



# VOICE OF THE ILWU

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## Hawai‘i International Team in D.C. Hits the Ground Running

—Washington D.C. The weather was frigid but the team was on fire. For three days in early February, the ILWU Hawai‘i International team hit the pavement in Washington D.C. meeting with all four Hawai‘i Congressional representatives to advocate for Hawai‘i’s working-class.

Recently-elected International Vice President Hawai‘i, Brandon Wolff, and Local 142 Legislative Liaison Brenson Wailehua-Hansen travelled to Washington with two priorities: strengthen and broaden the ILWU’s political relationships and safeguard and advocate for the rights of the working class.

While D.C. is indeed a hotbed of political uncertainty under the new administration, the Hawai‘i team focused on education, finding common ground, and securing win-win solutions to some of the issues that were discussed.

The team expanded political relationships by meeting with both Democrats and Republicans. In addition to Senator Brian Schatz, Senator Mazie Hirono, Representative Ed Case, and Representative Jill Tokuda, all of whom are Democrats representing Hawai‘i, they met with Republican reps including Representative Morgan Luttrell from Texas and Representative Derrick Van Orden from Wisconsin.

“The entire U.S. Congress makes decisions that impact Hawai‘i so our outreach needs to be as far-reaching as possible” said Wailehua-Hansen.

Win-win solutions emerged by linking representatives’ national security concerns with union job security. The delegation highlighted how automated, foreign-made cranes threaten both dockworkers’ jobs and national security. .

This was the first trip to D.C. for this Hawai‘i delegation who set the stage and tone for future meetings in the Capitol.

“Our trip to Washington D.C. was invaluable, yielding both new insights and tangible results”, stated Wolff. “We forged promising bipartisan connections. We’re optimistic about the progress and committed to strengthening these relationships to better represent our members and Hawai‘i.”



Brenson Wailehua-Hansen and Brandon Wolff at the nation's capitol.

## Labor Watch: Trump Administration Targets Department of Labor, NLRB.

The opening weeks of Donald Trump’s presidency have been marked by a sweeping and aggressive dismantling of federal agencies, targeting programs that serve a broad spectrum of U.S. interests—including protections for American workers.

Among the first casualties of this campaign was the Department of Labor (DOL), which has faced immediate and severe disruptions under Trump’s Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), led by Elon Musk.

**First Strike: Crippling the NLRB**  
Eight days into his presidency, Trump fired National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) General Counsel Jennifer Abruzzo, a Biden appointee known for her expansive pro-worker stance. He also removed NLRB Board Chair Gwynne Wilcox, another strong advocate for labor rights.

The firings have left the NLRB with only two sitting members—below the quorum required to issue rulings, effectively rendering the agency defunct. Wilcox, who had years left in

her term, is challenging her removal in court, arguing that she was fired unlawfully since NLRB members can only be dismissed for serious misconduct or negligence of duty.

### A Gift to Whole Foods and Amazon

The paralysis of the NLRB immediately benefited corporate giants. In late January 2025, workers at a Whole Foods store in Philadelphia voted 130 to 100 to unionize with the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 1776, making

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ADDRESS LABEL

# News from the Dispatcher

## We've Got Work To Do

### Bobby Olvera Jr. International President

#### Sisters, Brothers, and Fellow Workers,

In 2018, I received a call from ILWU Vice President Wesley Furtado that set me on a path to run for International office. He asked me to come to Hawaii to meet with him and members of the Hawaii Longshore Division. Over breakfast, we talked about the future of our union.

"You have work to do," he told me.

It was both a challenge and a call to action. He was right. I couldn't stay on the sidelines, content with my past elected offices. I understood that my real work was only just beginning.

I rose to the challenge and ran for International office. With the membership's support, I served two terms as International Vice President. Those six years were tough. In 2020, we lost Uncle Wes. We faced

new officers to focus on building a stronger ILWU, free from the shadow of bankruptcy and the accompanying drain on our resources.

Now is not the time to rest. We have a unique three-year window, free from major distractions, to move this union forward, re-engage our membership, and recommit ourselves to our core values. From the Titled Officers to our newest members, we all have work to do.

We will work closely with our active members and pensioners—including our three President Emeriti—to modernize our union's policies and practices. This union is rich in untapped talent and enthusiasm, and we will draw on the experience and knowledge from all our regions and divisions.

The effort will begin with the International Officers and the International Executive Board (IEB). At our October meeting, the

**The ILWU is all of us, and we share the responsibility to honor those who came before and to set the stage for those who will follow. Together, we must safeguard this union and carry forward the proud legacy and traditions we've inherited.**

a pandemic, endured 13 months of grueling West Coast longshore negotiations, and confronted a decade-long lawsuit from ICTSI that threatened our very existence.

Before we could move forward, we had to clear the obstacles in our path. I am grateful to President Emeritus Willie Adams for removing many of those stumbling blocks, allowing the

Officers presented the IEB with a comprehensive, strategic three-year plan to improve every department and program in the ILWU. The IEB unanimously adopted this plan, and we have already begun the work of implementation. Part of the plan involves holding our IEB meetings in different areas over the next three years, providing more opportunities to interact with members and allowing rank-and-file members to observe and participate in the International's work firsthand.

#### IEB Committees: the Foundation of Our Plan

We will have seven ILWU Executive Board Committees for the 2024–2027 term, each with defined goals and deliverables. Five are new

committees; two are existing. These committees will empower IEB members to shape and implement the ILWU's priorities:

#### 1. Infrastructure Committee (New)

This committee will recommend improvements to the union's internal structure and operations, including IT infrastructure and operational policies.

#### 2. Policies and Programs Committee (New)

This committee will address social issues, inclusivity, and internal community-building. It will help strengthen and maintain unity and solidarity by fostering understanding among all members.

