they struck Pacific Coast ports. The bosses played on divisions between one port and another, one job and another, one race and another.

The union lost bad. The workers faced another dozen years of wage cuts and speed-ups, goon squads and shape-ups, the jobs going to the guys that bribed the hiring agents.

By 1934 they reorganized, bringing together all waterfront workers all along the coast. As a unified rank-and-file they voted to strike, standing up to the employers and conservative officials of the old International Longshoremen's Assn.

The strike brought dramatic improvements in their work lives. And they learned first-hand the power of direct action and democratic participation -- the force a group can apply when each member makes a personal decision to act for the good of all.

In 1937 they started the ILWU, and wrote this experience and understanding into the constitution that continues to govern the union's day-to-day life.



"Labor unity at all times the key for successful economic advancement." **From the "Ten Principles"**

Unity among waterfront workers won the '34 strike. The new union embraced organizing efforts among the warehouse workers who worked on and near the docks, strengthening both. Over the years the ILWU never hesitated to use its power to bolster organizing efforts, whether by lending material support for workers on strike or honoring their picket lines or refusing to handle struck cargo.

"ILWU policies have always been built on the belief that international solidarity and world peace are the cornerstones of social and economic justice for all workers."

**From "The ILWU Story"**

Following policies set by the ILWU Convention, members and locals have put union power to work in support of workers all over the world. In the 1930s the union blocked shipments of supplies to the future opponents of the U.S. in World War II. In the '70s the ILWU joined a boycott of Chilean cargo following the overthrow of the democratically elected government there. In the 80s, locals refused to handle cargo from apartheid South Africa. Today the union is playing a leading role in organizing workers to oppose the world wide threat to democracy and economic justice posed by the World Trade Organization.

## Who we are

### All workers welcome

Some 60,000 people belong to the ILWU. They live and work in California, Oregon, Washington, Alaska, Hawaii and Canada. About 14,000 of them do longshore work, moving cargo on and off ships. The rest work at a huge range of jobs:

- \* in warehouses & food processing centers, on tugboats & ferries;
- \* in agriculture, light manufacturing & environmental industries;
- \* as hotel & hospital workers, miners & maritime office workers;
- \* as bicycle & car couriers, bookstore & cannery workers,
- \* Security & airport personnel,

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## **Now we work**

### **Members rule**

Final authority in the ILWU rests with the members. The International Convention-with delegates elected by direct vote of the members in each local-acts as the highest decision making body of the union. It meets every three years.

In fact, the members call the shots at every level of the union. Contracts must be approved by secret votes of all the members affected. Members elect their co-workers to represent them as negotiators and stewards.

### **Officers:**

In between conventions, authority goes to the International Executive Board. The IEB includes representatives from each geographic area of the union (Southern California, Northern California, Oregon, Washington, British Columbia, Alaska and Hawaii), the president of the Marine Division of the ILWU, called the Inlandboatmen's Union of the Pacific, and the four officers of the International-the president, two vice-presidents and the secretary-treasurer. Members in each area or division vote for their IEB representatives. All ILWU members vote for International officers. Everyone votes by direct, secret ballot.

According to the ILWU Constitution, the officers must come from the ranks. No one can hold office unless he or she has been a dues-paying member of the union for at least five years.

**Officers' salaries:** The Convention sets their salaries. The Constitution says their annual raises shall equal the average of increases negotiated in three major ILWU contracts. When union finances have been tight, the titled officers have often taken voluntary salary freezes.

### **Local autonomy:**

Each local has its own constitution, elects its own officers and sets its own dues rates. Locals have considerable autonomy, though they must respect the International Constitution, Convention decisions and referenda passed by the membership 'as a whole.

### **Roles of the locals and the international:**

The International gives the locals a way to pool their efforts-and their accumulated experience. For example, it coordinates and funds organizing, political action, communications, research, health and safety and education programs.

Locals take part in all those activities, and are also involved with members' everyday work lives, helping with grievances and contract negotiations.

### **Dues, fines and assessments**

Locals set dues rates by whatever democratic mechanism they choose.

Newly organized workers pay no initiation fees.

Fines and assessments; Fines or assessments, where they exist, are established by the democratic process.

Any assessments for special union-wide projects must be approved by the IEB and then passed by a secret-ballot vote of the whole membership, or by a vote of the delegates elected by the rank and file to the International Convention. For example, in 1994 the membership voted to assess itself \$2 per month for two years to boost the union's organizing program.

Special projects: In some cases, members of local unions in a particular industry or geographic area may vote to fund special programs. This illustrates how ILWU members set ILWU policy. For example, the Longshore Division established a "Fighting Fund" to defend union jobs on the docks, and only longshoremen pay into this fund. Local 142 in Hawaii asked members for a one-time contribution of \$2.50 each to help survivors of Hurricane Iniki in 1992.

### **Strikes and democracy**

During organizing drives, the company tries to scare workers away from the ILWU by implying that the union will constantly be forcing you out on strike.

This lie does you a disservice.

Strikes rarely happen. In the last 50 years, the longshore division struck just once, in 1971. And strikes never happen unless the members vote to walk.

That's not a decision anyone takes lightly. Members know that strikes, like any other union activity depend on their commitment and democratic participation,

And though strikes aren't easy, they give us a powerful weapon. They've played an important role in labor's history. Workers struck many times for the eight-hour day in the 19th century for example. The ILWU itself grew out of the longshore strike in 1934.

Bottom line, employers don't want to see you strike or join a union because then YOU have power. They can't just run over you anymore. You have a say in your work life.