

## Forging Regional Connections: Waterside Workers, the Cold War and Trans-Pacific Cooperation

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In the latter half of the twentieth century the organisational structure of the international labour movement developed both vertically and horizontally. On the one hand, the two leading European-based internationals - the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) - built linkages 'top-down' across the continents in a sustain effort to bring local unionised workforces under their umbrella. On the other hand, this vertical expansion of the global labour centres came with strengthening horizontal international ties between individual trade unions and their national peak bodies, which in turn produced a growth of regional autonomous labour associations.<sup>1</sup> During the period 1970s and 1980s around twenty organisations of this kind were established across the globe. Some of those emerged in Europe but many more appeared in other regions, including the Pacific Rim where local unionists formed several alliances.<sup>2</sup>

There is a small, yet growing body of literature which looks into how Asia-Pacific workers' organisations have attempted to collaborate with each other under the conditions of a rapidly globalising economy.<sup>3</sup> While providing a valuable insight into

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<sup>1</sup> George Myconos, *The globalizations of organized labour: 1945-2005*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 7.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Upham, *Trade unions and employers' organizations of the world*, (London: Longman, 1993), 533-549.

<sup>3</sup> Chris Rowley & John Benson (eds.) *Globalization and labour in the Asia Pacific region*, (London; Portland : Frank Cass, 2000); S. Harford *A Trans-Tasman Union Community: Growing Global*

the international[ist] experiences and incentives of regional unionists, these writers concentrate on the actions of the 'big' players – national labour peak bodies – at the expense of efforts of individual trade unions to build connections across the region. Moreover, academic attention is largely drawn to the post-1980s era when formal labour ties in Asia-Pacific solidified. As a result, there is no specific investigation into the Cold War period when early attempts at regional cooperation amongst Asia-Pacific unions were first made. It was then led by dockworkers' unions. This article reconstructs their efforts.

From the 1950s the US-Canadian International Longshoremen and Warehousemen Union (ILWU), the Waterside Workers Federation of Australia (WWF) and the Japan Dockworkers' Union (JDU) collaborated in pursuing their internationalist agenda. In cooperation with fellow unionists from the USSR and several socialist and pro-socialist Asian countries, they arranged conferences and set up a Corresponding Committee to exchange information and coordinate solidarity across the Pacific Rim. Despite their ambitious plans to build a regional form of labour organisation, they failed to realise their goals. The last Asia-Pacific dockworkers' conference was held in 1963 and the Corresponding Committee was dissolved a few years later. Albeit short-lived, the establishment and operation of the trans-Pacific partnership of waterside workers was a significant event covered widely in the contemporary press of many local countries. **Its impact was even felt in Europe where the London-based International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) – the ICFTU-aligned leading global association of transport unions – was seriously concerned by the emergence of 'a potential rival in the region' as an alternative international labour coalition.**<sup>4</sup>

The trans-Pacific cooperation of dockworkers' unions is a specific case study of the 'horizontal' development of the international labour movement. This article identifies reasons which prompted dockworkers' unions of the Asia-Pacific to seek formal international contacts on a regional level rather than lining up 'vertically' with the

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Solidarity, 95, Labour History (2008), 133-149; J. Price 'Challenging APEC: the Asia Pacific labour network and APEC's human resource development working group', *Asia Pacific Business Review*, 6:3-4, (2000), 34-53; K. Gajewska, 'Varieties of regional economic integration and labor internationalism: The case of Japanese trade unions in comparison', *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 34:2 (2013), 247-268; M. Park, 'Trade Liberalization and Organized Labour in the Asia-Pacific Region: Barriers to Labour Internationalism', *Globalizations*, 11:1 (2014), 71-81.

<sup>4</sup>International Transport Workers Federation, *Solidarity: The First 100 Years of the International Transport Workers' Federation*, (London: Pluto Press, 1996), 113.

well-established global labour centres that originated in Europe. The internationalism of maritime workers in general, and dockworkers in particular as labourers engaged in processing ships' cargo, is well-known. A number of secondary sources convincingly demonstrate that the nature of the maritime enterprise, involving the movement of goods and people around the globe, promoted the 'worldly' character of the industry workforce, so vital for its international organising.<sup>5</sup> It is perhaps not surprising that European dockworkers and seafarers took the initiative and established the ITF as early as the 1890s.<sup>6</sup>

This ability of maritime workers to organise themselves internationally more effectively than their shore-based counterparts explains why Asia-Pacific dockworkers pioneered the building of formal connections across the Pacific Rim. Yet that does not explain why they set up their own regional association in the 1950s in preference to joining their European fellow unionists of the ITF. Nor does it explain why their regional unity was eventually broken.

To answer these questions the article examines the ideological context in which intentional labour organising took place. **A deep Cold War political division between the anti-communist ICFTU and ITF, on the one side, and the pro-Soviet WFTU, on the other, discouraged the ILWU, the WWF and the JDU from a formal alliance with either global labour bodies as those often advanced politically motivated agenda instead of keeping a tight focus on the essential 'bread and butter' industrial concerns of waterfront labour.** At the same time, new methods of handling ships' cargoes, which spread rapidly in the stevedoring industries of developed Pacific nations in the 1950s and 1960s, brought similar challenges to dockworkers' unions. This factor, in turn, demanded their leaderships seek new ways of exchanging technical information. In light of this problem, their regional cooperation was a logical move, and was also facilitated by previously

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<sup>5</sup> Bruce Nelson, *Workers on the waterfront : seamen, longshoremen, and unionism in the 1930s*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988); Sam Davies et al. (eds), *Dock workers : international explorations in comparative labour history, 1790-1970*, 2 vol. (Aldershot : Ashgate, 2000); Colin J. Davis, *Waterfront Revolts: New York and London Dockworkers, 1946-61*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003); Margo Beasley, *Wharfies: The History of the Waterside Workers' Federation*, (Rushcutters Bay, N.S.W.: Halstead Press in association with Australian National Maritime Museum, 1996); P. Cole, No Ships Get Loaded: Political Boycotts on the San Francisco Bay and Durban Waterfronts, *International Review of Social History*, 58:2, (2013), 185-217; Tom Sheridan, *Australia's Own Cold War: The Waterfront Under Menzies*, (Carlton, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 2006); John S. Ahlquist and Margaret Levi, *In the Interest of Others: Organizations and Social Activism*, (Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> ITF, *Solidarity*, Ch. 1.

established informal contacts between the ILWU and the WWF and the shared commitment of all three unions to transnational labour solidarity. **Accordingly, the ILWU, WWA and JDU leaders tried to enlist maritime unions from developing Asia-Pacific countries in an attempt to form a sort of industrial popular front, designed to boost the industrial strength of waterfront labour across the region.**

The article contends, however, that the Cold War politics quickly made the Asia-Pacific dockworkers' association unsustainable. As the participants from the socialist camp attempted to use the newly formed coalition for political purposes, there an irreconcilable conflict with the ILWU and WWF representatives who viewed their internationalist objectives from a more pragmatic economic perspective.

To make this argument, the article is structured into four main sections. The first establishes the historical background of the trans-Pacific labour partnership by outlining the post-war interests and positions of the ILWU, the WWF and the JDU, as well as delineating the early Asia-Pacific policies of the ITF. The following three sections follow the history of the regional labour coalition to define the key causes of its emergence and dissolution.

