

Harry Bridges Prowls the Stacks at Powell's

by Michael Ames Connor

Harry Bridges works at Powell's Books. He keeps an eye out for fellow workers. At least, that's what they say. The story, repeated by many members of International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 5, goes something like this: Every once in a while, over the store intercom, comes a page for Harry Bridges. "Harry Bridges to manager Block's office." "Harry Bridges to the loading dock." It's a pretty good intercom system, so everyone can hear it. These union folks who work at Powell's--clerks, booksellers, loaders, techno-cats, and book buyers--they know, together, a little about everything: cooking, fly fishing, Japanese poetry, and labor history. They know about Harry Bridges. People know Bridges has been dead for years. But they know his reputation--fierce ILWU fighter who led the 1934 longshore strike that established the union. Part of joining ILWU means learning a little about their union and learning what Harry Bridges stands for: members know that if he's going to check out the loading dock, they should too. When they get there (and it's usually 30 or 40 people who show up), they find one of their co-workers in a little difficulty with the boss. A disagreement, an argument, a confrontation. Before they show up, maybe that coworker is in a little trouble. Maybe the boss is taking a hard line, getting ready to make an example, thinking about tossing a troublemaker out the door. That's why Harry Bridges gets the call. So 30 or 40 people show up, and the manager backs down. Happens every time. With one or two people there, the boss can do what he likes. But with 30 or 40 people, as Arlo Guthrie once pointed out, you got yourself a movement.

Nobody's ever seen Harry Bridges at Powell's. They just know he's there, watching to make sure nobody gets picked on, or picked off.

A Troublemaker's Handbook. 2005. ur. Jane Slaughter, Detroit: A Labour notes book.

Harry Bridges preži med policami v knjigarni Powell

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Harry Bridges dela v knjigarni Powell. On pazi na svoje sodelavce. Tako, vsaj pravijo. Zgodba, ki jo pripovedujejo mnogi člani sindikalne podružnice International Longshore in Warehouse Union, gre nekako takole: "Vsake toliko časa se na trgovinskem domofonu zgleda poziv za Harryja Bridgesa. "Harry Bridges v pisarno poslovodje." " Harry Bridges v skladišče." imajo zelo dober sistem domofona, tako da lahko takšen pozive slišijo vsi. Ti člani sindikata, ki delajo pri knjigarni Powell - uradniki, knjigarnarji, nakladalci, tehniki, in blaganičarji - vedo skupaj malo o vsem: kuhanje, muharjenje, japonsko poezijo in zgodovino dela. Oni vedo kdo je bil Harry Bridges. Ljudje vedo, da je Bridges že dolga leta mrtev. Ampak oni poznajo njegov ugled. Bil je strašen borec v sindikatu ILWU, ki je leta 1934 vodil stavko, ki je bila vzrok za ustanovitev sindikata. Del včlanitve v sindikat ILWU pomeni tudi malo učenja o njihovem sindikatu in kakšen pomen stoji za imenom Harry Bridges: člani vedo, da če bo Harry preveril kaj se dogaja v skladišču morajo tudi ostali. Ko pridejo tja (in to je ponavadi 30 ali 40 ljudi, ki se odzovejo klicu), najdejo svojega sodelavca v težavnem položaju s šefom. Lahko je nesoglasje, prepir, besedni spopad. Preden se prikažejo, je morda njihov sodelavec v majhnih težavah. Morda se je šef spraval na zaposlenega in ga želi postaviti za zgled in razmišlja, da ga bo odpustil. Zato dobi Harry Bridges klic. Torej, ko se prikaže 30 ali 40 ljudi, vodja odneha in se mora popustiti. To se zgodi vsakič. Z eno ali dve osebi tam, lahko šef naredi, kar se mu zahoče. Ampak s 30 ali 40 ljudji imaš že pravo gibanje.

Nihče ni še nikoli videl Harryja Bridgesa v knjigarni Powell. Oni samo vedo, da je tam in da gleda, ter poskrbi, da ni nihče ustrahovan, šikaniran ali kakorkoli drugače nadlegovan.