

Excerpt from Oral History Interview with Pete Dragovich

As part of the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen Union (ILWU), Local 13 Oral History Project, Hector Rojas interviewed Pete Dragovich on November 25, 1983. The interview focuses on the history of the ILWU and Dragovich's time as a longshoreman. In this clip, Dragovich remembers the 1934 West Coast Longshoremen's Strike and the shooting death of 20-year old union member Dick Parker.

Transcript:

PD: Well, the strike that we had in 1934, they decided to work the cargo and try to beat us in the strike, and we were sure intent on not letting 'em do that. So, we organized a group to go ahead and hit the area where the striking—where the scabs were housed and fed in San Pedro [inaudible] dock. And they slept aboard the L.A. Steamship boat, the Diamondhead and they were fed out in the field in a picnic table area. It was fenced in and they had their meals there. And we organized groups, we hit 'em from all angles. Towards nightfall one—on the day that we hit 'em, I forget exactly the day, but the—somehow or another they kept us out because there were cops located in the area. And as we come in off of Neptune Street and heading toward the waterfront that way, why they shot tear gas at us. But fortunately, the wind was blowing a little bit towards them, so we were able to throw it back. And the fellows run in to tear the fences down and get after the finks and there was a lot of shooting.

Young Parker got—Tommy—Young Parker got killed there, and I know of a fellow got—Buster [Criston] [Clifford Pugh?] was shot in the leg and a fellow, "Mushy" [John Knudsen] we called him on the waterfront, he died from his wounds. And another fellow that worked in the lumber company, but he was with us in the strike, he wanted to be in on the fun, he was shot in the leg and, uh, he was right next to me. And I could see his—he was wounded and we drug him to the street and I run up the street and got in my car a couple of blocks away and came back and picked him up. And, uh—I found out that the men had rushed the tables and had hand-to-hand combat, and we don't know how many of them were thrown overboard or anything like that, but I do know that when I got to the emergency hospital Tommy [Dick] Parker was lying there with a—he was dead on arrival. He was shot right in the aorta, below the heart. Buster [Criston?] was laying on a table with a flesh wound through one of his legs. And, uh, I'm not sure of "Mushy's" last name, but he had four—four nice even little bullet holes right in the middle of his stomach, and he—he lasted for about six weeks and had a horrible death, and that was the start of the—of the trouble on the waterfront.

They continued to try to work. They issued the workers pick handles and everything else. Took 'em down to the job with them, wherever they worked in the warehouses. I found that out later when I went back to work. But, in the meantime, there was plenty of job action taken by the—by the men on the—on strike. We'd wait for them to come out of the various areas with their cars and then run 'em off the road and beat [the] hell out of them and take any money they got away from them and jewelry and everything else. We didn't let them get by with much. There was a little maiming going on, but I don't think there were any lives taken.