#### 3. Education Committee (New)

This committee will update ILWU educational programs, making our curriculum more accessible—potentially through online platforms—and developing new materials for conferences and local training. It will also update How the Union Works and The ILWU Story to reflect who we are today.

#### 4. Communications Committee (New)

This committee will advise on all communication channels, including The Dispatcher, social media, and other outreach methods. Its members will source articles and ensure we're providing timely, relevant, and useful information to the membership.

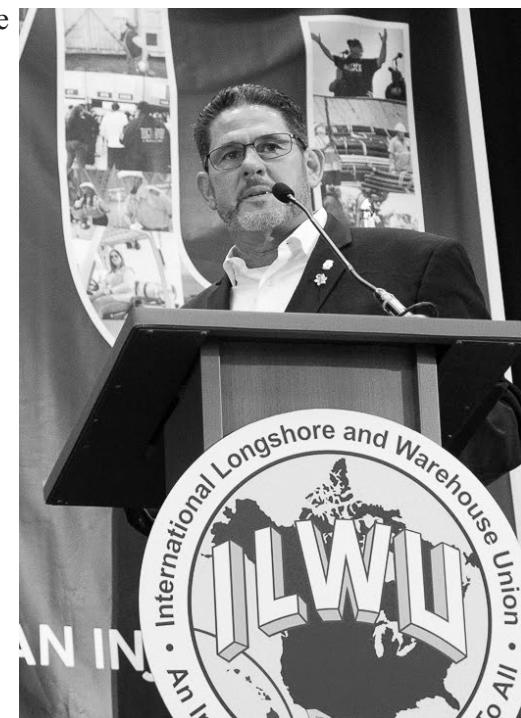
#### 5. Legislative Committee (New)

This committee will advocate for legislative priorities that represent all ILWU locals and affiliates—whether you work in a warehouse, a hotel, a hospital, a mine, or on the docks. Every member deserves a voice in Washington, D.C. The committee will work closely with the International Officers, the Coast Longshore Legislative Committee and Chair, and the Senior Policy Advisor.

#### Existing Committees:

##### \* Offshore Wind Committee (Established 2020):

This IEB committee monitors the emerging offshore wind industry



International President, Robert "Bobby" Olvera Jr.

on the West Coast, guarding and advancing ILWU jurisdiction for all divisions.

#### \* International Organizing Committee (Established 2018):

This committee supports the Organizing Department with regional knowledge and best practices, maintaining open communication with local officers and rank-and-file members, and assisting with first contract negotiations.

#### Delivering for Our Union

The Titled Officers and the Executive Board are on the clock. We are committed to modernizing and updating our union's practices so that the ILWU is well-positioned to face future challenges. Central to these efforts is our renewed emphasis on empowering members through comprehensive education and strengthening our collective power through targeted organizing initiatives. By our next convention, this administration will demonstrate tangible progress across all ILWU departments and programs, ensuring that the union's foundations in education and organizing are stronger than ever.

This will be a collective effort. We will engage the membership, our pensioners, and leaders throughout the union. The ILWU is all of us, and we share the responsibility to honor those who came before and to set the stage for those who will follow. Together, we must safeguard this union and carry forward the proud legacy and traditions we've inherited.

*We have work to do—and we will get it done.*

# DOL:

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it the first unionized location in the Amazon-owned grocery chain. Whole Foods swiftly appealed the election results, claiming improper conduct by the union, including offering transportation to the polls and promising wage increases.

With no functioning NLRB to rule on the appeal, Whole Foods retains the status quo—refusing to recognize the union and blocking contract negotiations. This sends a clear signal to corporations facing union drives: simply file an appeal and let the issue languish in a non-operational NLRB.

Amazon, Whole Foods' parent company, is already involved in a broader attack on labor rights. Alongside Elon Musk's SpaceX, Amazon is challenging the very constitutionality of the NLRB in court, seeking to abolish the agency entirely.

Trump has replaced General Counsel Abruzzo with William Cowen, a conservative labor attorney who previously served on the NLRB under George W. Bush and has led the agency's Los Angeles office since 2016.

## DOGE Seizes Control of the Department of Labor

Next, the Trump administration turned its attention to the Department of Labor. DOGE officials announced a mandatory all-staff meeting on February 5 to implement significant budget cuts and potential layoffs.

DOL employees were ordered to halt their work and grant DOGE unfettered access to departmental resources, with noncompliance punishable by termination. The department's IT staff was directed to stay after hours to assist DOGE in accessing government servers, including confidential databases from the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) and the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS).

The move sparked immediate concerns about the integrity of critical economic data and the security of workers' personal information.

DOGE proceeded to slash funding for programs it deemed unnecessary,

cutting deep into workplace safety enforcement, wage theft investigations, and research on employment trends.

## Federal Workplace Discrimination Protections Rolled Back

In another major blow to workers' rights, Trump rescinded Executive Order 11246, which since 1965 has required federal contractors to uphold Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) standards. Originally issued

**"If the agency does not fully effectuate its Congressional mandate in the future as we did during my tenure, workers—with assistance from their advocates—will take matters into their own hands to demand dignity, respect, and their fair share of the value they create." -Abruzzo**

by President Lyndon B. Johnson, the order prohibited discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, or national origin in hiring and employment practices among federal contractors.

Acting Labor Secretary Vince Micone immediately halted all investigations and enforcement of these protections, effectively removing oversight of discrimination in federally contracted workplaces. Critics warn that this will embolden employers to engage in discriminatory hiring and employment practices without consequence, deepening inequities in the job market.

## Equal Employment Law vs. DEI Initiatives

This rollback aligns with the administration's broader attacks on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs. However, it is critical to distinguish between DEI initiatives—which are voluntary efforts by organizations to promote workplace diversity—and legally mandated EEO protections. Unlike DEI, which companies adopt at their discretion, EEO laws prohibit employers from discriminating in hiring and employment practices. Nevertheless, under the guise of fighting so-called "woke" policies, the Trump administration has dismantled even these legally binding safeguards.

