HARRY BRIDGES: ... The prosecuting attorney - he was representing the Immigration Department - was a very fine person. An old ball player, and later on, I'd see him. He didn't feel good about the whole trial, but towards the end, as the trial was ending, we'd been talking about the Constitutional rights and the Constitution, and what was wrong with it, and a few things. So he finally said: "Well, look, Mr. B.," he said, "I suppose that you, you know ..." (Of course, I was an alien, remember, who was being tried for un-American notions). He says: "You probably might have a few ideas as to how we might improve the Constitution of our country, isn't that so?" I said: "Yes, I think so." "Ho, ho, ho," he said, "might I ask what they may be?" I said: "Why don't you start up by letting the American Indians have the vote? In the majority of States they're barred from having the vote, even in federal elections." So he denied that that was true, and got in a bit of a hassle with Dean Miles, who was a lawyer-professor, who straightened us out. He says: "Ah, you're kind of both right." Got over that. And then he says: "Well, any more brilliant ideas like that?" I says: "Well, I do have a couple more." He says: "What are they?" So, I start going: "Another thing on the right to vote, I'd let soldiers and sailors, members of the armed forces have a right to vote. Right now - the State Constitutions of the various States that determine eligibility to vote say: Soldiers, people, are barred from voting - ex-convicts, prostitutes, soldiers, sailors, members of the armed forces, and people like that." I says: "That's the Constitution of the United States. I'd change that." And, of course, later on, in World War II, Mr. Dewey was running against Mr. Roosevelt. Remember? It was a big fuss there about soldiers and sailors having the right to vote. I thought it was a good change. So that's about - the trial had just about ended. Mr. Glenn said: "I think we've had about enough of this ..."

BILL MOYERS: This is the Port of San Francisco - in the late afternoon, on a bright day, as beautiful a spectacle as the continent has left. It's hard to realize now what stormy and violent conflicts once raged here in the struggle of American workers for wages, rights, respect and power. But to that seemingly tranquil harbor, 50 years ago, came a seaman with the unlikely name of Alfred Brian Penton Bridges. San Francisco, and the American labor movement were never again the same. He became the bogeyman of the Pacific to his enemies. Congress tried to drive him out of the country. Other labor leaders sought to oust him from his position. And some prominent citizens of San Francisco even considered having him murdered. But Harry Bridges wouldn't buckle to threats, bribes or force. He remained a hero to his men, and, in time, he became a pillar of San Francisco, and a statesman of labor. Only once, in the last few decades, has he given an interview to a journalist, and that was to the obituary editor of the New York Times. But Harry Bridges is very much alive, as you'll see in the next half hour.

TITLES

Harry Bridges was born in Australia in 1900. His prosperous, conservative, Catholic parents hoped he would carry on the family business. But young Harry Bridges wanted adventure. So, at the age of 17, he went to sea. The more he
traveled the world's ports, the more he winced at the poverty and grueling life of common people. In 1922, he settled in San Francisco, to work as a dockside steel handler for ten dollars or less a week. The rest is the legend of Harry Bridges - from the bloody battle of Rincon Hill in the 1934 general strike, to the forging of a powerful union of longshoremen on the Pacific Coast. He was radical - some called him a communist - and uncompromising. But he was also an authentic voice of the rank and file. And he was incorruptible. For twenty years, the government, spurred by ship-owners, reactionary politicians and the American Legion, tried to deport him. It was one of the longest inquisitions of our history, and only the Supreme Court thwarted it. But Harry Bridges endured. His union grew. Times changed. And today, he's an officer of the San Francisco Port Authority, respected by the establishment, a friend of mayors, and, it's said, a symbol of how labor in general has mellowed. We talked in his office on Franklin Street.

MR. BRIDGES: She was a South Sea Island Trader. She'd originally been a Mission Ship. There was two or three of them - I was on two or three. And this one ran up from the South Sea Islands with a load of copra in what they call a hurricane - that's the cyclone season - the summer months south of the line. These terrible summer circular storms develop, and it was no place for the thing to be cruising around down there. So we picked up a load of copra in the Islands, and we came up here in the spring of 1920, and I got off and entered this country - legally, luckily as it happened. Even paid my eight dollar head tax. And if I hadn't had done it, I think Uncle Sam would have got me. So I came off in 1920, as a sailor, into San Francisco ...

