

INTERNATIONAL LONGSHORE AND WAREHOUSE UNION

THIRTY-FOURTH CONVENTION

REMARKS BY PADDY CRUMLIN

MARITIME UNION OF AUSTRALIA

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PRESIDENT McELLRATH: Brothers and sisters, I would like to introduce our next speaker, please. I think most all of you know Paddy Crumlin. Paddy heads up the Maritime Union of Australia, a union with a long legacy of struggle and close connections with the ILWU.

Paddy came up through the ranks, working as a sailor in the Australian Merchant Marines beginning in 1978. Most of us know him because of the struggles that he helped lead in 1998 when Australia's anti-union government got together with an anti-union employer to try to crush the MUA. The leading anti-union company was Patrick Stevedoring. They were totally serious about breaking the union.

When the first scab-loaded ship arrived at the Port of Los Angeles, ILWU members refused to touch it. We stood down until those refrigerated containers of lamb and beef were rotting in the harbor. The same thing happened in other countries, where dockworkers around the world refused to touch any ships loaded by the Patrick scabs. The MUA eventually beat back the attack from Patrick and the company allies and the corrupt government.

Please, brothers and sisters, give a warm welcome to our very good friend, Paddy Crumlin.

[Standing ovation]

BROTHER PADDY CRUMLIN: I just need a drink of
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water. I can't believe I drank so much last night and I'm still thirsty now, Bob.

[Laughter]

BROTHER CRUMLIN: Thanks, Bob, Willie, Wesley and Joe. It's a great honor to be here. I have been at the last few conventions. I would have to say that the highlight of my trade union life is being with the brothers and sisters of the ILWU in any forum, but particularly here at the convention which is the centerpiece, the political and industrial centerpiece of your great union.

Aloha to my Hawaiian mates. There are many special things in relation to the ILWU, but Hawaii would have to be one of the very, very special things, particularly the relationship between the ILWU and the leadership of the ILWU that saw the agricultural, hotel and other transport and dockworkers in that country and had the courage and the foresight and the leadership to be able to go in there and build that uniquely important local or series of locals inside the ILWU.

I had the great blessing to spend a couple of years in Hawaii surfing when I was a young bloke, in the seventies. I have always had with me the beauty of both the islands and your culture and the wonderful people who live there, even though I was told a couple of times to get my haole ass out

of the water by a couple of black shorts, I used to call them in those days. They have a very strong local surfing culture there.

I was saying to Bob the other day, I'm on a paddleboard, stand-up paddleboard, built by a Hawaiian called Robbie Nash. Bob apparently is a bit of surfer. He sometimes is called Moon Doggie, they tell me. I said to Wesley, we have many, many good surfers in the MUA and I know there are many good surfers in the ILWU, so as an expression of solidarity, maybe we ought to go to Hawaii and have an ILWU-MUA solidarity surf.

[Applause]

BROTHER CRUMLIN: I said Waimea, Bob said Waikiki, so maybe we will settle on Hanauma Bay. At least I won't be told to get my haole ass out of the water if I'm with my brothers and sisters from the ILWU.

This is also the first time I've spent a bit of time in Seattle, this beautiful city. I heard it always rains in Seattle. Well, all I've seen is sunshine. It's a most extraordinary, beautiful city. Thank you to Matthew and Herald and Local 19, all the members and officers for extending your generosity of spirit and your hospitality to us from the MUA, it is greatly appreciated.

I have spent some time, however, in Tacoma, thanks

to my long friendship and brotherhood with Willie Adams who gave me the great gift of an invitation to the extraordinary celebration that he and Mike Chambers ran for local longshoremen down in Tacoma and the black history and labor program.

It was the most extraordinary experience for a young Australian worker to stand alongside the individuals of the caliber, humanity, intelligence and compassion of Ossie Davis and Betty Shabazz, Malcolm X's sister. The grandson of Nelson Mandela was there, and the daughter of Martin Luther King who had passed away recently.

I sat there next to one old fellow, a little guy, and I said, "Hello, mate. Where are you from?"

He said, "I'm from the U.S. You're Australian."

I said, "Yes."

He said, "My father went to Australia. I've never been there."

