

An Affront to San Francisco, an Assault upon Organized Labor and Working People Everywhere

by

Bradley Wiedmaier and Ralph Schoenman

A landmark building, emblematic of a defining moment in the history of organized labor for San Francisco and working people across this nation, faces vandal-like desecration. On Tuesday, March 17th at 4:00 p.m., the San Francisco Board of Supervisors has an opportunity to prevent this from happening

The International Longshoremen's Association Local 38-79 Hall from 1933 through 1935 at 113 Steuart Street is targeted for demolition. The agenda item is camouflaged, listed as 110 The Embarcadero - the address to be assigned its intended replacement, a ten-story office building that is part of an illicit over-development planned in its place.

The Board of Supervisors can overturn the "Negative Determination" of the Planning Commission and save the ILA Hall at 113 Steuart Street.

We call upon all friends of labor to show up on March 17th and urge them to do so.

A Negative Determination

The key document on which the Planning Commission has based its "Negative Determination" [Case Number 2006. 1294E] regarding the appropriate survival of the ILA building and Hall was prepared by the architectural firm of Page and Turnbull, Inc., a firm retained, revealingly, by the developer, Hines Interests Limited Partnership, that presents itself as follows:

Hines is ... involved in real estate investment, development and property management worldwide ... (and) includes more than 1,100 properties representing ... 457 million square feet. ... With offices in more than 100 cities in 16 countries and controlled assets valued at approximately \$25.6 billion, Hines is one of the largest real estate organizations in the world."

Hines and his Hired Hands

Hines is a contributor to the Democratic and Republican parties, depending on who is in power, in cities across the US. and has enjoyed a major role in the profiteering resulting

from the high-rise development of San Francisco, the runaway cost of housing in the city and, inevitably, the current capitalist crisis that has engulfed the nation and the world.

The developer's political consultant and lobbyist, David Looman, set up meetings with each Supervisor to lobby him or her individually for the destruction of the ILA building and the Hall at 113 Steuart Street. Looman's mandate was to secure the replacement of labor's historic site with a huge development at 110 Embarcadero, re-packaged by this hired lobbyist as "the GREENEST building in the world."

Hines' hired hands, Page and Turnbull, Inc. prepared dutifully a study entitled "Historic Resource Analysis." In setting forth its criteria for preserving an existing building, the Page and Turnbull, Inc. document asserted baldly "neither the building nor any of the early tenants contributed significantly to ... the development of the San Francisco waterfront. ..."

It added, *inter alia*, the following *coup de grace*:

"None of the early owners or tenants associated with the building appear to have played a significant role in the development of San Francisco." (emphasis added)

The Class Agenda

Nothing so clearly manifests the agenda of the forces behind this classical speculators' undertaking, their manipulation of the Planning Department and Commission and, by intention, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. The "development" of San Francisco and those who "contribute to it" is meant literally. Language, no less than history and the needs of the people who inhabit our city, has been perverted by speculators.

It is real estate speculators who "develop" our cities and "contribute" to the political parties in office to do so. The destruction of an affordable living environment for working people is the cost of "development," rapacious profiteering the criterion for "progress."

If ever the class issues that define the significance and history of 113 Steuart Street and the plot to destroy it were crystallized for all with eyes to see, it is in this cynical assault upon the lives and struggles of working people and upon the "labor town" of San Francisco.

Whose History — Theirs or Ours?

Whose history is embodied by the ILA Hall at 113 Steuart Street and what is the social and historical replacement that Hines has engineered with the Planning Department and Commission, pursuant to the Board of Supervisors meeting on March 17?

The ILA Hall (now ILWU) was the nerve-center of the 1934 Maritime Strike from May 9, 1934 through the General Strike of 1934. This building and this very Hall on the second floor served as the headquarters of the ILA and of the Strike Committee that prepared, coordinated and led these seminal struggles.

It is the site where Harry Bridges displayed his leadership of the ILA (ILWU) to which he devoted his life. It is in this very Hall that working people across the West Coast found their voice.

From it emerged Harry Bridges, Henry Schmidt, Dutch Dietrich and John Schomaker. It was in the Hall that they honed their leadership and coordinated the workers' response to State repression. It was here that the General Strike was born.