#### *Pacific unions of dockworkers and the ITF at the start of the Cold War*

In the 1940s and 1950s, when loading and unloading ships were still largely done by hand, North American and Australian dockworkers were arguably the most consolidated on the Pacific waterfront. While those labouring at US and Canadian West Coast ports were united into the ILWU, their Australian counterparts were covered by the WWF. **Rank-and-file based and action oriented both unions gained large bargaining power in employment relations. While the ILWU won the union hiring hall system, getting rid of casual labour and securing the coastal-wide contract, the WWF succeeded in signing closed-shop agreement under which only union members could be employed in the industry.** Despite all the attempts of US and Australian conservative post-war governments to undermine the industrial strength of waterside labour, the ILWU and the WWF

managed to hold strong by mobilising large-scale strike actions in 1948 and 1954, respectively.<sup>7</sup>

There were similarities between the unions in their social and political leanings as well. Both were widely known for their support to various left causes, including disarmament, national self-determination and decolonisation, and peaceful coexistence of the Western and Eastern blocs, issues often discussed at members' meetings.<sup>8</sup> A sizable fraction of membership, especially that of the Australian union, favoured communist ideas, which in turn determined ILWU and WWF international alliances in the first post-1945 years.<sup>9</sup>

**Just after the war the unionists of Western and socialist countries jointly formed the WFTU as the single global overarching body for organised labour. The new institution, by Carew's figurative expression, however very soon 'fell victim to the mounting pressure of the Cold War.'<sup>10</sup> Failing to tolerate the pro-communist stance of many WFTU members, some European, North American and Australian labour organisations left the Federation to set up in 1949 an alternative body - the ICFTU. From that time till the 1990s unionism was divided organisationally into two opposite global camps in line with the Soviet-West political contest. The WFTU united radically minded unionists from all over the world who believed in superiority of socialism over capitalism. By contrast, the ICFTU freed from the ideology of class struggle brought together organised workers of many non-communist countries.<sup>11</sup>**

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<sup>7</sup> Report on the Conditions of Dockworkers Covered by the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, Waterside Workers Federation of Australia – Records, Noel Butlin Archives of Business and Labour, Canberra, (hereafter NBAC) N114/585; J. Healy. Report to the First Pacific and Asian Dockworkers' Conference, NBAC, N114/585; Howard Kimeldorf, *Reds or Rackets, The Making of Radical and Conservative Unions on the Waterfront*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), Ch1 and 6; Eugene Vrana, *The ILWU story : six decades of militant unionism*, (San Francisco : International Longshoremen's & Warehousemen's Union, 1997), Ch. The New Union.

<sup>8</sup> Proceedings of the Thirteenth biennial convention of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, 1959, 59-70; Proceedings of the Fourteenth biennial convention of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, 1961, 19-25; Proceedings of the Fifteenth biennial convention of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, 1963, 70-75.

<sup>9</sup> Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*, 258, 264, 270; Beasley, *Wharfies*, 140-141; Ahlquist, and Levi, *In the Interest of Others*, 95-96; Sheridan, *Australia's Own Cold War*, 69-74.

<sup>10</sup> Anthony Carew A False Dawn: The World Federation of Trade Unions (1945-1949) in. Marcel van der Linden (ed.). *The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions*, (Bern: Peter Lang, 2000), 174.

<sup>11</sup> Denis McShane, *International Labour and the Origins of the Cold War* (Oxford, England: Clarendon, 1992); Myconos, *Globilisations of Organised Labour*.

The institution of the WFTU matched the political and social commitment of the ILWU and the WWF so that both unions joined it and Harry Bridges, ILWU President, even briefly headed the Seamen and Dockers section of that labour international.<sup>12</sup> Yet very soon after the 1949 split the growing external and internal pressure compelled the ILWU and the WWF to break away from the pro-Soviet labour international. **In addition to the expulsion from the Congress of Industrial Organizations - an American labour peak body - for maintaining links with the WFTU, the leadership of the ILWU was confronted by rank-and-file opposition. A San Francisco branch, out of which Bridges had emerged, even demanded his resignation if he failed to leave the WFTU. The conflict was resolved in 1950 when the ILWU Caucus voted to cease formal relations with the Soviet labour camp.<sup>13</sup> The Australian Congress of Trade Unions (ACTU) also threatened the WWF to expel it from its ranks for a WFTU membership. The threat to loose affiliation to the ACTU coupled with the inner resistance of groopers within the union eventually pressed the WWF Federal Council to make a collective decision, however ‘with great reluctance’, to withdraw from the WFTU in 1952.<sup>14</sup>**

**Notwithstanding their disaffiliation from the WFTU, the American and Australian unions preserved some informal ties with organised labour on the Eastern side of the Iron Curtain. Bridges paid a visit in 1958 to the USSR, where he had a number of meetings with waterside unionists around the country.<sup>15</sup> Jim Healy, WWF General Secretary, and senior union officials also visited Soviet Bloc countries, openly commenting on advantages of political system there for working-class people.<sup>16</sup>**

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<sup>12</sup> Charles P. Larrowe, *Harry Bridges; the rise and fall of radical labor in the United States*, (New York: L. Hill, 1972), 329; Ahlquist, and Levi, *In the Interest of Others*, 192-193.

<sup>13</sup> M. Levi et al, Union Democracy Reexamined, *Politics & Society*, 37:2, (2009), 218-219. Eliot V. Elliott SUA Secretary to Louis Goldblatt, ILWU Secretary-Treasurer, January 24, 1950, Longshore Foreign Countries Subject File, International Longshoremen and Warehousemen Union Archives, San Francisco, (hereafter ILWUA); Goldblatt to Elliott, March 1, 1950, ILWUA. Paul T. Hartman, *Collective bargaining and productivity; the longshore mechanization agreement*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 22.

<sup>14</sup> Sheridan, *Australia's Own Cold War*, 83, 114-129; V. Williams, *The Years of Big Jim*, (Willagee, W.A.: Lone Hand Press 1975), 122; D. Kirkby and D. Ostapenko, Pursuing Trade Union Internationalism: Australia's Waterside Workers and the International Transport Workers Federation, c. 1950-1970, *Labour History*, 110, 2016, 61;

<sup>15</sup> Proceedings of the Thirteenth biennial convention ...95-100.

<sup>16</sup> Sheridan, *Australia's Own Cold War*, 69-70.

Even though the history of unionism in Japan dated back to the late nineteenth century, all independent labour organisations, including those of port workers, were dissolved by the government in 1940. With the adoption of the Trade Union Act and Labour Relations Adjustment Act of 1946 which embodied the standards of US labour legislation, Japan encountered a surge of labour institutional creativity. In December 1948, the country had as many as 34,000 newly established unions which brought together nearly 7 million workers.<sup>17</sup> In line with this growth, several unions also emerged in the stevedoring industry, covering a third of the workforce. The JDU established in 1946 was the largest organisation of this kind with a membership of around 20,000.<sup>18</sup>

In comparison with the United States and Australia the standards of waterside labour in Japan was low. To some extent, this situation reflected the character of the local waterfront industry dominated by nearly 2,000 small-scale stevedoring companies.<sup>19</sup> Such an intense competition forced many firms to drive down their rates by cutting on labour costs. The post-war surplus of casual port labour and the lack of government regulations in the sector further placed a downward pressure on wages and safety so that the employment conditions of Japanese watersiders dropped even below the International Labour Organisation (ILO) guidelines. In light of this problem, the JDU waged an intensive campaign in the 1950s to bring domestic standards into line with the established international minimum.<sup>20</sup>

On a national level, the JDU was an affiliate of the left-wing General Council of Trade Unions of Japan (Sohyo), then the largest trade union centre in Japan, covering a half of organised workforce.<sup>21</sup> The ideological stance of the ICFTU constrained Sohyo to consider 'even the slightest idea of joining' that international organisation. Despite the fact that the Japanese labour body maintained informal contacts with the WFTU it further saw 'no conditions

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<sup>17</sup> G.C. Allen, Japan in Owen Smith (ed.) *Trade Unions in the Developed Economies*, (London: Croom Helm, 1981), 73-78.