I said, "What was your dad? Was he a seafarer or a longshoreman?"

He said, "No, he was a singer and an activist." And, of course, it was Paul Robeson Jr., whose father sang in the opera house before we had even finished it. We always say in Sydney, the greatest performance that we have ever had at our wonderful opera house in Sydney was Paul Robeson who

sang among the foundation to the unionized work force that stopped work all over the city of Sydney to come and listen to that wonderful man.

So, Willie, thank you, for your friendship and your great leadership.

He did set up once. I was in the wonderful old hall in Tacoma, and there was Reverend Al Sharpton. I said, "When am I on, Willie?" He said, "You are on after Reverend Al." Can he warm a room up, that bloke.

He's out there and he's got the whole place, it was like a Baptist convention, he was saying, "Well, I am telling you about Condoleezza Rice, come out of Birmingham, Alabama. She sold out our people." They're saying, "You say it, you saying the truth." He said, "I'm saying to you, Condoleezza Rice, just 'cause she's skin don't mean she's kin."

[Laughter]

BROTHER CRUMLIN: Of course, I had to come out next with my Australian accent that's about as flat as the Outback. They all looked at me and tried to work out what I was about.

The one thing I learned out of that, never follow the Reverend Al Sharpton when you speak.

Having Michelle and Barack Obama in the White House now for the specialness of what has happened with labor and black labor and history and the role of the ILWU, and of

course, Barack Obama, another Hawaiian, in the White House, is a wonderful culmination of our long march to freedom, because you can't have enslaved people in one country and not enslave humans of every country that care and think and know and want to do something about oppression, racism and ignorance. This culmination of our long march together, civil rights march, our long march as human beings is now being delivered, a gift of tolerance, intelligence, inclusion and hope. That is what your President stands for not just in this country but all over the world. That march, of course is littered with tragedy, murder, imprisonment.

One of the reasons that it is so progressive up here in Washington and Oregon and California was the apartheid years in this country drove many Afro-American people to the only semblance of freedom. They had to put the Rockies between them and the John Birch Society and the Jim Crow policies of the many generations in this country. And in doing it created these wonderful progressive communities that inspire and continue to build. Listening to the government the other day, what a wonderful contribution and a person who cares and a politician who wants to do something with the politics, wants to make a difference. Isn't about elitism and greed, but is about making a difference.

Of course, as we know, we need to continue to make

that march. It was Harry and the great leadership of the ILWU that identified the Jim Crow policies and said that is a division that will not allow us to make a union that will stand the test of time like it has over the last 75 years. It went out because in the 1960 strike and the 1990 strike, as you know, in this country it was organization of Afro-American labor and the unions that was used to break the strike. The leadership and the willingness to engage and take on that racism and to build a union, a different union, a union that puts the dignity of labor at the forefront of everything they did, was one of the reasons that the ILWU continues to resonate with leadership not only in this country but all over the world and extended that same tolerance to other racial minority rights and affirmative action when people didn't want to recognize it, had the courage and the foresight and was able to take those arguments to the membership and translate that into policies that made a difference and change the way this country thinks, and ended up ultimately in having an Afro-American as President of the United States. What a wonderful, wonderful thing that is.

They were covered in the blood, I suppose, in many ways, but still with all the threat and the intimidation, the imprisonment -- I mean, they were excluded and railed against legally and you see the death at Local 10 on the footpath there

and the outline of those two bodies. And it's not touch one, an injury to one, an injury to all is something that goes far beyond industrial rights and into the area of human rights and civil rights and lies at the very core of this union.

That is an anthem that continues, our march, your march, against labor assassinations in Guatemala.

Dockworker, Pedro Zamora, assassinated in his car with his three children in the front seat with him for no other reason than he was a leader of the dockworkers union that wanted to make sure that privatization did not take away the working rights and the job security of his members.

Another worker is murdered in Colombia and other parts of Central America. Oppression in Africa and South America. Murder, imprisonment and political brutality in Burma.