## Unions Mobilize to Defend the Department of Labor

Labor unions, including the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM), have mobilized against DOGE's actions, staging protests at DOL headquarters and denouncing the takeover as a corporate-driven attack on labor protections. A coalition of unions and labor policy researchers filed an emergency lawsuit to prevent DOGE from accessing confidential DOL data, arguing that such access threatens worker privacy and economic stability.

However, on February 7, U.S. District Judge John Bates—appointed by George W. Bush—declined to block DOGE's access to DOL systems, dealing a setback to the labor movement's legal efforts.

## A Functioning Labor Board Is Essential to Labor Peace

The Trump administration's moves mark a dramatic shift in federal labor policy, tilting the balance of power even further toward corporations. With the NLRB incapacitated and workplace discrimination protections gutted, unions and workers face an uphill battle in defending hard-won

Historically, labor laws and worker protections were established in response to intense, and often violent, labor militancy in the early 20th century. These laws were not mere acts of goodwill; they were a compromise to quell unrest and force corporations to share power with workers. The current administration's attack on these laws risks rekindling the kind of labor resistance that made them necessary in the first place.

Former NLRB General Counsel Jennifer Abruzzo put it bluntly: "There's no putting the genie back in the bottle. If the agency does not fully effectuate its Congressional mandate in the future as we did during my tenure, workers—with assistance from their advocates—will take matters into their own hands to demand dignity, respect, and their fair share of the value they create."

The battle over labor rights is far



Top: Elon Musk. Bottom: February 5 workers rally at the Department of Labor.  
Photo credit: PBS News (top), AFSCME (bottom)

labor rights.

Trump could appoint new NLRB members at any time—or he could leave the board in limbo, allowing corporations to suppress unionization efforts without consequence. He could reinstate EEO protections—or let workplace discrimination go unchecked.

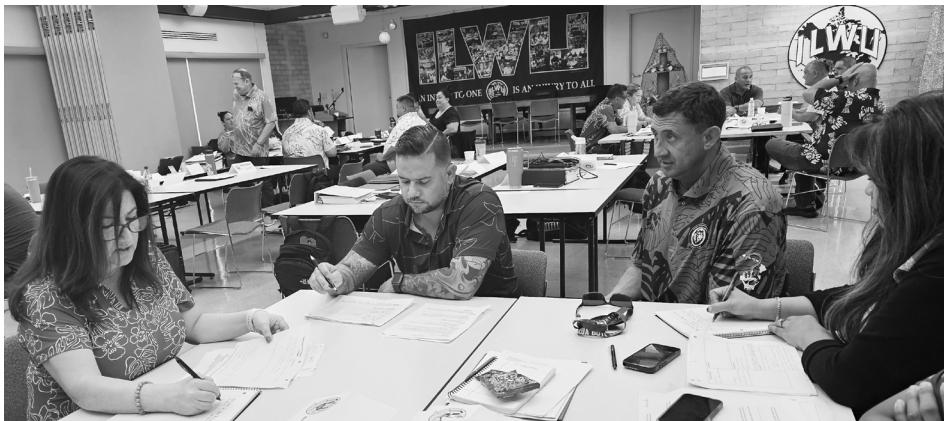
from over. The Democratic Party struggles to mount a meaningful response, while the labor movement scrambles to formulate a counter-strategy to a well-organized corporate assault on worker protections. In this turbulent landscape, working-class organization and unity are more critical than ever. The ILWU's guiding principles remains as relevant today as it was in the past.

## ILWU 10 Guiding Principles: Principle VI:

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

# Your Union Reps Are Ready, Are You?

## 2025 FTO Conference Kicks Off Triennium of Education



The team prepares proposals, identifies leverage, and gets ready for mock negotiations. L-R: Vice President Corinna Salmo Nguyen, O'ahu Division B.A., Paris Fernandez, Hawai'i Longshore Division Ka'ai Bruhn, and Hawai'i Division B.A. Roselyn Molina.

**W**e get to wake up every morning and go to work for the people. That's a privilege, and a serious responsibility." This is how President Chris West opened the 2025 Full-time Officers Training - the first in the new triennium focused on education to strengthen the union from bottom to top.

The January 13-17 full-time officers' training, titled Fortifying Foundations, Sharpening Spears, focused on administrative duties that keep the union organized and secure, as well as methods and techniques to increase unit strength and negotiation outcomes. Full-time Officers are the elected Business Agents, Division Directors, and Titled Officers.

This first training kicked it all off by getting to the core of what union work is about. Leadership coach Ka'ala Souza asked officers a simple but critical question: Why do we do this work? The discussions and activities that followed highlighted the nature of a Full-time Officer's job—fighting for what's right, making a difference in people's lives, and equalizing the balance of power between the employer and working people. President West drove that point home in his opening remarks, reminding everyone that while most people work for a boss, ILWU officers have the privilege of working for the members. And such duty-driven work requires great preparation for the fights ahead.

On Tuesday, FTO's took a deep dive

into collective bargaining—building research-backed proposals, identifying leverage points, and crafting negotiation strategies that drive forward movement for members. Officers tested their skills in mock negotiations against seasoned union negotiators, learning how to push back when employers try to delay, divide, or derail the process. Every step of the way, they were coached by experienced leaders, sharpening their ability to win strong contracts.

But bargaining is only half the battle. The best proposals in the world won't move an employer unless members are standing behind them, ready and willing to stand. That's why Thursday's focus was mobilizing—negotiations and mobilizing being two sides of the same coin. Officers practiced real conversations with members, moving past initial complaints to the deeper issues that fuel action. They practiced turning frustration into energy, identifying leaders, and building contract campaigns that members take ownership over.

Of course, running a union takes more than just negotiations and mobilizing. Officers also sharpened their administrative skills to ensure the union stays strong and secure. While not the most exciting part of the work,

sound administration is what keeps the whole operation running and protected from anti-union efforts.

