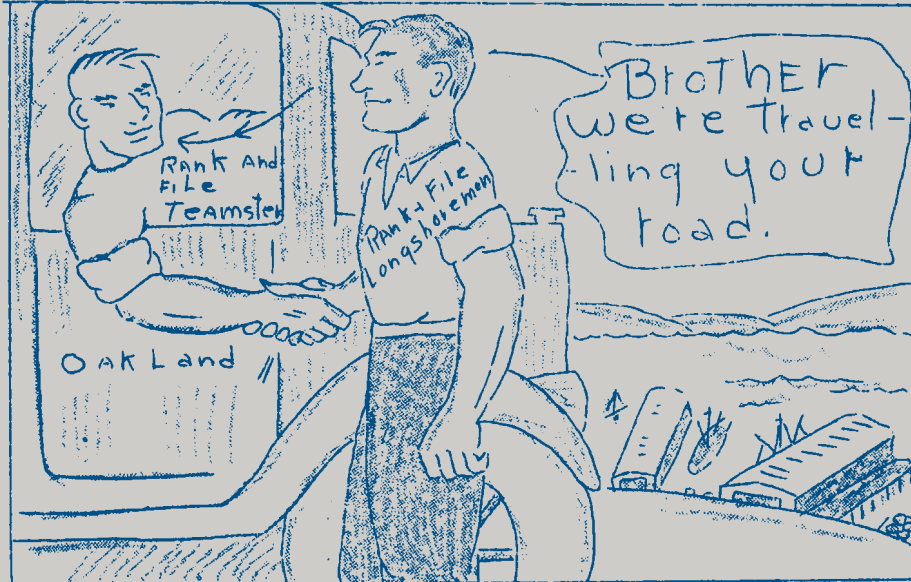


Emeryville C☺☺L Fun Facts

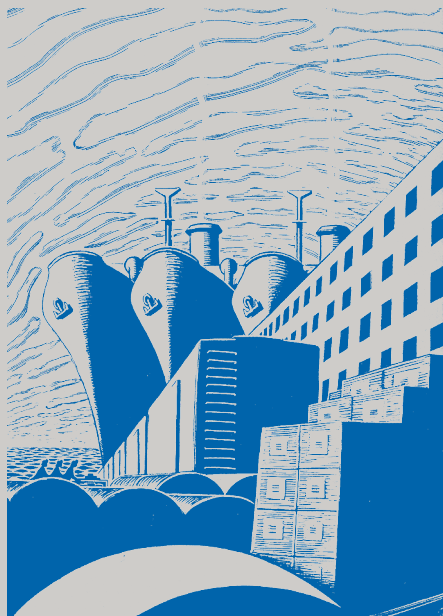
ISSUE 7

JULY 12, 2020



This past Juneteenth, those of us who enjoy labor actions were treated to a port shutdown by the ILWU in support of Black lives across the entire West Coast. While Juneteenth's port shutdown took place in Oakland, it got me curious: what kinds of herstorical protests have we seen in Emeryville? Not only did I uncover a series of bombings (the 1975 bombing of the police department by the Symbionese Liberation Army in retaliation for the murder of 14 year-old Tyrone Guyton by Emeryville police, the 2003 bombing of the Chiron building by animal rights activists), our multitude of CANNERIES and other factories has established Emeryville as an organized labor hotspot.

Since the late 1800's, shoe-makers, ironworkers, and longshore workers would regularly strike for better pay and working conditions (enjoy exploring the *San Francisco Call* for copious documentation!). One of my favorite



stories is from March 1937 when Emeryville women corset makers "knitted and read love stories" during their multi-day sit-down strike (is this real or sexist news coverage I can't really tell?). Also in 1937, workers at the Emeryville Heinz cannery shut down the plant two-plus months in order to gain union recognition, and in 1983, a four-month strike shut down production at Judson Steel.

What I was most excited to discover, however, was that our little industrial epicenter played a supporting role in one of the West Coast's most infamous labor actions: the 1934 West Coast Waterfront Strike. PLEASE TAKE A LOOK.

If you haven't heard of the West Coast Waterfront Strike before, I recommend checking out the ILWU's 25-minute 1988 documentary *Strikestory* which you can find on YouTube (my favorite website for watching 1970's safety training videos AND listening to rare Jamaican records!). You'll be relieved to know we are treated to not one but TWO kazooos featured on the soundtrack along with Woodie Guthrie's iconic ode to the founder of the ILWU, "The Ballad of Henry Bridges" (banjo fans, don't worry, Pete Seeger also has you covered here).

The strike began on May 9, 1934 when longshore workers walked out in order to gain union recognition. On June 19, teamsters began a solidarity strike through refusing to transport goods to and from the port by truck. This is where Emeryville comes in as a center for manufacturing: NO fruit cocktail was going anywhere! In fact, this led mayors of several East Bay cities (Emeryville among them) to declare a food shortage. HOW WOULD THE WORLD SURVIVE WITHOUT CANNED PEACHES (what else would you put on your cottage cheese?)!?!)

Pickets were going OFF all around town in June and July. Like many cities at the time, Emeryville had an anti-picketing ordinance. You'll be shocked to hear that police enforced this law selectively (civic unrest is always a

good time for cops to remind everyone that THERE ARE RULES OKAY?!).

On July 14, a general strike (MY TOP DOG ACTUAL FAVORITE TYPE OF LABOR ACTION due to its participatory nature) began. Two picketers were arrested which resulted in an increase in pickets at the locations of 35th & San Pablo, 53rd & San Pablo, 40th & Hollis, and 67th & Hollis. Shout-out to the dedication of strikers then & today!!! Some mischief occurs on the part of five strike sympathizers in Alameda who, "under the cover of darkness", "dumped part of a gondola load of iron pipe from a moving belt train" as their contribution to the general strike activity. HEROES.

You might remember that Emeryville police at the time were notorious for participating in illicit activity including bootlegging (our own city website describes a 1932 incident where "federal agents raided the Emeryville police garage at 3900 Adeline Street and discovered a 'liquor fleet' of 5 cars containing 565 gallons of liquor in 5-gallon cans; the police chief expressed 'shock' at the discovery."). The strike energy must have been contagious as even police got in on the fun: on July 24, 1934, two "special strike policeman" pleaded guilty to "staging an enthusiastic 'wild west' performance in which they shot out street lights, peppered a brick wall with bullets from their service revolvers, and then beat up a citizen" (I FEEL YOU COPS, A GOOD PROTEST GETS ME PRETTY EXCITED TOO).

It seems the 1934 strike has had a lasting legacy in Emeryville: strikes for union recognition and workers' rights peppered the 1930's (along with the rest of the country) and have continued into contemporary times, most recently with the Oaks Card Club strike in 2015 and the 2017 & 2019 UNITE HERE hotel workers strikes.

P.S. for a good time online check out the ILWU's archive of *The Waterfront Worker*, a newsletter published by an anonymous group of longshore workers from 1932-1936 (the source of these pretty badass cartoons).

SOLIDARITY!



Do you have info on labor history in Emeryville? Hot tips on important protest sites? Ideas for future issues?

Leave a message at (510) 519-7283