ILA Hall as Ground Zero for the Struggle

The Hall was the center of the month-long Waterfront Maritime Strike. It was ground zero on Bloody Thursday (July 5, 1934) when police and deputies shot on orders scores of union members, where Howard Sperry was martyred in front of the adjoining building.

The bodies of Brothers Howard Sperry and Nick Bordoise, killed in the next block, lay in state in the Hall for four days. The massive Funeral Procession of the ILA Martyrs on Monday, July 9th led from the Hall to Market Street and across the city.

Electrifying Working People, Galvanizing Labor

This great silent march electrified working people across the world. It galvanized organized labor and the broadest support for the General Strike. The march did not begin until the personal funeral service for the families and friends of labor's martyrs was concluded in the Hall.

Word of these solemn services spread everywhere by word of mouth and the vast outpouring that led to the General Strike served, as well, to abort police plans to shoot down strikers *en masse* in San Francisco as the Hearst and established press urged in hysterical and thinly veiled language.

The Hall was the birthplace of the seminal struggles that impelled the bitter, bloody and ongoing quest for workplace justice and organization for workers in every walk of life. It began on the Waterfront. It was nurtured by the ILA (now ILWU) and it was enacted in the Hall.

Bloody Thursday and 113 Steuart: Fierce Battle Rages All Day

On July 6, 1934, Hearst's *San Francisco Examiner* ran a front-page headline: "Fierce Fight Rages All Day Over Length of Waterfront."

"Two men shot to death. One near death from bullets. Twenty-seven suffering from gunshot wounds. Forty-five beaten, clubbed and gassed. A woman and two other passengers shot as they met on a streetcar.

"Such was the toll yesterday in the marine strike as the bloodiest and most widespread rioting and fighting in the recent history of San Francisco raged all over the waterfront.

"The riots raged from early morning until after dark. They raged from the Third and Townsend streets station to Fisherman's Wharf, from the Embarcadero several blocks uptown. The strikers numbered as high as 5,000 infuriated, slugging, rock-throwing, club-wielding men.

"The rioting crowds were opposed by practically the whole police department of more than 1,000 men, led personally by Police Chief Quinn. And for the first time since the strike began, the police poured solid lead into crowds as they emptied their revolvers time and time again into mobs of strikers who refused to fall back, refused to obey any police orders, attacked police automobiles and buried bricks and scrap iron back at the police bullets, gas shells and tear-gas bombs.

"The rioting grew in intensity as the day aged ... then the police poured lead from their revolvers into the jammed streets. Men fell left and right.

"Both police and State troops will employ a newly developed type of gas today recommend to them by Ignatius McCarthy, chemical warfare expert. The new gas ... affects its inhalers violently and renders them immediately unfit for action and leaves them ailing. ..."

Center of the Battle, Eye of the Storm

Where was the center of the battle, the eye of the storm?

Here is the *Examiner* fixing the location:

"The most terrific part of the battle raged about Mission and Steuart Streets. The ILA Hall is at 113 Steuart Street and reinforcements for the brick-throwing army came continually out of the hall as the police jammed them back up Steuart toward Market and out

Mission Street. Police finally threw several long range shells through the windows of the hall and it was reported several shots were fired through the windows.

“At least two and possibly more strikers were later carried out of the hall to the street wounded. One striker was placed in a police car, but when he saw where he was, despite his wounds, he snarled defiance of the police. ...”

Later in this gripping account, sanitized as it is by the *San Francisco Examiner*, the central role of the ILA Building and Hall at 113 Steuart Street is manifest:

“Police poured volleys of tear gas projectiles through the windows and doors until the strikers swarmed out.

“The fight was carried up to the doors and inside of the International Longshoremen’s Association headquarters. Several strikers were shot down at the door and were carried inside.

“Tear gas shells were fired into the building. The choking fumes drove the men out. One striker, stripped to the waist, staggered from the door carrying a wounded man in his arms.”

The Hottest Part of the Battle

The *Examiner’s* irrefutable documentation of the pivotal and heroic role in these historic events of the brothers and sisters centered at ground zero: the ILA Building and Hall is amplified by the *Los Angeles Times* account of July 6, 1934:

“Here’s the hottest part of the battle from now on, along Steuart Street from Howard to Market. No mistake about that. It centers near the ILA headquarters.