Training wrapped up on Friday and the FTO's returned to their regular work on Monday with more tools in their toolbox to see through the best outcomes for their fellow members.

The new triennium has just begun, and education will be a priority at every level—because the stronger the membership, the stronger the union. Coming up soon are unit officer training that aim to ensure that workplace leaders have the tools they need to organize, mobilize, and enforce contracts. The Local is also coordinating industrial grouping caucuses, which will begin this year. Industrial caucus brings together rank-and-file members from the same industries to strategize together for the campaigns that lie ahead.

Your FTO's spent one week in focused training. And now this is where you come in. Opportunities for rank-and-file members to get involved open up daily. More training is on the horizon. The fights ahead won't be easy—but together, we'll be ready. When the call comes to stand up for yourself and your fellow workers, will you be ready? Your union reps are.



## Labor Unity on Display as Hawai'i Remembers Civil Rights Leader, Labor Supporter, Martin Luther King Jr.

It was a beautiful morning on January 20th when nearly 100 members, pensioners, staff, and family turned out for the annual Martin Luther King Jr. parade in Honolulu. A number of other union, including UNITE HERE! Local 5, SAG-AFTRA, IBEW, and the State AFL-CIO turned out to show labor unity under a new corporate-friendly federal administration.

Martin Luther King Jr. saw the labor movement and the civil rights movement as deeply interconnected struggles for justice, equality, and human dignity. He believed that economic inequality and racial injustice were intertwined, and he frequently collaborated with labor unions to advance shared goals.

King's vision extended beyond end-

ing segregation and securing voting rights; it included economic empowerment for marginalized communities, particularly African Americans, who faced systemic exploitation in the workplace.

His support for fair wages, safe working conditions, and the right to unionize reflected his understanding that true liberation required addressing both racial and economic disparities.

One of King's most significant connections to the labor movement was his support for the Memphis sanitation workers' strike in 1968. The strike, led primarily by Black workers, sought fair treatment and union recognition. King saw their struggle as emblematic of the broader fight for racial and economic justice.

His famous "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech, delivered the night before his assassination, was in support of these workers, underscoring his belief that economic justice was inseparable from racial equality.

King also had a notable relationship with the ILWU, particularly ILWU Local 10, a union with a strong history of racial integration and social justice activism. The ILWU was one of the first unions to actively promote racial equality, welcoming Black workers and fighting against discriminatory practices. ILWU Local 10, based in the San Francisco Bay Area, was especially progressive, with a significant number of Black members in leadership roles. In 1967, King addressed ILWU members at their annual convention, praising their efforts to bridge racial divides and their support for the civil rights movement. He highlighted

the union's role in demonstrating that collective action could challenge both economic exploitation and racial discrimination.

The ILWU's commitment to King's ideals was further demonstrated after his assassination in 1968. ILWU Local 10 honored his memory by shutting down the ports of San Francisco in a day of mourning, a powerful act of solidarity that underscored the union's recognition of the interconnectedness of labor and civil rights struggles.

King's relationship with the ILWU, and particularly Local 10, exemplified his belief in the power of unity across racial and economic lines and highlighted the importance of labor unions as allies in the fight for a more just and equitable society, a legacy that continues to inspire movements for social and economic justice today.

# Tables Turn in Tourism, General Trades with Historic Contracts

Following the Grand Wailea's historic contract, the Andaz Maui followed suit. Kaua'i's Gay & Robinson quadruples usual increases and O'ahu's Pepsi breaks records.

For years, contract negotiations at Local 142's tourism units followed a familiar pattern: management set the pace, and workers fought for whatever small improvements they could get. Beginning in 2021 and solidifying in 2024, ILWU Local 142 members have changed course. Across multiple bargaining tables, workers leveraged their unity, strategy, and sheer determination to win historic gains—reshaping expectations for what's possible in contract fights.

## Wailea Breaks Maui Mediocrity

On the Big Island, the King Kamehameha Hotel was the first to win a record breaking contract through a mobilized membership in 2021. But in Maui, the groundwork for a wave of victories was laid at the Grand Wailea, where after eight grueling months of negotiations, workers secured a contract that shattered the status quo.

For years, wage increases had been modest, barely keeping pace with inflation. But this time, members fought for—and won—a deal that represents a seismic shift in compensation. Tipped employees, often left behind in past agreements, saw significant gains, including double pay for vacation time and other forms of leave. Overtime protections were strengthened, ensuring that workers are fairly compensated for their time and labor.

The victory at the Grand Wailea didn't happen overnight. It was the result of a sustained, member-driven campaign that started with small but powerful actions. Workers signed petitions, wore union buttons, and held rallies to show their unity. As negotiations dragged on, members

escalated their efforts, organizing pickets and demonstrating their readiness to strike. This show of solidarity sent a clear message to management: workers were united, determined, and unwilling to back down.

## Andaz Builds on Momentum

The momentum from the Grand Wailea spread quickly. Just down the road in Wailea, workers at the Andaz Maui took up the fight. Knowing that settling for less would put them at a disadvantage in a competitive labor

market, they pushed for a contract that mirrored the gains at the Grand Wailea—and won. Tipped employees at the Andaz saw even greater improvements, setting a new standard for fairness in the industry.

## Small Kaua'i Unit Wins Big

On Kaua'i, workers at Gay & Robinson also made history. After years of incremental raises that failed to keep up with the rising cost of living, they secured a contract that represents a dramatic departure from the past. The gains they achieved will have a lasting impact, providing workers with the stability and dignity they need to thrive in one of the most expensive states in the nation.

## "That's What I Like" for Pepsi Workers.

Continuing the momentum in General Trades, Pepsi workers just completed four weeks of negotiations, securing a new contract with the largest wage increases in the Unit's history. Pepsi covers drivers, warehouse workers, merchandisers, and clerks. The negotiating committee pushed the company hard to move past small incremental wage increases of the past and everyone saw significant gains.