MR. MOYERS: Do you remember what went through your mind when you got here?

MR. BRIDGES: I wanted to see San Francisco. I wanted to visit the United States. I didn't come up here to immigrate. I planned to go back home. But this was the famous town of San Francisco - I had a complete library of Jack London ...

MR. MOYERS: Of Jack London?

MR. BRIDGES: Oh, sure. So I just wanted to come ashore and look around yeah.

MR. MOYERS: It's a long way from that schooner arriving here to becoming a member of the establishment - what some people have called you. Is it true what we read: that Harry Bridges is a statesman of labor?

MR. BRIDGES: Well, I'm just so glad you said, what you read. I tell you, it's that press that you don't trust - that's what you read. I don't know how to explain that. I'm here, the same as I always was. All that's happened, and many of the things that sounded so terrible - a revolutionary here in this man's town, and not too many years ago - they're all commonplace now. But in those days, there were charges against me for deportation. Fighting for social security was like communism in those days - not talking about old age pensions and unemployment insurance - things that've been done for many many years in Australia. So, in 1933 - 1932, I was Chairman of what we called the National Rank and File Committee (AFL Rank and File Committee) for old age pensions and unemployment insurance.

MR. MOYERS: Pretty radical.

MR. BRIDGES: Well, a man named Londene introduced a bill Mr. Roosevelt was for, the Communist Party was for, the labor movement was opposed to it. That's why we called ourselves the Rank and File Committee. The secretary of the Committee
was a wonderful man, an official Communist - too darn strong in New York. His name was Louis Weinstock. He was the head of the New York Painters' Council. Elmer Brown, the former president of the Printers' Union, was another leading figure in this. So, I was the Chairman of this National outfit. Louis was International, was National Secretary, an official Communist. This made it a Communist plot. So Roosevelt was for it. The Communist Party was for it. The labor movement was opposed - AFL. They changed in 1935.

MR. MOYERS: What got you indignant, Mr. Bridges, as you were a young man, traveling from port to port, looking at the working conditions in this country? Where did you get your sense of outrage?

MR. BRIDGES: I wouldn't say it was a matter of being indignant or outraged. It was - I was taking care of myself. To take care of myself, I had to line up with other people, and help take care of them. It was one of those things. You know, well, you had a slogan: "Workers of the World, Unite!" It's still a good slogan. It's an old Marxist slogan. Still use it. That's how simple it was: "Workers of the World, Unite! You got nothing to lose but your chains." It's still as good as the day it was said. We still operate that. At least, I tried it.

MR. MOYERS: What was the old "Wobbly" quote?

MR. BRIDGES: Same thing.

MR. MOYERS: "An injury to one ..."

MR. BRIDGES: "An injury to one is an injury to all." That's still good today. That's still one of our slogans that we use.

MR. MOYERS: What is there to be radical about today?

MR. BRIDGES: Well, that's a good question. I don't know. I really don't know. Many of the things that were so radical yesterday - and that's where you're supposed to get mellow, and you're not - they've become accepted.

MR. MOYERS: What then becomes the role of the labor union in these affluent days?

MR. BRIDGES: The role of the labor union in this country, it's got one good role: to make sure that everybody that wants a job has it, at good wages. That's not been achieved yet. In this country, as rich as we are - and we're the richest country in the world - people have gone through school, and college, and they want to go to work. Now I don't go along with these ideas that these welfare people, they're uneducated, they want to get by, and have more kids, and especially the non-white people. That's a lot of baloney. We know better than that. But the fact of the matter is that when we're trying to accept that a figure of - say - 5% of the nation being unemployed - that's not too bad. That's not the case. We know there would be some unemployed. But just take one simple thing, and that's got to be cured, and that's radical enough: How can we guarantee, in this country, that everybody that wants to work has a job? Now, we've taken one big step, because everybody that doesn't work or can't work is going to be supported on welfare. Can you imagine what this country was like when there was no welfare - no unemployment insurance? We go back a little further, no workers compensation. These things are all relatively new: welfare, unemployment insurance, food stamps. When you got out of a job in the old days - which was not too long ago - well, you know, you were just - what were you going to do? If you didn't watch it, you'd starve to
death - in the United States of America.

MR. MOYERS: Do you think that labor still has a sense of passion about its mission?