“See the Mounties ride up toward that front of strikers. It’s massed across the street, a solid front of men. Take a pair of opera glasses and look at their faces. They are snarling and jeering the on-coming Mounties.

“This is war, boys”

“The men in front are kneeling like sprinters at the mark.

“Clatter, clatter, clatter come the bricks. Tinkle goes a window. *THIS IS WAR, BOYS, AND THIS STEUART STREET BETWEEN HOWARD AND MISSION IS ONE OF THE WARMEST SPOTS AMERICAN INDUSTRIAL CONFLICT EVER SAW.* (emphasis added)

“Crack and boom! Sounds just like a gas bomb, but no blue smoke this time. Back scrambles the mob, and two men lie on the sidewalk. Their blood trickles in a crimson stream away from their bodies.

“Over it all spreads an air of unutterable confusion. Sirens keep up a continual screaming in the streets, you can hear them far away.

Many Men Shot

“Now it is 2 o'clock. The street battle has gone on for an hour. *How many are shot, no one knows. Maybe they dragged some of the wounded up to ILA headquarters. Yes they did exactly that. ... Police consolidate their position at Mission and Steuart. ... They still have the machine guns. ... Perhaps the troops will come. All afternoon the militia has been mobilizing. (emphasis added)*

Win or Die Decision

“Now it is apparently win or die for the strikers in the next few hours. The time from 2 o'clock to 3 o'clock drags for the police; it goes on the wings of the wind for the rioters.

“At 3 o'clock they start again, the fight surging once more about Steuart and Mission Streets.

“Here is a corner the police have to hold. It is the key to the waterfront, the strategic key, and it is in the shadow of ILA headquarters. The rocks start filling the air again. ... (emphasis added)

“The police start firing again, pistol shots, rifle shots ... a blast or two from a shotgun. Again men fall in the streets. Again blood trickles slowly down the slanting sidewalks.

“Panic grips the east end of Market Street. The ferry crowds are being involved. The troops are coming. ...”

The Cloud-Cuckoo Land of the Planning Department

Neither the Planning Commission nor, it must be noted, the Board of Supervisors can ignore properly the documentary record of Harry Bridge's association and that of the entire leadership of the ILA Local 38-73 9 with 113 Steuart Street. Harry Bridges appeared in the local Press for the first time in the *San Francisco News* on May 19, 1934. By the end of June 1934, Harry Bridges and those associated with him in the Hall were household names in San Francisco.

In the Press and in the minds of the public, Harry Bridges' name was synonymous, both with the ILA and with the great strike.

Nothing is more graphic in this regard than the article in the *San Francisco Chronicle* of July 7, 1934. It was accompanied by a map delineating the events of "Bloody Thursday," July 5, 1934. It is highlighted by shading "THE AREA OF CONFLICTS DURING AFTERNOON. CROSS INDICATES CENTER OF RIOTS AND GUN BATTLES."

The *sole* buildings labeled are the Ferry Building and the ILA Headquarters. The "cross" indicated is placed exactly at the ILA Headquarters on 113 Steuart Street.

The description of the passion and intensity of emotion infusing the outrage over the slaughter of the martyrs of the Longshoreman and Maritime Workers Strike is captured by the description of the key meeting of the Teamsters Union on July 11, 1934:

Bridges, Bridges, Bridges

"A deafening chant of 'Bridges, Bridges, Bridges' brought Harry Bridges onto the program and the platform to speak."

Harry Bridge's speech was met by a tumultuous response from the assembled Teamsters. It led not only to the Teamsters joining the General Strike but appealing to other major unions to follow their example.

Three years later, on July 17, 1937, Harry Bridges full page photo appeared on the cover of *Time Magazine* under the caption "Labor's Harry Bridges: A Trotsky to Lewis' Stalin?"

The long article was the focal point of the issue and addressed his "rise to national fame" and his entry "to the C.I.O. high command, taking rank with men like Philip Murray of the Steel Workers Organizing Committee, Sidney Hillman of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, Harvey Fremming of the Oil Field, Gas Well & Refinery Workers, Charles P. Howard of the Typographical Union."