## The Role of Member Mobilization

These victories didn't happen by accident. They are the result of a deliberate shift within Local 142 to return to member-driven contract campaigns. At the Grand Wailea, it was the mobilization of rank-and-file members that tipped the scales. Workers showed up, spoke out, and made it clear that they were ready to fight for a better future. That energy set the tone for the Andaz and Gay & Robinson negotiations, proving that when members are actively involved, the union is unstoppable.

Strong negotiation strategies and support from the local union also played a critical role. By sharing best practices and leveraging the power of solidarity, workers were able to secure deals that reflect their value and contributions. These wins are a reminder that negotiations aren't just about numbers—they're about power. And power comes from unity.

This moment is part of a broader wave of labor actions sweeping across Hawai'i and the nation. From the Kapi'olani nurses to the Local 5 Hilton Hawaiian Village strike, workers in every industry are standing up and saying, "Enough is enough." Employers are on notice: workers are fed up with stagnant wages, eroding



Members of Gay and Robinson on Kaua'i ratify their new contract. Front L-R: David Niau (31 year at G&R), Gordon Jacinto (53 years), Unit Chair Curt Pantohan (4 years). Back: Unit Vice Chair Matt Capino (8 years), Tarrance Yaris (48 years), Lousi Matias III (33 years).

benefits, and disrespect on the job. They're ready to fight—and, if necessary, walk—to secure the dignity and fairness they deserve.

Workers have leverage as the labor market remains tight, especially in industries such as tourism. ILWU members are also coming to the bargaining table prepared highlight the sacrifices made during the COVID-19 pandemic, and with research on corporate profits.

## Big Negotiations Ahead Keep Stakes High

The fight is far from over. Across the islands, workers at the Outrigger Kona, Hilton Waikoloa, Ritz Carlton Kapalua, and Straub are gearing up for their own contract battles. And the stakes couldn't be higher.

Hawai'i's cost of living continues to soar, with housing, groceries, and utilities eating up a larger share of workers' paychecks. For too many families, the dream of staying in Hawai'i is slipping away. According to recent data, thousands of residents are leaving the state each year, driven out by the high cost of living and stagnant wages.

This is why these contract fights matter. They're not just about securing better pay—they're about ensuring that working people can afford to live and thrive in the place they call home. Every wage increase, every improvement in benefits, every strengthened protection is a step toward a future where Hawai'i's workers aren't just surviving, but thriving.

## Unity or Defeat: The Choice Ahead

For members, the message is clear:

your involvement matters. Contract campaigns aren't something that happen to you or for you, they're something you make happen. When you show up to meetings, when you talk to your coworkers, when you stand together on the picket line, you are building the power to win. The victories at the Grand Wailea, Andaz, Gay & Robinson, and Pepsi are proof of what's possible when members take ownership of their union and fight for what they deserve.

Looking ahead, there will be a direct correlation between worker unity and the outcomes of these fights. Divided units will not achieve the strong contracts that united units will. Solidarity isn't just a buzzword—it's the foundation of every win. When workers stand together, they are unstoppable. When they are divided, employers will exploit that weakness. The choice is clear: unity or defeat.

## Building Power for the Fights to Come

This is a moment of transformation for Local 142. The old playbook—the one that relied on modest gains and incremental change—has been tossed aside. In its place is a new approach, one that's rooted in member mobilization, bold demands, and unwavering solidarity. It's an approach that's delivering historic wins and setting a new standard for what workers can achieve.

As we look ahead to the battles to come, let's carry this momentum forward. Let's show up, stand together, and fight for the future we deserve. Because when we fight, we win. And when we win, we change lives—not just for ourselves, but for generations to come. This is our season. Let's make it count.

# You're Living In The Past, But Which One?

Don't be fooled, race has always been an obsession of the ruling class. Working class unity overcame.



1948 A photo of University of Hawai'i students displaying racial difference. The University of Hawai'i became a hotbed for research on racial hierarchy in the mid-20th century - a topic of great interest to members of the Hawai'i Sugar Planters Association (HSPA).

The rhetoric around Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) is everywhere. Politicians and pundits claim that DEI is "divisive," "woke," or even "anti-American." They argue it gives "special treatment" to certain groups or is part of some Marxist agenda.

Most of the political debate around DEI is deceptive and points to a history that the ILWU knows all too well. There are also valid critiques that exist. Looking at the question of diversity, equity and inclusion through the lense of labor helps us sort through the issue.

## Pono Principle or Corporate Scam?

The truth is, DEI can be used for good or for bad. In principle, DEI stands for exactly what it says, diversity, equity, and inclusion. Are there three words that can better describe the history and impact of the ILWU? Or Hawai'i for that matter? And if we are to be honest, whatever diversity, equity, and inclusion that exists in this union or in Hawai'i, was achieved through hard-fought struggles against a very powerful ruling class of corporate racists. More on this in a moment.

However, labor should also understand the ways that corporations use D.E.I. to flaunt righteous values to the public while acting hypocritically on the shop floor. Take Target and Krogers, for example. Both corporations adopted D.E.I. programs in recent years. And both have been notorious union-busters.

In fact, as this article is being written, Krogers, who doubled down on their D.E.I. program in recent weeks has 10,000 workers on strike in Denver. If workers have to walk off the job for fair pay and working conditions, does a company really believe in principles of equity and justice? Or are they just using them to bring more shoppers through the door?

Unfortunately, the current prevailing critiques of D.E.I. are not coming from a labor perspective, but a corporate one. How can you tell? Because it's dividing the working class. And this should be a red flag to any union member. Because the fact is, we have been here before. Racial equity is only a rallying cry because the corporate class has continuously used race to divide their most formidable opponent - the workers.