Our movement, your union, stands for ideals that go very, very far further from the issues of just the contract and just the delivery of job security and material worth and self-esteem of the membership. And it's hard to do that, to find the courage to continue to return to this convention hall and renew your spirit of intent and leadership that takes your voice in this room into the lives of so many working men and woman in this world and gives them hope and inspiration for a better world. And that is one of the wonderful things about

this convention and the many, many other conventions that preceded it.

At the moment we have been brought to the precipice of economic collapse, social exclusion, poverty, unemployment and industrial exclusion by one of the worst demonstrations of greed, elitism and selfishness in the history of humanity. So much has not been plundered or desecrated by so few in such a short period of time since the industrialization of our world.

The victims, of course, are the great sea of working men and women and their families, retirees. The disadvantaged have been further humiliated and denuded. Those with material independence and jobs and a living security have been mugged and robbed by an elite group of corporate thugs and bullies and assisted in their greed and endless self satiation and self absorption by a political elite that is driven by greed, injustice and their own self absorption.

Halliburton, when you see the Vice President of the United States, Dick Cheney, who had his mouth and his pockets stuffed by a company and convinced that imbecile George Bush that the war in Iraq was about weapons of mass destruction. Instead of rebuilding that country by the removal of tyranny, he sent young working U.S., working-class people into the

Marines, into the Army, into the Armed Service to go and prosecute a case that is illegal and immoral. This was the extraordinary change that has been visited upon us.

At the collapse of the Cold War there is a word that said the new world order that was going to bring peace and prosperity to working men and women all over the world. And the catch cry of neo liberalism was to let the market do its job. Well, the market has done its job. It has destroyed 80 percent of the wealth of the world. It has plunged us into war after war after war. It has desecrated humanity and removed the fundamental rights of decency and dignity to people all over the world. That's the new world order.

In this country, unemployment of ten percent, it is a figure, but that ten percent represents so many working men and women, so much inability to be able to live a decent life, the emotional stress, the physical stress, the family breakups. All of those percentages translate into a waste of humanity. Young people, double that. Youth unemployment now in the U.S. is, they say, between 20 and 24 percent. A generation, a lost generation of workers has been robbed of their aspirations and their right to a decent living, all the things that we fought so hard for in our unions, you in the ILWU, have been robbed and taken from them through no fault of their own.

The global financial crisis wasn't at its roots like the depression. It wasn't about not enough. It was too much. If anything, look at the material worth still out there. What the global financial crisis was about a polarization of wealth at one end and in a country that never saw the move of the basic wage for workers for, how long, ten, twelve years under policies of the Bush government. There is no doubt that the subprime crisis was about denying working men and women of this country the ability to pay houses off. And that is a great challenge for our labor movement, is to get out there. We have now been drawn back by this legal manipulation, by the suppression, political and corporate oppression. We have been drawn back to 12 percent density in this country, 20 percent in Australia. And around the world those figures are very, very similar.

How do we claw our way out of that morass, out of that hole and regain the momentum that we once had? And at the same time, you know, the banks and the private equity houses that lived and created that wealth now reshaping themselves. They'll be back. They have visited destruction. They have taken our wealth. They have destroyed the companies that we work for. They have put us on the unemployment lines. And they will be back. And as the economic cycle turns around they will rebuild their banks,

they will rebuild their short selling, the use of all those exploited, even speculative processes that brought to us the brink of this terrible economic catastrophe and we will be plunged in another cycle unless we do something about it.

I guess that is the key message I wanted to come with to you, my wonderful brothers and sisters of the ILWU. Out of all the mud and mire there gleams an opportunity for us, not just through Obama and the personalities.

The great debate on Monday about the national health system in this country is now within your grasp. For many, many generations in this country, beyond your reach.

Better and fairer labor laws, within your grasp, is going to give right of access, the right to be in a union, the ability to bargain without harassment and legal harassment, the right to access workers, the right work to secure peace. All of those things now are opportunities in the rebuilding of our economies and our societies and the creation and the new vision. The door is open for us to build a new labor movement, a better labor movement, a social and political, industrial and cultural manifestation of freedom and equality. All the things we aspire for in our normal lives as individuals and collectively, compassion, support, and belief in each from the cradle to the grave.

