

How the life and  
personal qualities of  
harry bridges can  
inspire us to achieve  
ou...



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Harry Bridges: Titan of Labor. Harry Bridges (1901 - 1990), is undisputedly one of the Titans in the history of organized labor unionism. The founder of the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen Union (ILWU) may be credited with several pioneering tactics, which were responsible for the emergence of the labor movement from the clutches of the company owners and the labor unions which they controlled. Bridge's life and achievements are a living testament to the power of one man to bring about a change in the status quo and usher in a better world.

Alfred Renton Bridges (Harry) was born in Melbourne, Australia on July 28, 1901. After completing school, Bridges declined to enter his father's real estate business, choosing to be a merchant seaman at 16. In 1920, Bridges entered the USA, and became a longshoreman at San Francisco in 1922. Bridges protested against the stranglehold of the ship owners through the company-controlled Longshoremen Association of San Francisco and the Bay Region (the Blue Book Union). Speedups, arbitrary dismissals, blacklisting of militant workers, low wages, long hours and dangerous working conditions were endemic on the docks. Bridges earned support among the longshoremen for the revival of the local of the International Longshoremen's Association, advocating " Organization... rank and file control... unity of action... union democracy... solidarity among all Coast ports... among all unions," (ILWU website). The local ILA was formed in 1933. Despite pressure from the Roosevelt administration, theories of a communist conspiracy and media opposition, the 1934 West Coast Longshore Strike began on May 9, with Bridges as the chairman of the Strike Committee. Bridges formed a coalition of all waterfront workers and effectively stopped shipping on the West Coast. On July 5, " Bloody Thursday," the police <https://assignbuster.com/how-the-life-and-personal-qualities-of-harry-bridges-can-inspire-us-to-achieve-our-goals-today/>

charged the workers picket lines, shooting into the ranks of unarmed men, and wounded over one hundred men. Two men were killed. This led to a general strike and finally, arbitration commenced, with the unions successfully negotiating joint hiring-halls, a thirty hour week, higher wages, union recognition and coast-wide contracts. In 1937, Bridges founded the ILWU, serving as President for 40 years.

Bridges life was characterized by a shining integrity which one cannot fail to admire. He remained steadfast in his loyalty to his fellow-workers, insisting that the salary of all union officials be the same as that of a longshoreman's wages. His tactics are a shining example of the adage ' United we stand, divided we fall.' The maritime union's ' March Inland,' is an example of this. His life-long battle against discrimination on grounds of race, class or gender, and his support of civil rights and democracy, is worthy of emulation by present-day society. By adopting political action as a weapon of labor, he consolidated the power of the unions. One of his most admirable traits is his flexibility: he was unafraid to incorporate communist ideals in his strategy, as a means to achieve his goals. His ability to move with the times is reflected in the 1960 Mechanization and Modernization Agreement, which secured workers the best deal possible in the face of the inevitable. His lifelong struggle " for dignity, equality, democracy, to oppose war and to bring to the world a better life," (The Harry Bridges Project website), is as relevant today, as it was in Bridge's lifetime. Harry Bridges remains an inspirational figure who showed that personal courage, selfless devotion to a cause and the intelligent use of all the resources at one's command can let any individual be an instrument for change in this world.

#### Works Cited.

<https://assignbuster.com/how-the-life-and-personal-qualities-of-harry-bridges-can-inspire-us-to-achieve-our-goals-today/>

ILWU and Labor history. ILWU local 19 Seattle Washington website.

Harry Bridges: Biography. Accessed on 22 May 2009 from

< <http://www.ilwu19.com/history/contents.htm> > The Harry Bridges Project website. Accessed on 22 May 2009 from

< <http://www.theharrybridgesproject.org/> > The Harry Bridges Institute for International Education and Organization website.

Harry and the ILWU. Accessed on 22 May 2009 from

< <http://harrybridges.com/harryb.htm> >