## The Path of Division: The Plantation Oligarchy's Playbook

In Hawai'i's early sugar plantation days, the white plantation owners were part of an oligarchy—a small group of wealthy people who controlled all aspects of society, from government to education, to industry, and more. This oligarchy was known as the Big 5, made up of owner of the top 5 largest plantations. The Big 5 knew exactly how to keep

workers divided. They segregated labor camps by race: Filipinos in one camp, Japanese in another, Portuguese elsewhere. They paid different wages based on ethnicity, ensuring no group felt equal to another. They spread rumors and lies to stoke racial tensions and prevent unity.

National origin was also weaponized. Native

Hawaiians, still grappling with the overthrow of their sovereign nation, and workers themselves, faced the impact of mass immigration for expanding plantations and the resulting wage suppression across industries. This stoked resentment among Native Hawaiians toward the immigrant workers.

The Hawai'i oligarchy didn't stop at workplace division—it built an entire system to keep non-whites "in their place." They controlled most of the courts, the medical system, and public education, including the University of Hawai'i.

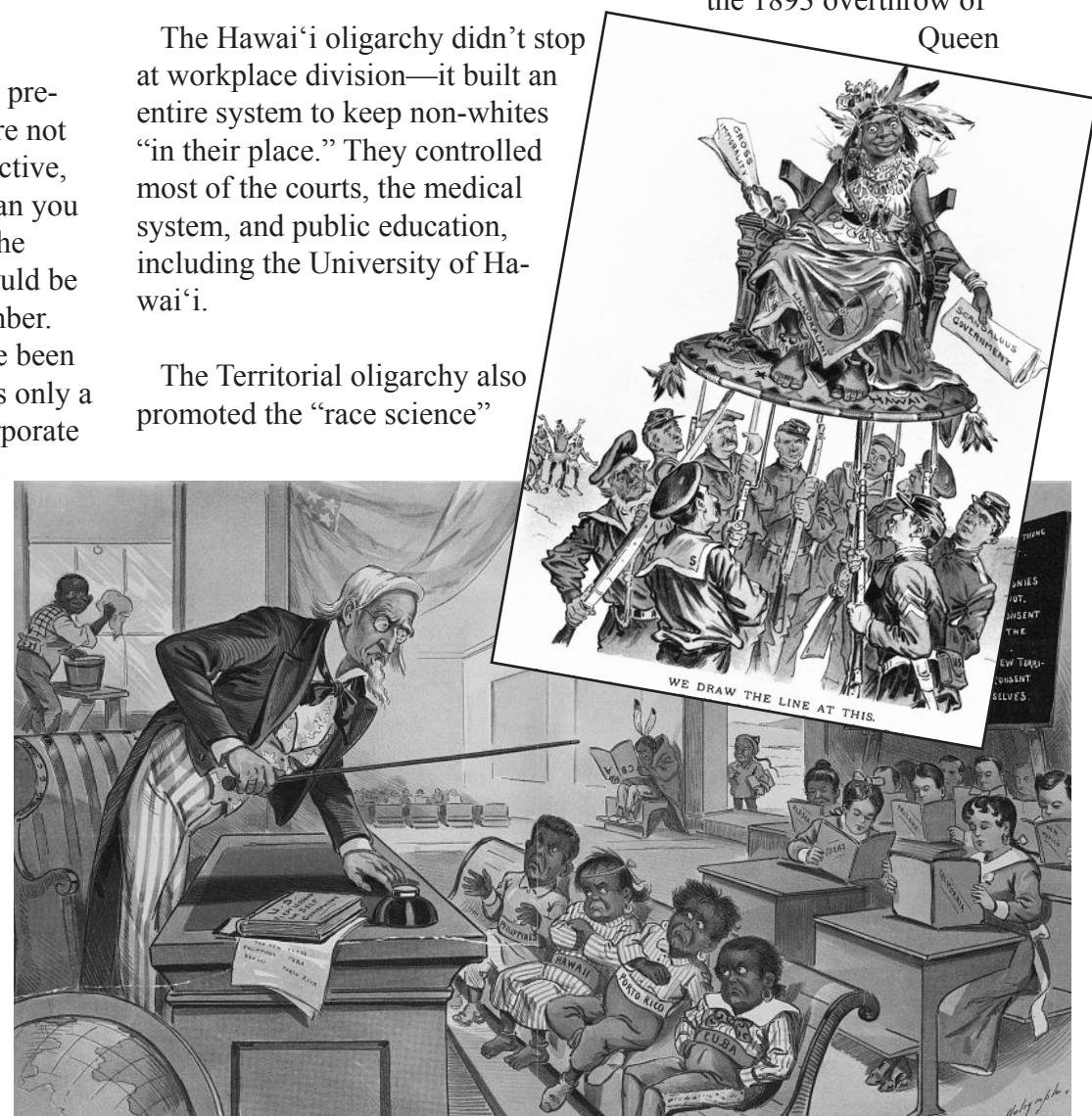
The Territorial oligarchy also promoted the "race science"

at UH, as were dazzled by the eugenics movement - a movement to promote reproduction among the white race and to slow reproduction among non-white races. As part of this, they wrote and taught a curriculum at Kamehameha Schools teaching Hawaiian children, whose parents had resisted the American take-over of Hawai'i, that they were likely to die out unless they became "good American citizens." The employer class of this time even promoted forced reproductive sterilization for so-called "troublemakers" on the plantations.

## The Racism of the Sugar Planter: Justifying Empire

These attitudes and tactics were used prior to Territorial Hawai'i. In fact, they fueled the overthrow of the Hawaiian Kingdom, that made their level of control in the early decades of the twentieth century possible.

When sugar planters, led by men like Sanford B. Dole and Lorrin A. Thurston orchestrated the 1893 overthrow of Queen



An 1898 political cartoon depicts the nations of Hawai'i, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines as children in need of discipline. Racial commentary is found throughout the cartoon. Above: Queen Lili'uokalani is blackened, given native American feather headdress and holds one paper saying "gross immorality" and another saying "scandalous government". Cartoons like this were highly racialized and used as propaganda to sway public opinion about U.S. expansion.