<sup>18</sup> The Japanese Waterfront, NBAC, N114/585

<sup>19</sup> The Japanese Waterfront, NBAC, N114/585

<sup>20</sup> Letter of Tomitaro Kaneda, JDU President to ILWU, May 24, 1958, ILWUA.

<sup>21</sup> The Japanese Waterfront, NBAC, N114/585

justifying [its] participation in the WFTU' due to the constant barrage of non-constructive criticism of the pro-Western labour camp.<sup>22</sup>

Much of Sohyo's internationalist philosophy was embraced by the JDU. While sending union officials to Western European countries to collect evidence on local labour practices, the Japanese union declined in the early 1950s a formal invitation to align with the ICFTU, labelling it a 'reactionary' institution 'led by the US'.<sup>23</sup> The JDU had much more sympathy to the pro-Soviet global labour camp on the basis of shared commitment to 'independence, peace and democracy' but still it was reluctant to seek formal connections with the WFTU.<sup>24</sup>

Besides a possibility of association with the ICFTU or the WFTU, the ILWU, the WWF and the JDU had an option to join the ITF. This organisation had long been an important player in the international labour community, and by the late 1940s brought together several dozen affiliated unions.<sup>25</sup> Even though the Federation remained a predominately Eurocentric institution, it tried to gain recognition in other parts of the world. The question of unity with non-European labour was first discussed at its 1902 Congress, though it took some time to make practical steps in this direction. When Indian and Japanese seamen's unions joined the ITF, the Federation Secretary, Edo Fimmen, made a trip to the Far East in 1931 to set up a short-lived Japan-based ITF office.<sup>26</sup> There were also attempts made to call a large Asian and Australasian Transport Workers' Conference, yet this did not materialise because of the war.<sup>27</sup>

After 1945 the ITF resumed its efforts to seek direct contacts with regional labour. To this end it decided to hold a Pacific transport workers' conference in Sydney in 1948.

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<sup>22</sup> Alice H. Cook *Japanese Trade Unionism*. (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University, 1966), 115-116, 128-129.

<sup>23</sup> Zennihon Kouwan Roudou Kumiai, *Kouwan Roudouhou Tousou shi: Touroku Hiyatoi Kouwan Roudousha 20 nen no Tatakai*, (Tokyo: Zennihon Kouwan Roudou Kumiai, 1988), 63, 67, 76. Zennihon Kouwan Roudou Kumiai, 63, 67.

<sup>24</sup> Zennihon Kouwan Roudou Kumiai, 69; The Japanese Waterfront, NBAC, N114/585

<sup>25</sup> Affiliated Organisations, Report on Activities and Financial Report of the ITF for the years 1938-1946, 12-16.

<sup>26</sup> S.Mogi, *Japanese Shipping and the Seamen's Trade union Movement*, (Amsterdam: ITF, 1931), 21, 24-25; J.F. Soares, Japanese Seafarers and their union, *International Transport Workers Journal* (hereafter *ITF Journal*), 5/6, 1959, 56-62;

Takao Matsumura, Anglo-Japanese Trade Union Relations Between the Wars, in Chihiro Hosoya and Ian Nish (eds.) *The History of Anglo-Japanese Relations, 1600-2000*. Vol. 5, (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire ; New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 265-267.

<sup>27</sup> Asian transport workers conference, *ITF Journal*, 11, 1960, 238-239.



The host city was selected at the proposal of the Australian Maritime Transport Council, a loose association of mainly skilled small industry unions, which then became an official ITF affiliate. While the WWF received an invitation, it indicated that its assent was dependent on the existence of good relations between the WFTU and the ITF. The Australian Council of Trade Unions also arranged a meeting of local transport unions, which expressed a view similar to the WWF. In the face of such an opposition the ITF eventually had to cancel the conference.<sup>28</sup>

**With the onset of the Cold War, the ITF rapidly developed a very strong anti-communist stance, which influenced its Pacific policy. The Federation did not hesitate to expel in 1949 the New Zealand Waterside Workers' Union, the sole Pacific dockworkers' affiliate, on the pretence that it had become a 'Communist-controlled organisation'.<sup>29</sup> For similar reasons, the ITF supported the US and Canadian governments during the 1949 Canadian seamen's strike organised by the local 'communist' union, an official ITF member.<sup>30</sup> The ITF post-war leaders – Jaap Oldenbroek and Omer Becu – also led the global labour opposition to the WFTU by consecutively holding the position of ICFTU General Secretary between 1949 and 1967. The ITF leadership also struggled to get a deep insight into the contemporary development of unionism in remote regions. When de Vries, the newly elected ITF Secretary visited Australia in 1962, he showed 'a marked lack of knowledge' of the local labour movement.<sup>31</sup> This was further supplemented by making loud political claims as to 'the urgency of freeing the Australian unions from communist domination.'<sup>32</sup>**

**The very hostile and intolerant attitude of the ITF to pro-communist ideas was at odds with ideological preferences of part of the ILWU, the WWF and JDU members who, thus, strongly opposed to seeking any contacts with the London-based labour international. Furthermore, as the New Zealand and Canadian strikes demonstrated, an ITF affiliation did not guarantee any degree**

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<sup>28</sup> Problems of regional organization, Report on Activities and Financial Report of the ITF for the years of 1946 to 1948.33-35.

<sup>29</sup> Communist Activities in New Zealand, Report on Activities of the ITF for the years of 1950 to 1951, 64; Relations with affiliated organisations Report on Activities and Financial Report of the ITF for the years of 1948 to 1950, 21-22; Exclusion of the New Zealand Waterside Workers' Union, *ITF Journal*, 7/10, 1950, pp. 54-55.

<sup>30</sup> ITF, *Solidarity*, 111-112.

<sup>31</sup> Fitzgibbon autobiography, Charles Fitzgibbon Papers, NBAC, P102/91, 159.

<sup>32</sup> Relations with Affiliated Organisations, Report on Activities of the ITF for the years of 1962 to 1964 p. 43; Regional Activities, *Ibid*, pp. 74, 80.

**of outside support, which consequently diminished the usefulness of such international connection even in the eyes of liberal-minded unions' officials and rank and file members.**

This brief examination of the post-war standing of the ILWU, WWF and JDU suggests some commonalities. A part of the membership of the three unions was willing to contribute to political and social causes that went beyond the traditional economic concerns of trade unions. This shared leanings created a common ground for mutual cooperation. Furthermore, none of these leading Pacific unions was aligned with the ICFTU and ITF camp owing to ideological incompatibilities. As all three unions had no formal linkages with the pro-Soviet WFTU either, they did not face any organisational obstacles to building a direct connection with each other.

#### *First contacts of Pacific dockworkers' unions and the 1959 conference*

A convergence of the interests of Pacific maritime unionists was not new, it had historical roots in the pre-war solidarity action of North American and Australian seafarers and watersiders. As early as 1919, when the longshoremen of the US West Coast went on strike, their Australian counterparts refused to handle cargo of American vessels in a sympathy protest.<sup>33</sup> Such instances of mutual support continued over the following two decades.<sup>34</sup> To a great extent, those actions stemmed from a relatively free movement of the maritime workforce between the two countries, which consequently gave an opportunity for workers to develop a mutual interest in each other's problems. Arguably, the best illustration of this process was the story of Harry Bridges, who as a young Australian sailor settled down in San Francisco in 1920, transferring his original membership to a local seamen's union.<sup>35</sup>

That otherwise routine transfer turned out to be important for building trans-Pacific labour linkages. Bridges was able to make a remarkable career as a union official in his new home country, leading the ILWU over four decades, from 1937 to 1977. The beginning of his leadership coincided with the election of Jim Healy as WWF General Secretary on the opposite side of the Pacific. A common cultural background, along

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<sup>33</sup> Proceedings of the Fifteenth... 181

<sup>34</sup> Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*, 66; Proceedings of the Fifteenth... 182.