MR. BRIDGES: Yes. I'm well aware of the digs and the thrusts that labor's getting fat. It's not true. It's really not true. And I'm a real critic of the labor movement, Mr. Meany, and some of these ideas. But here's the way you look at it. There's only one labor movement in this country, as far as I'm concerned, and that's it. And if I can't put my faith there for the future, or any other worker in this country can't put his faith for the future in that labor movement, I don't know where else to put it.

MR. MOYERS: It all seems so much more tame today - the labor movement.

MR. BRIDGES: In a sense, that's true. It's tame. The labor movement is legal today. A lot of times it wasn't. Organization is legal. Unionism is legal. Strikes are legal. Not too many years ago, that wasn't the case. I'd like to observe - picket lines - we had to fight like hell around here.

MR. MOYERS: Did you get accustomed to being called foul names?

MR. BRIDGES: Yeah.

MR. MOYERS: Did it make you bitter?

MR. BRIDGES: No.

MR. MOYERS: Why?

MR. BRIDGES: Waste of time. Makes you old, and, in addition to being a dirty old man, then you become a mean, bitter dirty old man. It's a waste of time. I'm not going to waste time that way.

MR. MOYERS: I'd notice just recently that Secretary of Agriculture, Earl Butz, called you a selfish, arrogant, public-be-damned labor leader.

MR. BRIDGES: I didn't know that. That's one I missed. Well, to hell with Butz. So that's his opinion. He's entitled to his - he's full of prunes, I'd say.

MR. MOYERS: How can a man who wears a suit, sits behind a big desk, makes speeches to large dinners, moves in the right circles - how can that man speak for the rank and file today?

MR. BRIDGES: Because I'll speak for them as long as they elect me. So I have to run - I do in a few weeks - as long as they want to keep on re-electing me. I'm pretty old now, and I want to get out. I'm over 72. That's my job. That's what I'm elected for. And that's what they pay me for: to speak for the rank and file, not only of this union, but I'm entitled to speak for the rank and file of all other unions, see. They don't like it, they'll send me a wire, and say: "Hey, you're off the beam." Which they do. So, because I'm a worker - I'm a part of the working class - because our union doesn't happen to be affiliated with the AFL-CIO, that's still a part of the working class of this country. And that's the way we look at it. And a battle of any union, of the rank and file of any union, AFL affiliated or otherwise, is our fight, and we join in. The other unions do the same thing.
MR. MOYERS: You once talked about a socialist America. How do you feel about that term now?

MR. BRIDGES: Oh, it's way overdue. But we're getting to it bit by bit. The next thing what's coming around is, take one simple thing: a national health plan. Isn't that way overdue? Way overdue. And it's disgraceful, this country with all its wealth. But that's where the old people are moving along. At least the old people have medicare. Now it's just around the corner for my money, and that's the number one job of the labor movement. Of course, they recognize their job – a national health plan. If I had my way, I'd just organize a few days' holiday, and nobody would work until we had a national health plan. That's the one thing that works, and that's understood. Just damn tools - and get going.

MR. MOYERS: What's your opinion toward the young radicals today, who've been pressing the establishment for change?

MR. BRIDGES: Well, they're right. Some of the ways they do it, and some of the changes they want, I'm not so interested as to whether pot is legalized, or a few things like that. But they're young radicals - you can't change young radicals. They mean well, and they learn, over the long pull - and that goes for my own kids, see. They're not going to listen to me, and say: "Hey, don't give me that baloney Dad. That was thirty, forty years ago. It's a different world, these days." And they're right. It is a different world. In due time, they'll be alright. They'll make their mistakes, and learn the hard way. So they don't bother me. And what do I think of them? They're pressing for change. They've made a lot of changes. I just noticed the other day - said the same criticism of Jerry Rubin: "Hey, how do you feel? You used to be a great, flaming radical. Now, you're old and mellow." The same thing. A few years ago, being against the war was a pretty radical idea. To legalize pot - pretty radical. Now, abortion laws - they were all considered pretty radical when Jerry Rubin was a crisis. Now, they're nothing, see. Must have peace, and eliminate the draft, and let us go on.

MR. MOYERS: Who are labor's adversaries, today? As you look around, you see a lot of collusion and collaboration between labor leaders and the establishment.