Time Magazine, detailing Harry Bridges' rise to leadership and of the premier role of the ILA under his inspiration at 113 Steuart Street, added:

"So great is his prestige among the rank and file of insurgent maritime labor that he towers above both rivals and loyal allies. Nor is his power confined to the West Coast. Even tall, tattooed Joe Curran and his Atlantic Coast deck hands take orders from dour-faced (*sic*) Harry Bridges. ... Harry Bridges' position in the new C.I.O. drive was clearly indicated ...

when John Lewis closeted himself with the San Francisco leader for an hour just before the Maritime Conference assembled.”

The Continuing Role of 113 Steuart Street

In 1935, the ILA moved into a larger space at 27 Clay Street. The importance of the 113 Steuart Street ILA Hall space to San Francisco’s labor movement continued. It housed other maritime unions, including the Shipwright, Joiners and Boat Builders Local 1149 and the Ship Caulker’s Union Local 554.

Right next door, moreover, the historic Audiffred Building had a legacy of being the headquarters of waterfront workers on its second floor. Both 150 Steuart and the adjacent building housed waterfront union offices. The history of the entire site that the Planning Commission would reduce to rubble is tied intimately to the maritime unions and the waterfront workers of San Francisco.

It is, moreover, across the street from the Waterfront Historic District and the building next to it is already “landmarked” as the Landmark Audiffred Building, the latter the location of the International Seaman’s Union offices and hall.

Thus, the report of the developer’s hired hands is false, not merely by omission, but in failing to note that the buildings adjacent had already been granted Landmark status and, hence, the exclusion of 113 Steuart from such protection is at once specious and contrived.

The Planning Commission Embraces Deception

The Planning Commission failed not only to make the most elementary inquiry into the accuracy and credibility of the claim in the Historic Resource Evaluation Report that the ILA Hall lacked historical significance.

The Report outright fabricates the nature of 113 Steuart Street:

“The project site building is located immediately to the right (south) from where the strikers were gunned down on July 5, 1934. ... The project site building was not a union labor hall, but was a restaurant and marine supply shop which was frequented by the longshoremen during this period. Although the building was part of the backdrop for the ‘Great Strike of 1934,’ it does not appear to have a strong association with this historical event. ...”

The Planning Commission deployed improperly its baseless negative finding regarding historical significance for the site. It aborted the required Environmental Impact Report stipulated by the California Environmental Quality Act.

The significance of this sleight of hand is that Environmental Impact Reports are more meticulous and thorough in assessing the issue of historic significance.

The Physical State of the ILA Hall Today

The Planning Commission “determined that there is no historic, social or cultural significance” to the structure itself. It claims falsely, as well, that the building is so altered that there are no historic resources present.

In fact, the current state of the 113 Steuart Street ILA Local structure, contrary to the Planning Board’s baseless assertion, possesses a high degree of continuity and integrity with regard to its period of significance. The exterior Of the second floor and the parapet match the way the building appeared in 1934.

The second floor is where the ILA Hall was located at the level of the existing second story windows. The following features comprise a virtually unaltered record of the building as it appeared in 1934 during the Great Maritime and General Strike: the window opening dimensions, the number of openings, the depth of the glazing from the wall surface, framing and pilaster wall detail, and the crowning silhouette of the parapet.

The ground floor alone, containing the door to the stairs going to the second floor ILA Hall and has been slightly altered. This modest walk-up to the upper floor of the humble initial accommodation of the fledgling ILA Local – the very Local and location that made labor history and led a struggle that resonated throughout the city, state, nation and the world – is wholly preserved by the 113 Steuart structure.

It is, in any event, a bogus criterion, since the ILA Hall remains *in situe*; but even that criterion is met fully, contrary to the determination by the Planning Commission and the Report on which this conclusion is based.

Falsifying the Architectural Record

The abiding issue, of course, is the falsification by the Historic Resource Analysis Report on page 6 of the importance of the ILA Hall for organized labor and working people. This glaring fact exposes the real purpose of the Report, as it does the Developer who paid for it: it is to remove the ILA and its heroic leadership from living memory and from history.

What then of the developer's project that would wipe off the map the ILA Hall at 113 Steuart? It entails a ten-story office building that fronts on 110 The Embarcadero – and will continue throughout the block, removing the entire structure of which the 113 Steuart ILA Hall site is but a portion.