It will be a long road and a hard road. We have

to challenge our internal leadership. We need to change and rehabilitate our unions and our union structures and our union movement. We have to make a difference for workers this time before the neo liberal and neo conservative forces regroup and visit the same tragedies upon us again. We must go out. I saw it on the TV, not that I get a chance to watch much TV, I've been mostly socializing and hard work the last few days. All the advertisements out there are about the health system. They're already out there advertising that you don't need a health system, a national health system. It hasn't even come into some of concrete manifestation and yet they are expending tens of millions of dollars on an advertising campaign to make sure it doesn't happen, in their own self-interest, at the bottom of the economic and political cycle.

We have to challenge and renew our leadership. We have to make a difference for workers. We have to go into our mechanisms -- it doesn't matter if it's the AFL-CIO or the Australian Council of Trade Unions or it's the International Transport Workers Federation, we must continue to define our leadership by the needs of workers in the external environment of these terribly difficult times and not be scared to challenge our internal mechanisms, to make them waste free, to remove the duplication, to be able to go and extend. It's hard to organize hotel workers and

warehouse workers. What a courageous group of individuals. We're blessed in unions like ours that we organize dock workers and seafarers that are easy to organize. Who wants to organize the unorganized in some of these miscellaneous and difficult industries? That was the great vision of the ILWU, to extend the ownership of the union into areas where it was hard to organize. And we have a responsibility with our resources to make sure that we are able to embrace those workers in the warehouse, in hotels, in other industries, with other unions. We are cooperative with each other and not against each other. Put political and personalities aside and rebuild a world around the real labor values that we stand now for and you stand for. Giving women equal rights of access and remuneration. Rebuilding the opportunities for our youth and giving them voice and power in our union and giving the opportunity that has been taken away from them. Refurbishing our shabby bureaucracies and our national and international structures and doing away with the wastage and the opportunities that drives it along and has driven it along. Directing our resources to organizing the unorganized. Working with other unions to eliminate that wastage and challenge that political opportunism. Organize, organize, organize. That has never changed, never will change. That is what we do. Whether it's Rite Aid, Blue

Diamond, continue to secure the rights of hotel workers wherever they are, the warehouse industries. Giving workers the opportunity that we take for granted most of our days on the docks and in our other industries.

They are exposed and have been exposed, these generational workers that have never had the opportunity to join a union. They have been denied by the empty promises and the legislative straitjackets. They have been imprisoned, away from the freedom of the labor movement by legislation and self-interest, the same self-interest that brought us to the brink of economic collapse and destroyed the wealth of all of us. It won't be easy to turn our movement around. But it's more possible today than it has been for many, many years.

As a labor movement we must organize those workers like we always have, with commitment and thoroughness in a way that sustains the outcome and maximizes our precious resources, our precious resources, paid by workers over generations. They built this house of the ILWU and the MUA. They crafted it out of the grave of the depression, political and industrial oppression from the boss, and got dignity and decency against all the odds. We have a responsibility of stewardship to translate those resources into better opportunities for future generations of workers. It's our

time -- it's our time to do that. It's not Harry's time or Herman's time. It's our time. It's Big Bob, Paddy Crumlin, every one of us, delegates, working people, everybody in this hall. It's our time to show that leadership, as Bob did in the last contract. What if that contract wasn't secured? What would have been the state of dockworkers here on the West Coast if that that wasn't secured at that time? With leadership and thoroughness, democracy and debate, having it out, talking to each other, making a better deal, having our disagreements, but translating those disagreements into new opportunities.

We come from a hard yard, dock workers, because we have always been subjected to terrible political intimidation and manipulation. The Liverpool dockers. It started there. Dock workers control the trade of the world. All of the trade in and out of America comes through our hands. We are a threat to the neo liberal agenda. That's what the Liverpool dockers were about. That's what Patrick's was about. That's what the lockout was about. It was to take away your power. And in taking away your power, giving themselves more power and more manipulation.

We have learned hard lessons in the last ten years. I thank you again and again and again for your courage and determination in a country that hasn't got great labor laws

to turn a ship away. It's a long way to Australia. Even in a plane it's a long bloody way. But to turn a ship around and send it back to New Zealand so the cargo could be reloaded by unionized workers of the Maritime Union in New Zealand was one of the great heroic and courageous solidarity supports that has ever happened in the history of unionism.