<sup>35</sup> Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*, 66; Larowe, *Harry Bridges*, 6. Ahlquist, and Levi, *In the Interest of Others*, 99.

with a rather similar political philosophy, assisted these two labour activists to establish friendly relations across the ocean. In 1942 the ILWU President sent his Australian counterpart a long letter to provide an account of the union's activities, which largely aimed at speeding up the movement of military cargo. Pointing out a somewhat slower turnaround of vessels at Australian ports, Bridges offered to 'work out an exchange of ideas and even delegations to better past and present alliances'.<sup>36</sup> Healy enthusiastically responded to welcome Bridges' 'practical suggestion' of information exchange. **To a great extent, Healy's reply reflected his key role in the Australian trade union movement in mobilising support for the war effort as well as his 1942 appointment to the government Stevedoring Industry Commission which was set up to improve efficiency of wartime waterfront operations.**<sup>37</sup>

At the very end of the war, in an attempt to convert an ILWU-WWF connection into a broader association of regional labour, Healy, jointly with Toby Hill, the New Zealand Waterside Workers' Union leader, invited Bridges to attend a New Zealand dockworkers' conference to be held in early 1946. It was believed that the visit would help to organise a large labour forum '[to] bring into cooperation all waterfront unions in the Pacific Area'.<sup>38</sup> Yet, a wave of industrial unrest in the US at the time of the New Zealand conference held the ILWU delegation in the home country, thus preventing exploration of ways to implement Healy's and Hill's suggestion.<sup>39</sup>

In the following few years Healy sought to promote the proposal of a Pacific maritime labour conference in the WFTU, but it was reluctant to take up the proposal due to financial constraints.<sup>40</sup> On the other side of the Pacific the ILWU leadership also retained some interest in a closer relationship. Bridges wrote in 1951 to WWF Secretary, saying 'we have not given up the idea of a Pan-pacific Conference. We are still working on it.'<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Bridges to Healy, August 18, 1942, ILWUA.

<sup>37</sup> Beasley, *Wharfies*, 111-120; Healy to Bridges, February 1, 1943, ILWUA.

<sup>38</sup> Healy and Hill letter to Bridges, June 1, 1945. ILWUA.

<sup>39</sup> Bridges to Healy, January 25, 1946, ILWUA; Bert Roth, *Wharfie "from hand barrows to straddles": unionism on the Auckland waterfront*, (Auckland [N.Z.]: Auckland Branch, New Zealand Waterfront Workers Union, 1993), 93-94.

<sup>40</sup> Healy and Hill to Bridges, June 9, 1947, ILWUA.

<sup>41</sup> Bridges to Healy, November 11, 1951, ILWUA; Healy to Bridges, January 3, 1953, ILWUA.

Even though ideas of cooperation between Pacific maritime unionists were in the air in the early post-war years, they did not materialise. Perhaps the most serious obstacle to their execution was the lack of a clear purpose for an alliance, apart from pursuing the general notion of working-class solidarity and unity. The situation changed in the late 1950s when the introduction of new technologies on the North American and Australian waterfronts gave a more practical meaning to ILWU and WWF's plans.

Until that time the methods of processing ships' cargoes had been relatively simple, generating a large demand for manual labour.<sup>42</sup> The growing use in the 1950s of various mechanical equipment, ranging from fork-lift trucks and frontend loaders to specialised cranes, made the dramatic reduction of waterfront employment an obvious concern.<sup>43</sup> Putting into operation bulk-loading facilities to manage 'shovelling' commodities – especially grain and coal – had an especially profound implication for dockworkers. By 1960 new bulk-handling machinery processed around forty percent of total tonnage on the US Pacific Coast but required only around five percent of the industry's workforce.<sup>44</sup> Likewise, the installation of sugar loading equipment in Australia's Queensland ports made manual handling of bagged sugar almost defunct during the 1950s.<sup>45</sup> As an expression of these new problems, Healy reported in May 1958 to Bridges: 'Like your own position, the moves here undoubtedly flow from the introduction of mechanised operations and different methods of packaging cargoes', so that 'the work available to our members constantly decreases'.<sup>46</sup> The shrinkage and erosion of the union membership base threatened to diminish an industrial power so hard-earned by American and Australian workers in the previous decades. Under these circumstances, the importance of international cooperation increased since it offered a prospect of jointly defined solutions to common problems.

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<sup>42</sup> Robert B Oram, *Cargo Handling and the Modern Port*, (Oxford ; New York: Pergamon Press, 1965), 64-94; Herb Mills, *The San Francisco Waterfront: The Social Consequences of Industrial Modernisation* in Andrew Zimbalist (ed.) *Case Studies on the Labor Process*, (New York : Monthly Review Press, 1979), 128-29, 133-39; Hartman, *Collective bargaining*, 43-46.

<sup>43</sup> Mills, *San Francisco Waterfront*, 146-148; Australian Stevedoring Industry Authority (hereafter ASIA) report for the year ended 30th June, 1963, 22-23.

<sup>44</sup> Hartman, *Collective Bargaining*, 45-46.

<sup>45</sup> ASIA report, 1961, 17; D. Hull, 'Queensland sugar ports: labour and technological change,' *Journal of Australian Political Economy*, 6, (1979), 60-72.

<sup>46</sup> Healy to Bridges, May 8, 1958, ILWUA.

As the US West Coast stevedoring industry pioneered the adoption of many technological innovations, it is not surprising that it was the ILWU that took the initiative in bringing together Pacific maritime labour. In mid-1958, the American union sent a proposal to the WWF and the JDU to jointly organise a conference of Pacific dockworkers. Since their problems were believed to be similar, 'an exchange of ideas and experiences would be beneficial'. The particular purpose of the event was to discuss 'on-the-job' labour problems arising from mechanisation and new methods of cargo handling and to consider opportunities to reduce work shifts, increase wages and gain other benefits 'under these changing conditions'.<sup>47</sup> **Apart from these new industrial issues the ILWU suggested that the conference should also consider the standings of waterfront labour in developing countries along with the rights of trade unions to participate in solidarity strikes of 'national and international origin.'**<sup>48</sup> The response of both Australian and Japanese unions to the ILWU proposal was strongly positive. The Australian union indicated that all Pacific dockworkers' unions, irrespective of their political standings and the country of origin should be invited to participate in the conference.<sup>49</sup> On its part, the JDU suggested that the agenda should be broadened to include questions on enforcement of the ILO Conventions and opposition to nuclear tests in the Pacific area.<sup>50</sup>

After some further correspondence, the three unions refined the program and logistics of the event, which aided the ILWU Executive Board to adopt the final resolution in December 1958. The conference was proposed to be held in Tokyo in around four to five months. Even though invitations to participate had to be forwarded to both WFTU and ICFTU affiliates, it was stressed that neither labour international would take part in that 'autonomous' conference. The proposed agenda listed a number of practical questions on waterside work covering safety, wages, holidays, hiring, training, trade union rights, and the like. It did not specify any specific political issues beyond indicating that participating organisations might offer

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<sup>47</sup> Goldblatt to Kaneda, July 30, 1958, ILWUA; Brigges to Healy, September 18, 1958, ILWUA.

<sup>48</sup> Items for All Pacific and Dockworkers' Conference supplied by H. Bridges, NBAC, N114/585

<sup>49</sup> Healy to Bridges, October 15, 1958, ILWUA.