The Planning Commission, in approving a ten-story building on this site, has, without authority or explanation, sanctioned a structure that violates the San Francisco City Plan Height Limit for this location. These height restrictions, designed to preserve the integrity of historic sections of San Francisco, apply with particular force to the abutting Waterfront Historic District and the Landmark Audiffred Building.

The Most Important Historic Site in San Francisco

The entire area comprises one of the most important historic locations in San Francisco, the reason why San Francisco is regarded still, in spite of all the developer predation, as a city of historic beauty that has preserved its past and its own integral character.

The Planning Commission has thus betrayed its legal mandate on two counts: it has sanctioned the decimation of an icon of the struggle of working people and of organized labor, betraying the legacy of San Francisco as a "labor town," and it has ignored the City's very standards for preserving the integrity of an irreplaceable resource and legacy.

The San Francisco Maritime Strike that forged the General Strike of 1934 is a decisive moment in the history of San Francisco, like the Earthquake and Fire of 1906. The Maritime Strike and the General Strike that emerged from it are more important than the events of 1906, for these extraordinary struggles represent a historic coming of age of organized labor that became an epiphany for working people across the world.

It had global impact. It has international significance. It is a defining moment in the class struggle in America. The glorious battles of 1934 are featured in every subsequent book on labor history.

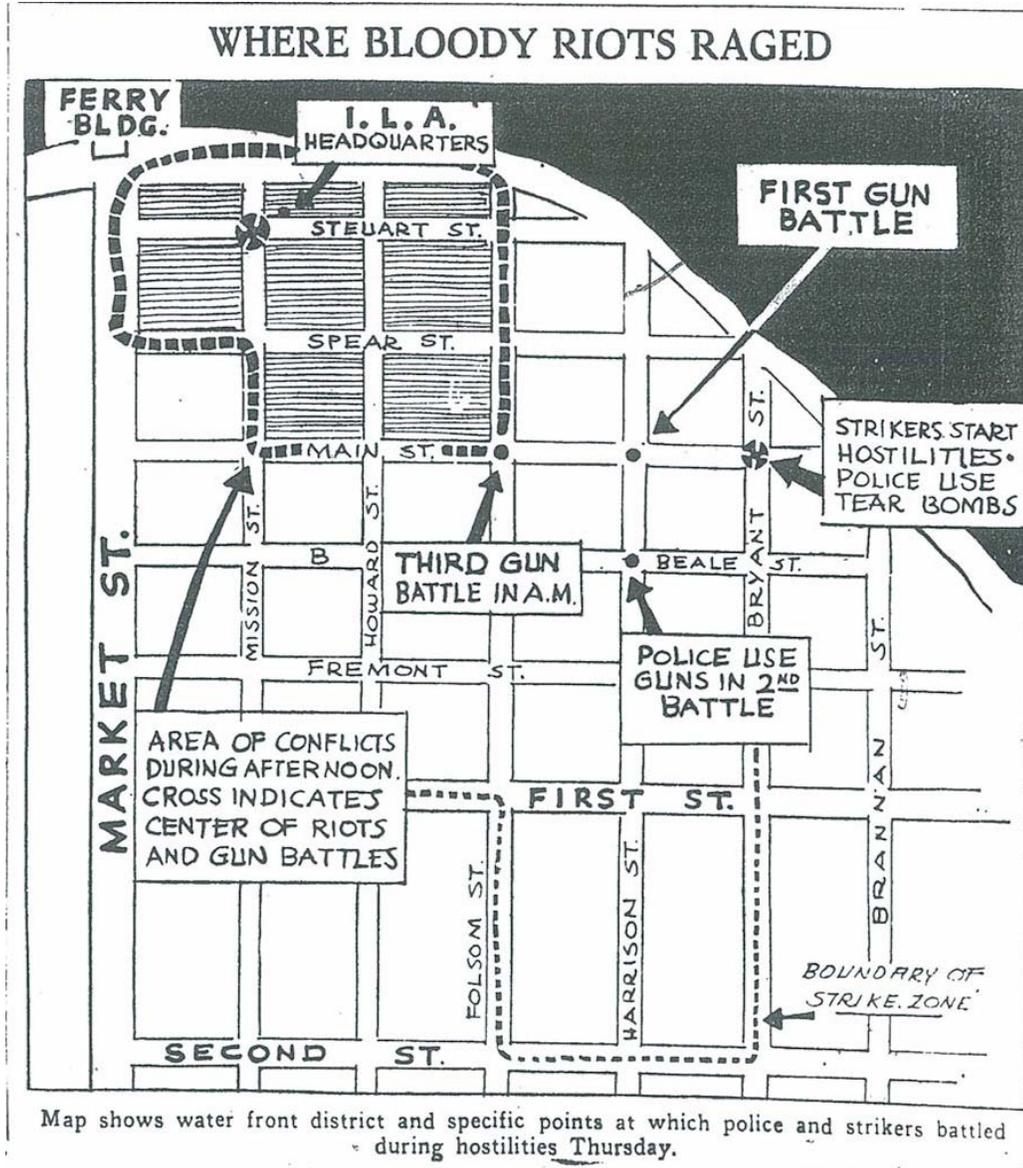
We must preserve and celebrate our past. May it be prologue to the future.