[Applause]

BROTHER CRUMLIN: In 1934 when this union was formed, most dock workers in those days were impoverished, disenfranchised, legally excluded and industrially isolated, and murdered and imprisoned to boot. Through your courage, through your strategic leadership, through your brotherhood and sisterhood and your democracy you have built this great union. You built a union of political independence and progress, that stands on an understanding of your individual and collective self-worth and dignity. That's where your self-esteem comes from. To be an individual but also to work cooperatively and collectively. That is the signature of your work. That is the signature of our work and our lives as labor activists and labor leaders. That is the hope for the future and that's the hope for workers here and everywhere.

Long live the labor movement. Long live the ILWU.
Thank you very much.

[Standing ovation]

BROTHER CRUMLIN: Can I get my delegation to stand up? Jamie Newlyn, Glen Wood, Mick Ryan, Bob Patchett, Wade Eaton, Steve Cumberlidge and Dennis Outram. They came all this way to be with you, brothers and sisters.

[Standing ovation]

BROTHER CRUMLIN: The Maritime Union of New Zealand, Ray Fife and Russell Mayne.

[Applause]

BROTHER CRUMLIN: I've got a gift. It doesn't look like my DVD is going to work.

When Bob sent that wonderful delegation before your contract down to our convention in Australia, which inspired us and gave us great strength and hope, and that was before the contract. We gave Bob a gift. The gift was -- I will read it. This was donated to us by a long term seafarer and it tells the story in itself. It's the story of a coat, a big leather coat. And this was the story of the seafarer who gave it.

The jacket had an unusual beginning, and may yet have had an unusual ending. Its original owner was Geoff Wills, a militant member of the Seaman's Union of Australia, like Harry Bridges, and was also an intellectual. During his lifetime at sea he had once been an official in Adelaide for

South Australian ports. He ended his life as a highly skilled artisan, creating violins, guitars and basses.

In 1948 he was part of a trade union delegation to the Soviet Union and in Moscow was given the gift of a Siberian winter overcoat of black leather that went way down to his boots. It also had a detachable sheep skin interior and the ensemble was completed with a golden bear skin cap.

What was ideal for Siberia was fundamentally useless in tropical Queensland and most of coastal Australia. In the words of a Port Kembla humourist, "It's about as useful as a wooden leg in a bush fire!" It would be akin to tackling an Alaskan winter in shorts and shirt. So it spent nine years in Geoff's wardrobe until while sailing on the Cycle (our last banjo job) he passed it on to a much taller shipmate named Alan Cameron. He had to cut 18 inches off the coat to walk safely, so it must have trailed Geoff like a wedding gown. The sheep skin section made his dog happy for it gave his kennel a luxurious interior. Alan said the complete outfit made his shoulders ache during his inside modeling; he never it made outside.

The next inheritor was Alan Oliver who in turn could never find anyone big enough or cold enough to pass it on to, so he just hung it up for another 40 years. But he noticed last week an ILWU delegate with shoulders while not quite as

broad as a Mack truck, would be capable of handling its safe working load. And, of course, that's Big Bob McEllrath.

To its next inheritor, although it is 60 years old, it has led a somewhat sheltered life. May it end up serving its original purpose, to give a working man warmth and comfort on a long cold night producing enrichment for the world's peoples.

Alan Oliver, Union No. 667.

It couldn't go to a better bloke than Bob McEllrath, my great mate and president of the ILWU. Comrade.

[Applause]

PRESIDENT McELLRATH: Thank you. Well, for those of you who weren't in Australia, they presented me with this big leather overcoat. Paddy gives it to me, and it fits, and it fits real well. I reach in the pockets, but he didn't know it, I took out my money clip and stuck it in the coat pocket. I say, "Jeez, look what I found in the coat pocket." He goes, "I should have tried it on first."

[Laughter]

PRESIDENT McELLRATH: Paddy, we have a poster for you. It's signed by the living presidents of the ILWU, David Arian, Jim Spinosa, Brian McWilliams and myself. We hope you will hang it in your hall. Thank you very much.

[Applause].