<sup>50</sup> Kaneda to Goldblatt, August, 30, 1958, ILWUA; Zennihon Kouwan Rondou Kumiai, *Zenkouwan Undoushi*, vol. 1 (Tokyo, Roudou Shunpousha.1972), 212;

for the discussion 'issues of more general trade union and working class importance including such vital matters as the end of nuclear bomb testing, disarmament, etc.'<sup>51</sup>

**From the very onset the conference organisers tried to turn their small coalition into a broader industrial front of Asia-Pacific labour. To this aim and with the secured support from the Madras Harbour Workers' Union and the Indonesian Seamen and Dockworkers' Union they allocated between themselves the geographical zones of influence to increase the conference participation.<sup>52</sup> The ILWU was responsible for recruiting waterfront labour organisations from both Americas. The WWF, correspondently, should be accountable for Australia and New Zealand; the JDU for Japan, USSR and China; the Madras Union for India and the surrounding countries, the Indonesian Union for its home country, Malaya, and Philippines.<sup>53</sup>**

Despite the harmony in the interests of these several Asia-Pacific unions, the conference preparation did not run smoothly. The sheer vastness of the region, coupled with an apparent weakness of unionism in many countries, made it difficult to spread the message of the proposed event. There were political obstacles as well. The conference eventually held in May 1959 was not attended by ILWU Secretary-Treasurer Louise Goldblatt since the conservative Japanese government denied him entry into the country. He was not replaced by other union official.<sup>54</sup> The Indian authorities also prevented Madras unionists from visiting Japan by rejecting their passport applications.<sup>55</sup> However strongly the conference organisers' tried to emphasise their political neutrality, they were subjected to bitter criticism by Japanese right-wing labour organisations associated with the ICFTU. Claims were made that the conference was sponsored by 'Communistic Unions' aligning their actions with a 'communist force of the world.'<sup>56</sup> The ITF also sent a representative to

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<sup>51</sup> Bridges address to organising unions, December 3, 1958, ILWUA; Resolution on Pacific Area and Asian Longshore Conference, ILWU Executive Board Meeting, December 2 and 3, 1958, ILWUA; Zennihon Kouwan Rondou, 211.

<sup>52</sup> Iyengar (General Secretary of Madras Harbor Workers' Union) to Bridges, November 4, 1958, ILWUA; Harsono (Secretary of Indonesian Seamen and Dockworkers' Union) to Bridges, November 6, 1958, ILWUA.

<sup>53</sup> Proceedings of the Thirteenth ... pp. 338-339.

<sup>54</sup> Solidarity Beyond Ocean: Report of the 1st All Pacific & Asian Dockworkers Conference. May 11-13, 1959. 12-13.

<sup>55</sup> Solidarity Beyond Ocean. 13.

<sup>56</sup> Solidarity Beyond Ocean, 10-12; All-Japan Seamen's Union, Dockers, You are watched! The Truth About the International Conference of Dockworkers, February 1959, NBAC, N114/585.

some Asian countries 'for the sole purpose of persuading dockers' unions not to attend.<sup>57</sup>

Even so, the Tokyo conference was an apparent success since, for the first time, maritime labour delegates from different Pacific countries came together to discuss their contemporary problems. The audience consisted of representatives from the ILWU, the WWF, the Soviet Sea and River Workers' Union (SRWU), the Cambodian and Indonesian sea transport unions, along with a number of Japanese maritime labour organisations, including the JDU.<sup>58</sup> Greetings were also received from New Zealand, India, the Philippines, Malaysia and China, whose maritime unionists were not able to come to Tokyo.<sup>59</sup> The event was also welcomed by left-wing Japanese political and social movements. This was evident by the presence of numerous guest speakers from local Socialist and Communist Parties, Sohyo, and social organisations such as Japan Peace Committee and Asian and African solidarity committee.<sup>60</sup>

The practical work of the conference followed the agenda originally developed by the ILWU. After extensive discussion of different aspects of stevedoring work, delegates adopted several resolutions related to the negative social and economic effects of mechanisation and poor conditions of port labour in developing countries. So far as the Trans-Pacific labour cooperation was concerned, the most important decision was to set up a Dockworkers' Corresponding Committee (DCC) to maintain contact and 'fraternal relations' between unionised Asian and Pacific dockworkers. Tokyo was designated as the place for the DCC and Tomitaro Kaneda, the JDU leader, was appointed its secretary.<sup>61</sup>

The 1959 conference, therefore, produced a loose organisation of Pacific maritime labour in the form of the Corresponding Committee. While international autonomy of leading Pacific dockworkers' unions and their common ideological platform encouraged direct contacts, the forging of closer relations coincided with the introduction of new labour-saving technologies on the North American and Australian

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<sup>57</sup> Healy. Report to the First Pacific and Asian Dockworkers' Conference, NBAC, N114/585

<sup>58</sup> Solidarity Beyond Ocean, 18-22; Zennihon Kouwan Rondou, 212-13.

<sup>59</sup> Solidarity Beyond Ocean, 17.

<sup>60</sup> Solidarity Beyond Ocean, 23-38.

<sup>61</sup> Healy. Report to the First Pacific and Asian Dockworkers' Conference. NBAC, N114/585; Zennihon Kouwan Rondou. 213-17.

waterfronts. This technological shift prompted the ILWU and the WWF to seek more permanent channels for information exchange on new developments. **Those two unions also perceived the new coalition as an alternative to both WFTU and the ICFTU political camps by attempting to unite regional dockworkers' organisations on the basis of their common industrial concerns.**

*Building the strength of regional solidarity: the 1962 conference and the first International Solidarity Day*

Just two weeks after the 1959 conference Tomitaro Kaneda, newly appointed DCC secretary, and Jack Hall, Hawaii ILWU regional director, signed a memorandum to specify the purpose and operation of the corresponding committee. Following the conference resolution it was agreed that the new body should work as an Asia-Pacific information centre for regional organised waterfront labour. In the light of this objective, it was decided to publish a monthly bulletin named *DCC News* that should contain 'basically economic' material on the workplace-related problems of dockworkers 'in all Pacific and Asian countries.'<sup>62</sup> There was no formally defined editorial board and it was mainly Kaneda who managed the publication. Over most of the following decade the *News* was circulated around fifty Northern and Southern American, Asian and Australasian port labour organisations, spreading the message among their membership.<sup>63</sup> Relevant organisational expenses, along with wages of a small DCC administrative team, were jointly met by leading Pacific unions. Half of the money was supplied by the ILWU, the SRTWU and the WWF, and the JDU donated the rest.<sup>64</sup>

Despite the fact that the Committee was supposed to be concerned with practical aspects of watersiders' work, from the very beginning its secretary tried to advance a broader political agenda. The first release of the *DCC News* in August 1959 highlighted the participation of maritime unionists in a Hiroshima international peace conference, the prosecution of labour activists in Cambodia, the development of the Matsukawa case (involving accusations of sabotage against Japanese railway

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<sup>62</sup> Draft of understanding between Kaneda and Hall, May 29, 1959, ILWUA; Healy to Kaneda, June 12, 1959, NBAC N114/585.

<sup>63</sup> List of Unions to which DCC news is sent, ILWUA; Tomitaro Kaneda. Report of All Pacific and Asian Dockworkers Corresponding Committee, Report of the 2nd All Pacific and Asian Dockworkers Conference, 1961, 14-15.