Funeral Preparations, Morning, July 9, 1934, 113 Steuart St., flatbed trucks to carry caskets being prepared (source: Bancroft Library)



Noon, July 9, 1934, Spectators looking down from inside the ILA Headquarters while the flag draped caskets are moved to the truck from the draped entry. (source: Bancroft Library)



San Francisco Chronicle, Tuesday, July 7, 1934

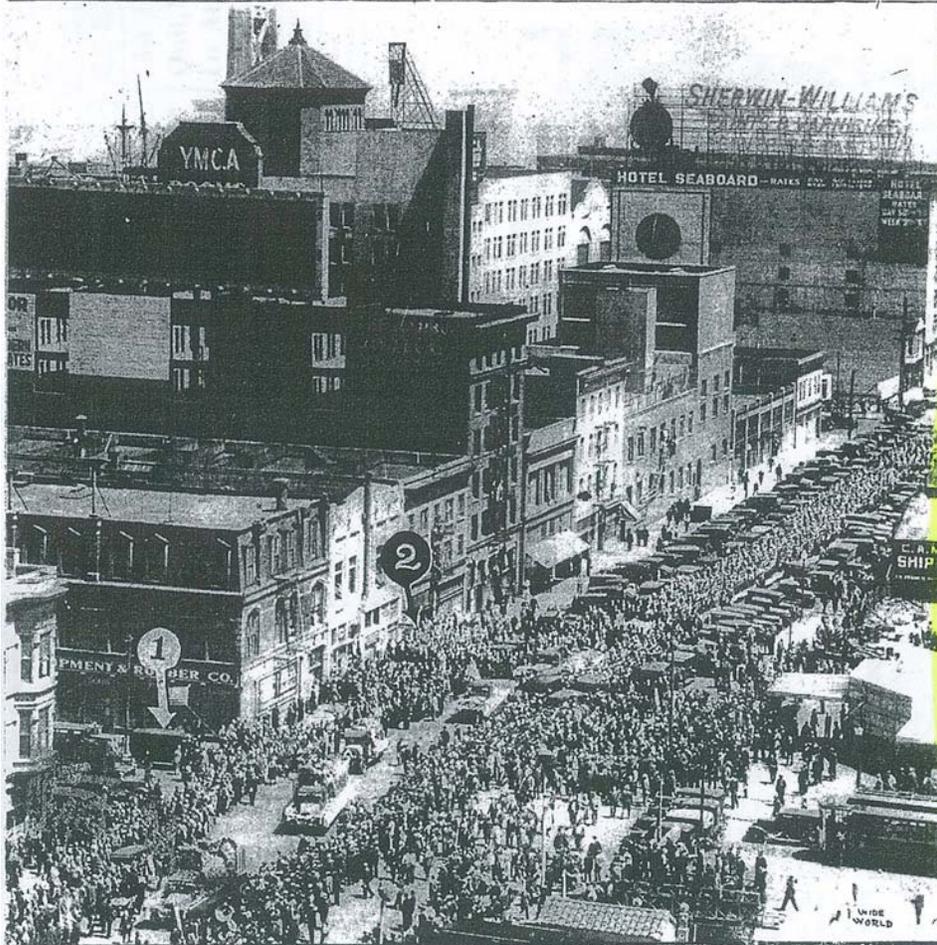
SAN FRANCISCO CHRONICLE, TUESDAY, JULY 10, 1934

Deputy Slain in Battle With Mob After Car S

START OF FUNERAL MARCH



WHERE STRIKE VICTIMS DIED



Scene at Steuart and Mission streets, where two men were killed in last Thursday's riots, and from which point yesterday's parade started.