# Oligarchy or Union past cont.

Lili‘uokalani, profit was their motive, but racial superiority was their justification. Dole, who became the first president of the Republic of Hawai‘i, once said, “The Hawaiian is a race of children... They are incapable of governing themselves.” Thurston was even more explicit, describing Native Hawaiians as “a race of barbarians” who needed to be “civilized” by white Americans.

This mindset was shared by certain U.S. expansionists to justify taking control of Cuba, the Philippines, and Puerto Rico. Late 19th-century political cartoons in Puck and Judge portrayed Queen Lili‘uokalani, Filipinos, Cubans, and Puerto Ricans as savage, child-like, or grotesque—imagery designed to convince Americans that these nations needed to be “saved” through colonization and exploitation.

These are all examples of how race has been used to serve cor-

porate interests at the expense of regular people. But our history in Hawai‘i also tells another story—one of an uphill resistance against these divisive tactics.

## The Path of Unity: The ILWU’s Fight for Solidarity

In the 1940s, ILWU organizers like Jack Hall, Harry Kamoku, and countless rank-and-file leaders saw through the oligarchy’s lies. They knew that workers could only win by uniting across racial and national lines (this is why “international” is in so many union’s names).

They taught workers that their real problem wasn’t each other—it was the employer class who was exploiting them.

The oligarchy fought back hard. They accused the union of being communist, of colluding with Joseph Stalin, of trying to overthrow the U.S. government itself. Just like with the anti-DEI rhetoric of today,

they used fear of Marxism to vilify the union and manipulate public opinion.

And here’s the hard truth: many workers believed them.

The sugar oligarchy’s power relied on working-class buy-in. Even in 1954, during the “Democratic Revolution” when the united working class in Hawai‘i unseated the oligarchy-run Republican Party, some workers still voted to keep the party of the employers in control. In all cases, corporate power only succeeds with the allegiance of the working class.



The 1946 sugar strike and the 1949 longshore strike are perhaps the most commonly noted. But the fact is, workers had to consistently struggle together in order to maintain dignified wages and conditions. Workers unite in the 1958 sugar strike, standing together once again.

The ILWU persisted through these very difficult and very real divisions. They did the relentless work of uniting enough workers to shift power. They organized historic strikes like the 1946 Sugar Strike and the 1949 Longshore Strike—two pivotal moments that reshaped Hawai‘i’s labor landscape.

These union leaders often found themselves fighting against the grain of public opinion. They knew that improving workers’ lives required confronting racism and standing together as one union, one working class—even as they were branded “un-American” and “Marxist.”

Perhaps we should take pause when we hear the most powerful men in the country today using the same tactical messaging that the Big 5 used on our strongest union leaders not that long ago.

## Call to Action: Choose the Past of Unity

We are at this crossroads again

and the work toward true equity is not over. Look around your workplace. Do wage disparities exist that just so happen to fall along racial lines? Have we solved the wealth gaps that fuel our housing crisis in Hawai‘i? Does every keiki have access to three meals a day?

It is important that union members assess and comprehend debates around race through a union lens. Be steadfast for justice and equity. Be suspicious when corporations flaunt values around justice and equity but treat their workers poorly. And be on high alert when the richest people in the U.S. and the world make a boogey-man out of solid union principles like diversity, equity, and inclusion.

So let’s get real. Let’s have the tough conversations. Let’s challenge the lies. And let’s do what we’ve always done—unite, organize, and fight for what’s right. Because when we stand together, we win. The choice is ours.



ILWU leader Jack Hall prepares for trial. In 1951 Hall and 7 other ILWU leaders were arrested for “un-American activities” and put on trial as communist conspirators. What were they actually guilty of? Uniting workers across racial and national lines.

## Division Executive Board Meetings

Members are highly encouraged to attend Division meetings!

### Hawai‘i Division Executive Board

Friday, February 27, 2025

Friday, March 28, 2025

6:00 p.m.

100 W Lanikaula Street. Hilo.  
Last Friday of the month.

### Maui Division Executive Board

Wednesday, February 19, 2025

Wednesday, March 19, 2025

6:00 p.m.

896 Lower Main Street. Wailuku.  
Please RSVP: (808) 244-9191  
3rd Wednesday of the month.

### O‘ahu Division Executive Board

Wednesday, February 26, 2025

Wednesday, March 26, 2025

Dinner 5:30 p.m. Meeting 6:00 p.m.  
451 Atkinson Drive. Hale Hapaiko.  
Last Wednesday of the month.

### Kaua‘i Division Executive Board

Wednesday, March 12, 2025

Wednesday, April 9, 2025

5:00 p.m.  
4154 Hardy Street. Lihue.  
Please RSVP: (808) 245-3374  
2nd Wednesday of the month.

## Local Executive Council

Monday, March 3, 2025

Monday, April 7, 2025

Monday, May 5, 2025

Monday, June 2, 2025

## Local Executive Board

Friday, March 7, 2025

Friday, June 13, 2025

Friday, September 12, 2025

## Joint Local Board of Trustees & Centralized Fund Trustees

Thursday, March 6, 2025

Thursday, June 12, 2025

Thursday, September 11, 2025

## In Memorium

ILWU Local 142 mourns the loss of Kevin Ballesteros, a dedicated union member who worked at the Airport Hotel in Honolulu for eight years. Kevin tragically passed away following the New Year’s Eve fireworks accident in Aliamanu. We extend our deepest condolences to his family, friends, and fellow union brothers and sisters.

# Short-term Rentals Demand Way Down, Supply Up.

The short-term rental industry in Hawai‘i is showing signs of weakness, with the latest data from the Hawai‘i State Department of Business, Economic Development & Tourism (DBEDT) revealing a significant drop in demand and occupancy compared to pre-pandemic levels.