MR. BRIDGES: Yes, there is a certain amount of that, and it's wrong. And even though, in many cases, the people think they're doing their job, and it's good for the rank and file. In many cases the rank and file worker supports what he thinks is the same thing too: That's a good way - maybe strikes are outlawed - let's do a nice, respectable job, and get in there with the economists and lawyers, and have a nice set of negotiations. That's a lot of baloney, because you've got to be - and that's the big fuss - about strikes. The workers, the organized workers, the unified workers, they have one weapon that they only possess, and nobody else does. That's the strike weapon. It has to be there at all times to be used. And all these attempts to outlaw, or to modify, or this, that, and the other - including these respectable meetings on top, and negotiations, they don't produce as much for the workers, even though they produce a lot. As, in my opinion, the use, or the threat of the use of the strike weapon. It's a terrible thing - it's only to be used as a last resort. It's very dangerous and when you start to use it, you better know what you're doing. But I still belong to the school where you say to an employer: "Look, you're a nice guy. Here's the price. If you don't pay, you're going to get shut down." Because I never met an employer yet, in all my experience - you go in there - an extra penny of wages is one penny less of profits. So you have to get around that. I remember when the employers used to sit back and argue with me, the shipowners, it took us years to straighten them out. They said they were really in business to give us jobs. They gave me that kind of a line. I'd
say: "Get on your own side of the cockeyed table. I represent the workers. You're in business to make money." And when we agreed on that, then we'd take it from there. After many, many years they finally got around to that. It was called 'The New Look,' you know. And the great man who was handling the employee at that time, J. Paul St. George - he's dead now - he was a great man on the other side of the fence. That was the new look, and they'd agreed with us that their number one job was making money, after many, many years of trying to kid me that their job was to try to take care of me.

MR. MOYERS: You once talked about the possibility of one big union of dock workers, truckers, railroad workers, airline workers, with the muscle to bring the whole economy to a stop, like the coal miners in England.

MR. BRIDGES: I'm still for that. It's way overdue, but, of course, it's looked upon as pretty radical, too. But that is what's badly needed, today.

MR. MOYERS: Is it realistic?

MR. BRIDGES: Sure, it's realistic. What's overdue, now, in the country - talking about that - well overdue, we should have one labor movement. Now, I'm well aware of all the feelings towards Mr. Meany - AFL-CIO. I think all the unions ought to get in there and straighten it out. And I think the labor movement - just to demonstrate how important it was - I think it passed unnoticed, but there was that convention down there, where the Senator from Hawaii spoke, Dan Inouye, see. But the resolution on "Resign, Mr. President - if not, we ought to take steps to impeach you" - the importance of that was not the political aspect. But that served notice on Mr. President, and anybody else that had any notions, that there would be no time - you know - there was a discussion in the press here about the possibility of the President, as Commander-in-Chief, giving orders to the Pentagon: "Come over and surround the Congressmen" - there was speculation in the press.

MR. MOYERS: You don't believe that, though, do you?

MR. BRIDGES: Of course, I don't. But I felt better when I saw the labor movement take that position. Because, if I'm going to follow the history - I was around and went through it with other countries, see - the so-called fascism, or military dictatorship - or whatever you want to call those things. It'd only work successfully when a large section of the workers in the country are convinced or sold on the idea it's for the best, it's for their own good. Happened in Germany, happened in Italy ...

MR. MOYERS: What was the importance of that statement?

MR. BRIDGES: I thought the importance of it was, leaving aside the politics, and without withdrawing any of the criticisms or opinions I have about a lot of things that the AFL-CIO does, and Mr. Meany - I thought the importance that unanimous action under the circumstances of demanding that the President of the United States resign and call for impeachment, served notice on the elements in this country that had any notions this was the time for a move to take over and dump the Constitution and a few other things - which has happened in other countries - that served notice on them: "Count us out!" - or, "Count us as your enemies if you try anything like that." That was the big thing, I thought.

MR. MOYERS: Some people have said that Mr. Meany and AFL-CIO officials were actually playing too much footsy with the Nixon administration...
MR. BRIDGES: In some respects that's true. I certainly think so. I think it's wrong - in view of what they said, it doesn't go along with Mr. Meany and even Woodcock and Fitzsimmons sitting on that advisory committee of that C.O.L.C.

MR. MOYERS: What's that?

MR. BRIDGES: They used to be represented on the Cost-Of-Living-Council, see. They got a Cost-Of-Living-Council, and they're there, and Mr. Meany and others - they're there in an advisory capacity.