(1) Scene of shooting, and (2), I. L. A. headquarters, where the bodies laid in state. Trucks bearing caskets shown in the foreground.

Unusual Rites At I. L. A. Hall For Riot Dead

Comrades and Kin Only Attend Memorial Before Parade

All of downtown San Francisco yesterday saw that unique and impressive funeral cortege of 13,600 maritime workers which moved up Market street, but only a favored few were present at the strange rites which preceded it.

In the International Longshoremen's Association "meeting hall" at 113 Steuart street, before the two gray caskets containing Howard S. Sperry and Nicholas Bordone and amid innumerable floral offerings from union locals, the services were held—if you can call them that.

No minister of the cloth was present—only a few of the "comrades" and a group of their women—wives, mothers, sweethearts, and even little children. In the corner, seeming shrunken by her years, was "Mother" Mooney, the mother of "Tom" over in San Quentin.

VETERANS STAND GUARD

Here and there in the group a child whimpered, restless in the close atmosphere with the cloying scent of many flowers. Veterans in their old army uniforms, already gray with the years since the war in which they served, stood guard over the caskets—vastly different soldiers than those youthful National Guardsmen on the Embarcadero a block away.

A P. Walker, a former longshoreman, spoke a few words—spoke directly to the men in the caskets who couldn't hear him.

"We are here to pay respects to you," he said, "in the hope your sacrifice will not have been in vain..."

TWO MEN SING

Two men sang—a veteran and a civilian, they sang "Abide With Me" and "Comrade Goodnight." While husky longshoremen stood around, uncomfortable in their Sunday suits and white gloves. And then they carried the caskets and the flowers out to the procession.

The casket containing Bordone was taken on from the funeral parlors, after the funeral parade, to Cypress Lawn Cemetery.

The other, containing Sperry, remained at the funeral parlors—Dugan's at 3414 Seventeenth street—pending burial at the Presidio National Cemetery today. Sperry was honored at a service held last night by his comrades of McQuade Post No. 120, Veterans of Foreign Wars.

Col. Walker Killed By Crash Into Tree

NEWBURYPORT, Mass., July 9 (AP)—Colonel William Hull Walker, 63, of Pasadena, Cal., and Bridgeton, Me., chief of the criminal division of the United States Army during the World war, was killed as his automobile left Lafayette highway in Seabrook, N. H., today and crashed into a tree.

150 SERA Men

15,000 at Strikers' Funeral as Peace Parleys Start

San Francisco Chronicle, Tuesday, July 10, 1934

**ALL OUT ON MARCH 17 AT 4:00 P.M. TO THE HEARING OF THE SAN
FRANCISCO BOARD OF SUPERVISORS**

We call upon the ILWU and all of organized labor in San Francisco to rise in defense of our fallen martyrs.

Let us learn the lessons that our greatest leaders taught us by example.

The financial speculators, developers and exploiters of society have created a crisis only working people can resolve.

Never more than now do our martyrs and leaders of 1934 summon us to draw the balance sheet of these past 75 years.

In the words of our anthem, we are approaching the final battle and we had better wage it to win.

We can turn the tide. It is not too late to save Labor's Historic ILA Hall at 113 Steuart Street and to demand that the Board of Supervisors act appropriately in this matter.

Bradley Wiedmaier

Ralph Schoenman

Bradley Wiedmaier is an architectural historian and a long time activist in the workers' movement. He has uncovered and identified countless long-lost San Francisco and Bay Area architectural treasures.

Ralph Schoenman is co-producer with Mya Shone of the national radio program *Taking Aim*, heard internationally. He was communications director of the Million Worker March, initiated by ILWU Local 10 and is a life-long activist in movements for social justice.