<sup>64</sup> Draft of understanding between Kaneda and Hall, May 29, 1959, ILWUA.



workers), and the lodgement of a protest in the national Parliament against refusing Louise Goldblatt an entry visa to attend the 1959 conference; these were all somewhat different types of stories from the coverage specified in the Kaneda-Hall memorandum.<sup>65</sup> In subsequent years the *News* continued to circulate a great deal of politically related material on 'the attacks imposed by the capitalist class to emasculate the world movements'.<sup>66</sup>

There were further attempts made to use the Pacific dockworkers' association for attaining specific political aims. In early 1960 Kaneda, as DCC secretary, appealed to the participating unions to boycott Japanese ships for one day in protest against the anti-labour policy of the Japanese government and a new Japan-US security treaty.<sup>67</sup> The solidarity action of Soviet and Australian unionists was, however, limited to sending messages.<sup>68</sup> The response of the ILWU President was even less supportive. While acknowledging the integrity of Kaneda's call, Bridges stated that 'under present circumstances' union members would not be willing 'to move on anything except to support fundamental trade union issues'.<sup>69</sup> A few months afterwards, Bridges once again criticised Kaneda's intention to encourage DCC members to support political opposition in Japan and object to the visit of US President Eisenhower to the country. He stressed that the ILWU had always taken a firm stance on many social and political issues such as disarmament and decolonisation. Yet Bridges also claimed that American dockworkers were only able to support DCC requests if those were related to the 'economic and organisational problems' of Pacific waterside workers and their unions.<sup>70</sup>

Such reluctance of the ILWU to become engaged in Japanese political issues stemmed from the very philosophy of the union. The content of many resolutions adopted by ILWU contemporary biennial conventions demonstrates that West Coast dockworkers were certainly eager to promote justice and working-class unity on a global scale, but they were very reluctant to acknowledge openly their support for any political agency outside their home country.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, the timing of organising

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<sup>65</sup> Correspondence committee news, August 19, 1959, ILWUA.

<sup>66</sup> Kaneda, Report, 15.

<sup>67</sup> DCC appeal, May 25 1960, ILWUA.

<sup>68</sup> Kaneda, Report, 17.

<sup>69</sup> Bridge to Kaneda, June 15, 1960, ILWUA.

<sup>70</sup> Bridges to Kaneda, January 27, 1961, ILWUA.

<sup>71</sup> Proceeding of the thirteenth ..., 386-388; Proceeding of the fourteenth ..., 487-488.

a large-scale sympathy action, especially on political grounds, was not right according to the ILWU leadership. At that time union officials were negotiating with industry employers a new collective bargaining deal, known as the Mechanization and Modernization Agreement, in response to the adoption of new methods of handling cargo. Given the great importance of that bargaining process, the ILWU would not risk disrupting it by unrelated protests.

Even so American unionists did not lessen their interest in the DCC scheme or their dedication to the ideas of international working-class unity. In April 1961, the delegates to the union's convention adopted a resolution in which they proclaimed their support of the work of the Corresponding Committee as well as their solidarity with 'the longshoremen of Japan in their struggle for decasualisation, for a Port Labor Law, and for the adoption by the Japanese government of the ILO convention on Safety'. The statement further declared 'full support' to a new forthcoming conference of the Asian-Pacific dockworkers.'<sup>72</sup>

The financial and organisational assistance of the ILWU was, indeed, crucial for holding a new forum of regional maritime unionists. The DCC members initially planned to call their second conference in Indonesia in 1960. In December 1959 Healy expressed in correspondence to Bridges some doubt over the ability of the Indonesian waterside workers and seamen's union to successfully host the event.<sup>73</sup> With mounting organisational problems, the need for an alternative place became obvious. In these circumstances Kaneda offered to host the conference in Tokyo once again.<sup>74</sup>

The conference, eventually held in June 1961, gathered representatives from the ILWU, the WWF, the SRWU, the Indonesian and Chinese maritime unions as well as several organisations of waterfront labour from Japan.<sup>75</sup> A WFTU top official, Sattish Chatterjee, also attended the conference on a non-official basis.<sup>76</sup> Even so, the organisers of the 1961 conference tried to follow the policy of political neutrality by

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<sup>72</sup> Statement of policy on Asian-Pacific conference, ILWU 14<sup>th</sup> Biennial Convention, April 3-7, 1961, ILWUA.

<sup>73</sup> Healy to Bridges, December 22, 1959, ILWUA.

<sup>74</sup> Healy to Kaneda, March 9, 1960, NBAC 114/585; Kaneda's address to participating unions, 20 October 1960 NBAC 114/585; Healy to Kaneda, October 17, 1960 NBAC 114/585; Zennihon Kouwan Rondou, 217.

<sup>75</sup> Reports of the 2nd All Pacific.., 8.

<sup>76</sup> Reports of the 2nd All Pacific.., 168-69.

sending an invitation to the ITF as well. The report of the ILWU delegates on their visit to Japan indicates that an ITF official also attended one session of the conference, but avoided making any statements <sup>77</sup>

As at the 1959 conference, much of the discussion in June 1961 was centred around the practical aspects of stevedoring work pertaining to employment, mechanisation and safety.<sup>78</sup> The question of cooperation between Asia-Pacific dockworkers was considered as well. In pursuing this objective, the delegates decided to hold annually an International Solidarity Day during which DCC affiliated unions should take coordinated transnational action to promote waterfront labour standards.<sup>79</sup> The dates and demands of such transnational campaigns should be determined by the DCC in consultation with all participating members.<sup>80</sup>

Organising the first Solidarity Day became the main task of the DCC in the several months following the conference.<sup>81</sup> The program of action was largely shaped by ILWU suggestions forwarded to Kaneda in October 1961. It was stated that whether the trans-Pacific labour partnership would develop into a unity of a wide international participation hinged 'on a broad demonstration of workers in as many of the world's ports as possible over a good economic issue.' As a suitable objective of such solidarity action, the American union offered improvements in the standing of port labour in Japan. The proposed international support should take the form of short-term boycotts of Japanese ships, yet it was especially emphasised that the campaign 'should not be tied in with any political objective'.<sup>82</sup>

Early next year the DCC made an appeal to Asia-Pacific dockworkers to participate in the International Solidarity Action Day on March 27. The document, signed by all DCC participating unions, declared that Japanese dockworkers were 'still chained by shipping monopolies and their Government to ... semi-feudalistic employment relations with low wages and long hours of work'. As all attempts of local labour to improve the situation brought in only 'terroristic suppression', the DCC called on members 'to strike a severe blow against Japanese shipping capitalists' on the

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<sup>77</sup> Report on the Second Pacific-Asian Dockworkers' Conference, ILWUA.

<sup>78</sup> Reports of the 2nd All Pacific ..., 36-109.

<sup>79</sup> Report on the Second Pacific-Asian Dockworkers' Conference, ILWUA.

<sup>80</sup> Assistant General Secretary's Report to 1962 Triennial Conference, NBAC, N114/131.

<sup>81</sup> Hall to Kaneda, September 12, 1961, ILWUA; Kaneda to Hall, January 8, 1962, ILWUA;

Roch to Kaneda, November 3, 1961, NBAC N114/586.

<sup>82</sup> Hall to Kaneda, October 31, 1961, ILWUA. [as underlined in the original]

designated day.<sup>83</sup> In the first days of March a WWF triennial conference voted to act in support.<sup>84</sup> The ILWU Executive Board also collectively endorsed the proposal, sending around union branches a circular with request for a sympathy action.<sup>85</sup>

In responding to this call, the ILWU members in Ketchikan and Wrangell ports in Alaska and Aberdeen, San Francisco, Alameda, Portland, and Vancouver ports on the West Coast, declared 'extended launch hours' when servicing several Japanese-flag ships on March 27 and sent condemnatory telegrams to Japanese consulates. Other ILWU branches indicated that their members understood the importance of transnational working-class solidarity and would have been willing to act should Japanese ships be presented in their ports.<sup>86</sup>

Australian watersiders in turn expressed their solidarity by holding stop-work meetings in all major local ports on March 27th and 28th.<sup>87</sup> Concurrently, they also organised a nation-wide four-hour stoppage in relation to the new domestic industrial award. A leading Australian daily commented that although the union leadership had denied any direct link with the 'Pacific-wide campaign of disruption ... nonetheless, it [was] an unfortunate coincidence to say the least'.<sup>88</sup> Indian dockers of Madras, where the local union kept ties with the DCC, also boycotted Japanese vessels for one week in late March along with arranging a 4,000-large solidarity demonstration. Maritime labour in some Pacific port cities of the USSR, China, North Korea, North Vietnam and Indonesia took part in sympathy rallies held by local unions. The largest protests took place in Japan where a 24-hour strike at 35 ports paralysed loading and discharging 360 ships, including 100 foreign-flagged vessels.<sup>89</sup>

The immediate results of the first Pacific Solidarity Day were summarised in the letter written by Ted Roach, WWF Assistant Secretary, to Kaneda, JDU Secretary, in early May the same year. Roach believed 'that prestige of our Corresponding Committee [had] been considerably enhanced in the eyes of the workers in the Asian Pacific

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<sup>83</sup> DCC Call to All the Dockers' Organisations in the Pacific and Asian Region, March 8, 1962, ILWUA.