While some may see this as a challenge for the tourism economy, for working-class residents and union hotel workers, this decline could mark a turning point in the fight to reclaim housing and increase union jobs in Hawai‘i.

## Short-Term Rentals Are Struggling

The recently released 2024 Year-End Hawai‘i Vacation Rental Performance Report paints a clear picture: despite an increase in short-term rental supply, demand has not rebounded to pre-pandemic levels. In 2019, unit demand was 645,575, with an occupancy rate of 75.3%. By 2024, unit demand had dropped to 413,086, while occupancy plummeted to 52%. Even as the total supply of vacation rental units rose to 794,681, the market failed to absorb this growth.

Simply put, more short-term rentals are available, but fewer visitors are

choosing them. Instead of returning to pre-pandemic levels, demand remains weak—even compared to 2022 and 2023 figures.

## A Turning Point for Hawai‘i’s Housing and Tourism Landscape

Momentum against short-term rentals has been growing, particularly after the 2023 Lahaina wildfires. The fires exposed Hawai‘i’s deep housing crisis, leaving thousands of displaced Maui residents struggling to find homes while entire condo complexes sat empty, reserved for vacationers.

This glaring contradiction sparked widespread outrage, fueling the movement to reduce or ban short-term rentals. With many ILWU members impacted, the union joined the fight, as hotel workers in West Maui marched alongside community members in a mass rally in December 2023. Local 142’s political action team followed up with strong support in the 2024 Hawai‘i State Legislature.

## The Impact of New Legislation

The movement gained a major victory last year when a new law passed in the Hawai‘i State Legislature, granting counties the authority to regulate and phase out short-term rentals. This historic measure empowers local gov-

ernments to take bold action to reclaim housing for residents.

With DBEDT data showing sustained weak demand for short-term rentals, counties now have a prime opportunity to act decisively. If owners are struggling to fill their units, it may signal market oversaturation—making this the right moment for policy shifts to protect long-term housing stock.

## What This Means for Hotel Jobs and Local Families

The decline in short-term rental occupancy isn’t just a win for housing—it’s also a win for union hotel jobs. Every visitor choosing a legal, unionized hotel over an unregulated vacation rental supports stable employment for hotel workers. Unlike many short-term rental hosts—who are often investors or absentee owners—unionized hotel workers are local residents who rely on these jobs to support their families.

Additionally, union hotels offer professional, structured service with labor protections, safety standards, and fair wages—unlike short-term rentals, which operate with little oversight. If the downward trend in vacation rental demand continues, tourism may gradually shift back toward hotels,

reinforcing the need for strong union contracts and job security in the sector.

## The Future of Short-Term Rentals in Hawai‘i

While it’s too early to declare the downfall of the short-term rental industry, the signs are clear: demand is weak, regulations are tightening, and public sentiment is shifting. Similar trends are emerging in major tourist cities like New York City and Santa Monica, which require short-term rental hosts to live in the property like a true bed-and-breakfast. Barcelona and Berlin have attempted outright bans.

The question now is whether local policymakers will seize this moment to enact lasting reforms that protect residents’ housing—or allow another boom-and-bust cycle in the vacation rental market.

The fight for Hawai‘i’s future isn’t just about one law or industry—it’s about who gets to call this place home. The ILWU and its members stand ready to ensure that working-class people are at the center of that future.

## Membership Services Department

### Pensioners Division Council Meetings

Calling all Pensioners! Now is the time to get involved with your fellow ILWU Pensioners. Following the 2024 Pensioners conference in Honolulu, retirees from across the islands continue to get organized and activate Pensioners. In the coming months, each Division will hold their Division Council Meetings, where reps from the various clubs will elect leadership to support the activities and governance of the Pensioners program.

The Division Council Meeting dates are listed below. All Pensioners are encouraged to come and if you’re not plugged into a club yet, come to the meeting and learn how to plug in.

#### Mga Pagpupulong ng Konseho ng Dibisyon ng mga Pensiyonado

Ito ay time na makisali sa iyong mga kapwa ILWU Pensioners.

Kasunod ng 2024 Pensioners conference sa Honolulu, ang mga retirado mula sa iba’t ibang isla ay patuloy na nag-aayos at nag-a-activate ng mga Pensioner.

Sa mga darating na buwan, ang bawat Dibisyon ay magdaraos ng kanilang Mga Pagpupulong ng Konseho ng Dibisyon, kung saan ang mga kinatawan mula sa iba’t ibang club ay pipili ng pamumuno upang suportahan ang mga aktibidad at pamamahala ng programa ng mga Pensioner.

Ang mga petsa ng Division Council Meeting ay nakalista sa ibaba. Lahat ng Pensioner ay hinihikayat na pumunta at kung hindi ka pa nakasaksak sa isang club, pumunta sa pulong at alamin kung paano mag-plug in.

#### Division Pension Coordinators & Council Meeting Date

Hawaii Longshore Division  
Dennis Morton  
808-949-4161  
March 4

Oahu Division  
Corin Kekua  
808-949-4161  
March 15

Maui Division Coordinator  
Manny Baltazar  
808-244-9191  
March 6, June 2

Hawaii Division  
Dylan Gaspar  
808-935-3727  
April 2

Kauai Division Coordinator  
Rhonda Morris  
808-245-3374  
TBA



## Harriet Bouslog LABOR SCHOLARSHIP

### AMOUNTS AVAILABLE PER SEMESTER

UH Mānoa | \$2,000.00  
UH West O‘ahu | \$1,000.00  
UH Community Colleges | \$750.00

DEADLINE TO APPLY: APRIL 1

\* harrietbouslog.com for full details

### ELIGIBILITY

Must be accepted into one of the UH system schools.

ILWU Local 142 family member \*