<sup>84</sup> Triennial Conference Meetings 8/3/62, NBAC N114/131.

<sup>85</sup> Bridges' Address to all Longshore, Clerks and Walking Bosses Locals, March 9, 1961, ILWUA.

<sup>86</sup> ILWU Aids in Japan Dock Fight, *Dispatcher*, April 6, 1962, 1, 8; ILWU in BC Aids Japan Dock Fight, *Dispatcher*, May 4, 1962, 4.

<sup>87</sup> Historic Asia-Pacific Solidarity Action Day, *Maritime Worker*, April 4, 1962, 5.

<sup>88</sup> Pacific-wide Wharf Hold-up, *Sydney Morning Herald*, (SMH), March 27, 1962; 2. 5,000 Wharf Men in Four hour Stoppage Today, SMH, March 28, 1962, 8.

<sup>89</sup> Tomitaro Kaneda. Report of All Pacific and Asian Dockworkers Corresponding Committee, Report and Resolutions of the 3rd All Pacific and Asian Dockworkers' Conference, Djakarta: October 4-9, 1963, 18-17.

area that such a Committee can now serve as a rallying point and driving force in the struggle for independent rights of trade unions'.<sup>90</sup> While this may be an overstatement, there is certainly a degree of truth in Roach's words; before the establishment of the DCC, an international campaign on the scale of the 1962 Solidarity Day would have not been possible.

### *Broken unity: the 1963 conference and dissolution of the Corresponding Committee*

The years following the first Pacific Solidarity Day were marked by several national and international changes that had direct implications for the partnership of regional dockworkers' unions. One of those was the deterioration of relations between China and the USSR in the early 1960s. As trade unions in these socialist countries were, by and large, an organisational extension of the state system, the Sino-Soviet split was a watershed event in the relationships between Chinese and Soviet unionists under the DCC umbrella.

There was also a shift in the ideological standing of the ILWU and WWF leadership, which brought both organisations into a direct conflict with their DCC partners from the socialist camp. Charles Larowe, Bridges' biographer in the early 1970s, largely agreed with numerous contemporary commentators, that the career of the ILWU President fell into two periods. Until the late 1950s Bridges was a radical, fond of communist slogans and labour offensive campaigns. After signing up to the Mechanization and Modernisation Agreement in 1960, he turned into a labour statesman who wanted to consolidate the gains made under the bargaining contract with capital through negotiation and friendly personal relations.<sup>91</sup>

On the other side of the Pacific the WWF also experienced change in the leadership's ideological position. The turning point in the process was the sudden death of 'Big Jim' Healy soon after the second Asia-Pacific dockworkers' conference and the subsequent election of a new general secretary. The majority of the membership voted for Charlie Fitzgibbon, the WWF Newcastle Branch president and a member of the Australian Labor, who defeated a communist candidate. Retaining the top position until the early 1980s, Fitzgibbon followed a much different political philosophy from his predecessor. Many years later, he confessed in his unfinished

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<sup>90</sup> Roach to Kaneda, May 3, 1962, ILWUA.

<sup>91</sup> Larowe, *Harry Bridges*, 376-379; Ahlquist, and Levi, *In the Interest of Others*, 105.

autobiography that throughout his long secretaryship tenure he 'wanted succeed as a trade union leader not committed to revolution but to reforms, not committed to being a "bosses man" [and] ... the political will of some party or foreign control ... but to the long term interest of the members of my union'.<sup>92</sup>

Among Fitzgibbon's priorities on assuming the leadership was to learn how unions in developed countries had dealt with the negative consequences of technological revolution on the waterfront. While still a branch president he had been a delegate to the 1961 conference of the DCC, thereby making personal contacts with his overseas counterparts.<sup>93</sup> Those connections, in fact, solidified. Unlike Healy who would not have been allowed entry to the United States due to his pro-communist position, Fitzgibbon easily obtained a local visa so that in March-April 1963, for the first time in the WWF's history, the General Secretary paid an official visit to North America to study new technological advances at West Coast ports and to take part in an ILWU convention as a guest speaker and observer.<sup>94</sup>

That ILWU forum was also attended by JDU secretary Kaneda, who delivered a speech to the audience on the standing of Japanese dockworkers and collaboration of unions under the DCC umbrella. He pointed out that even though the scale of the second Pacific Solidarity Day held in March 1963 was not as spectacular as the inaugural one, it still demonstrated the ability of regional labour to mount a collective transnational campaign.<sup>95</sup> Kaneda's talk contributed to the decision of convention to continue participation 'in All Pacific and Asian Dockworkers Conferences and the work of the Corresponding Committee'.<sup>96</sup>

To a great extent, the ILWU organisational and financial assistance secured the organisation of the third Asian-Pacific dockworkers' conference in Jakarta, Indonesia in October 1963.<sup>97</sup> As both ILWU and WWF leaders preferred to remain in their home countries, it was Jack Hall, deputy secretary of the ILWU, who headed the delegation of American unionists and Ted Roach, an active Australian Communist

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<sup>92</sup> Fitzgibbon autobiography, NBAC, P102/91, 65.

<sup>93</sup> Fitzgibbon autobiography, NBAC P102/91, 41-42.

<sup>94</sup> Fitzgibbon autobiography, NBAC, P102/91. 72; Proceedings of the Fifteenth biennial convention ..., 182-197.

<sup>95</sup> Proceedings of the Fifteenth biennial convention ..., 253-263.

<sup>96</sup> Proceedings of the Fifteenth biennial convention ..., 514-515.

<sup>97</sup> DCC call to the Third All Pacific and Asian Dockworkers' Conference, August 31, 1963, NBAC 114/586; Unions to which "Call" was sent; NBAC 114/586.

Party member, who was the chief representative of Australian waterside labour. Despite all hopes of the DCC members to expand the representation, the conference was still largely limited to a traditional pool of participants. Apart from the ILWU and WWF delegates, the attendance list also included names of officials of the Indonesian maritime union, the SRWU, the Chinese seamen's union, five Japanese waterfront labour organisations, the North Korean Traffic Workers' Union and a WFTU observer.<sup>98</sup> The newly established Port, Dock and Waterfront Workers Federation of India also wanted to send 'a strong delegation', but the Indian government refused to issue exit permits to these unionists on the grounds of Chinese participation in the Jakarta forum at a time of border conflict between China and India.<sup>99</sup>

**More broadly, the international hostilities of the Cold War made the third Asia-Pacific conference more of a gathering of radical politicians than a conventional meeting of unionists. Apart from ILWU delegates intended to discuss economic issues, other participants were much more concerned with general political questions of the day.** Kaneda's talk on the operation of the Corresponding Committee included a great deal of criticism of 'the American imperialism' and the 'fascist-like' regimes of Japan, South Vietnam and South Korea.<sup>100</sup> Likewise, the official speeches by Chinese and North Korean delegates did not provide much information on the standing of national labour while furnishing a vivid description of 'the US imperialists' policies of war and aggression.<sup>101</sup> The reports from other unions, with the exception of the ILWU one, also contained a number of critical remarks on anti-labour actions of local governments and the international political situation.<sup>102</sup>

The character of the conference resolutions reflected the interests of a majority. Just a few out of seventeen declarations that were adopted mentioned the work-related

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<sup>98</sup> Delegates to the 3rd conference. Report and Resolutions of the 3rd All Pacific and Asian Dockworkers' Conference, Djakarta: October 4-9, 1963, 2-3.

<sup>99</sup> Report on the Third All Pacific and Asian Dockworkers Conference by William Ward, James Herman & Jack Hall ILWU Delegates, ILWUA; The address by A.S.K. Iyengar, General Secretary of Port, Dock and Waterfront Workers Federation of India to the Third Conference of Asian .. September 29, 1963. ILWUA,

<sup>100</sup> Kaneda, Report, Reports and Resolutions of the 3rd All Pacific ..., 15-16.

<sup>101</sup> Tang Chang, Report of Chinese delegations; Reports and Resolutions of the 3rd All Pacific, 37-42; Ho Pil Man, Report of Korean Delegation, Reports and Resolutions of the 3rd All Pacific, 64-70.

<sup>102</sup> Reports and Remarks by the delegations, Reports and Resolutions of the 3rd All Pacific, 29-37, 42-63.

problems of dockworkers and the functioning of their occupational organisations, and the rest were devoted to different political and social issues ranging from the condemnation of Malaysia's proclamation to wishing success for the sporting games of the New Emerging Forces.<sup>103</sup>

On their return to the home country, the ILWU delegates submitted to the union Executive Board a report on their visit to Jakarta. The document provides a more accurate insight into the flow of the conference than the official publication does. It describes 'time-consuming and aggravating sessions' influenced by the politics of the Sino-Soviet split. The ideological division between the Soviet Union, on one side, and China, North Korea and to some extent Indonesia, on the other, meant that the delegates from these countries failed to compromise on a number of contemporary political issues such as approval of the 1963 Soviet-American-British nuclear test ban treaty and acceptance of the removal of Soviet missiles from Cuba. As a result, the delegates could not mention such controversial topics in the final resolutions 'in the interests of Conference "unity"'. The ILWU delegates further claimed that there was 'a little need for regular biennial conference of the All Pacific and Asian Dockworkers as long as they are so narrow in representation as the one just concluded'. Even so, they made a suggestion that the operation of the Corresponding Committee 'should be definitely continued.'<sup>104</sup>

The ILWU, indeed, continued to provide financial assistance to the DCC and in May 1965 Kaneda produced an account of the Committee activities since the Jakarta Conference. The report did not contain any specific information on the International solidarity days attempted in March 1964 and April 1965, probably because they had such limited impact.<sup>105</sup> Instead, it gave an analysis of the contemporary international situation along with an outline of protest campaigns waged by Japanese, Indonesian, Australian and Canadian waterside workers against the Vietnam War. While sketching the position of unionised waterfront labour in some Pacific countries, it provided no other details on the activities of the DCC apart from stating that it

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<sup>103</sup> Adopted resolutions, Reports and Resolutions of the 3rd All Pacific, 71-87.

<sup>104</sup> Report on the Third All Pacific and Asian Dockworkers Conference by William Ward, James Herman & Jack Hall ILWU Delegates, ILWUA.

<sup>105</sup> DCC appeal for International Solidarity Actions, March 1, 1964, ILWUA; DCC Appeal on International Action, February 1965. ILWUA.



continued publishing the *News* and promoting information exchange on a regional level.<sup>106</sup>

As the practical results of the DCC declined, disagreement among the participating unions mounted. In November 1965 Bridges criticised the transformation of the *DDC News* into 'an anti-war bulletin rather than a trade union' publication because of preoccupation with Vietnam War themes. In line with the views expressed in previous years, he insisted that 'a more strenuous effort should be made to carry detailed information of trade union developments affecting the longshoremen in the countries on the Pacific basin'.<sup>107</sup> Around a year later, ILLWU President Bridges wanted to know why 'for many months past' on the pages of *DCC News* there had been no references to the Cultural Revolution in China, where labour organisations were the subject of attack by the Red Guards.<sup>108</sup> Other parts of Bridge's letter condemned publishing in *DCC News* unconfirmed stories of atrocities committed by American troops in Vietnam.<sup>109</sup>

An increasing political tension between the USSR and China further damaged relations between the DCC members. When Kaneda visited Moscow in February 1965, the leadership of the SRWU made it clear that they would not contribute to organising the fourth Asia-Pacific dockworkers' conference unless Chinese unionists declined to participate in it. On his way back to Japan, Kaneda also briefly stayed in China to meet local maritime union officials. Those, in turn, expressed their intention to abandon all direct contacts with Soviet counterparts in the Corresponding Committee. In the light of such a mutual antipathy, Kaneda had to propose that Bridges call off the conference for a later year.<sup>110</sup> The ILWU President responded that, after a detailed discussion, his union officials came to the same conclusion; they were determined to avoid 'another debate between the Soviet and Chinese positions', as happened in Jakarta in 1963.<sup>111</sup>

The fourth conference never materialised. In September 1967, the leaders of the ILWU and the SRWU joined their Australian fellow unionists at a triennial conference

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<sup>106</sup> Report of the Activities of All Pacific and Asian Dockworkers Corresponding Committee, October 1963-May 1965, ILWUA.

<sup>107</sup> Bridges to Kaneda, November 15, 1965. ILWUA.

<sup>108</sup> Bridges to Kaneda, January 17, 1967. ILWUA; Kaneda to Bridges, February 7, 1967. ILWUA.

<sup>109</sup> Bridges to Kaneda, February 10, 1967. ILWUA; Kaneda to Bridges, February 28, 1967. ILWUA.

<sup>110</sup> Kaneda to Bridges, October 23, 1965. ILWUA.

<sup>111</sup> Bridges to Kaneda, November 15, 1965. ILWUA.

of the WWF. That meeting provided an opportunity for the parties to discuss the recent working of the DCC. Their exchange of opinions resulted in a decision to disband the Committee. The collective letter they sent to Kaneda explained the reasons for this choice. It claimed that the DCC had ceased to advance dockworkers' solidarity and cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region because of the ideologically biased position of China and North Korea, too great a concern with broad political objectives at the expense of industrial ones, a failure to secure a large representation from regional developing countries, and the one-sided character of many articles published in the *DCC News*.<sup>112</sup> Two months later, when the SRWU secretary visited Tokyo, he made an attempt to revitalise the DCC concept by suggesting to Kaneda that Chinese unionists be excluded from participation; he received a negative response.<sup>113</sup> This was the final episode in the DCC history.

### *Conclusion*

Started in the 1950s with a great hope of fostering Asia-Pacific labour connections, the Dockworkers' Corresponding Committee turned out to be an unworkable institution by the late 1960s. **Nevertheless, the DCC organisers succeeded for a decade in their attempt to create a broad coalition of industry unions outside the control of the two competing international peak bodies – the WFTU and the ICFTU.** The fleeting success of the DCC illuminates a moment of a 'horizontal' shift in the international organised labour movement, and reveals some of the complexity of labour internationalism of the Cold War period. It was the ILWU – the most powerful Pacific waterfront union organisationally and financially – that took the lead in bringing together regional unionists. Once this union lost an interest in the DCC scheme as the result of conflicts with other members, the trans-Pacific association of dockworkers was doomed. Yet in its heyday the DCC reveals the capacity of Asia-Pacific waterfront unions to organise themselves on an international level under the unfavourable political environment of the Cold War.

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<sup>112</sup> Fitzgibbon, Bridges and Shein to Kaneda, September 20, 1967, ILWUA; Bridges to Kaneda, November 2, 1967. ILWUA; Zennihon Kouwan Rondou, 224.

<sup>113</sup> Kaneda to Bridges, December 11, 1967. ILWUA.