MR. MOYERS: Do you think that's too much collusion?

MR. BRIDGES: They ought to get the hell of that there. They can't be sitting there, and pointing to the President, and say: "Get out, quit your job," and sitting on that advisory committee to put over one of the worst parts of his program, namely "What's wrong with this country is that the workers are too well off." That's baloney. The workers of this country are making too much money? That's news to me. I know it's not so.

MR. MOYERS: How do you explain the fact, Mr. Bridges, that in the last few years many workers have become quite conservative, particularly on social issues? They supported Mr. Nixon ...

MR. BRIDGES: Many did, that's true, many did ...

MR. MOYERS: How do you explain that?

MR. BRIDGES: Well, the workers, they feel that they got a right to vote as they see it, and it is true, in that sense, pretty often and politically conservative. Now some of those workers - you think, and they are - politically conservative. They'll make your hair stand to hear them talk to me in the union, it sounds like I'm selling them out every day. And they're the same kind of workers that politically might have these conservative notions. They're going to exercise their own darn right to make up their own minds politically. Well, you try to advise them. I'm not kidding myself that the big sections of the rank and file that I represent did not vote for Mr. Nixon. I know they did.

MR. MOYERS: Why do you think they did? That's a long way from what you were in the early 1930's.

MR. BRIDGES: Well, there's reasons. I read somewhere recently, in some of these investigations, Mr. Nixon and these campaign people had a lot of money to spend, and you can't worry where they got it from, see. And you must say, they did have the media somewhat in their corner, see. And, there's no doubt about it, with all due respect to Mr. McGovern, he made a few serious fumbles. When I sat and listened to him debating - the contest between him and Mr. Humphrey in this State - I heard him, and I thought, now that's a lot of wacky stuff, and, in a way I kind of liked the principle. He was going to guarantee everybody, every member of a family, a thousand dollars a year for life, and, without figuring up what the bill would come to - I didn't quite mind that, but I don't think it's as progressive a program as guaranteeing jobs. Everybody's got to go to work, and got to work, and this is the program - we have to put people to work.

MR. MOYERS: I guess what I'm getting at is: once the worker gets a good hold on that good life, does he become selfish about holding on to it ...

MR. BRIDGES: No ...
MR. MOYERS: ... and keeping it ...

MR. BRIDGES: No ...

MR. MOYERS: ... and does he feel other people are a threat to ...

MR. BRIDGES: No, not in my experience. No. We go to workers every day, and say: "Put your job on the line to help Joe Blow over there." And the workers have never failed. They've always done it. And they put it to a vote. I'll give you a good example now, not even in this country. That little thing in Chile. There's four Chilean dock worker leaders down there, union leaders, in jail. I'd kind of go to the rank and file I represent, and say: "Tell that Chilean Government let off those people, otherwise we'll take action up here." And that action could have serious effects on their jobs. I had no doubt that these workers - in the United States this is - would be that they'd recognize their responsibility to those dock worker leaders - the union leaders in Chile.

MR. MOYERS: What would be their reaction if you asked them to open up their membership to more blacks here at home?

MR. BRIDGES: Well, our local union down here, they're 70% black. They've been doing that for years. They're all for that.

MR. MOYERS: I know that the ILWU has been a leader in civil rights, but what ...

MR. BRIDGES: Many unions are sticky - many unions are backward and sticky on that question. Prejudice is the word - you've got to learn. You have to keep on plugging along. They've got to learn, see. There's no doubt about it. I'm not kidding myself that many of the unions are prejudiced because of color, race, religion, other things. We still have to plug along - after all, so was the country when it was first born. Things developed. You have to keep on working.

MR. MOYERS: One of the new phenomena about our time, which didn't exist when you first were active in the labor movement in this country, is that multi-national corporation - that huge conglomerate that goes beyond national boundaries. How are the unions going to deal with that?

MR. BRIDGES: Well, as I say, there's one union, our union, we're trying to figure that out. I don't quite know. I don't quite know. It's easy to say: "Well, let's have a - " There's something, maybe, might come out of it if we could put together, say, a conference of all the trade unions of all the countries. If you don't start there - if you try to think of something else - I can't think - that's a tough enough job to try to get a national - international conference of all the trade unions in all those lands, you see. So then, let's put our heads together, and ask ourselves the question you just asked me. Now what are we going to do about these multi-national corporations? Because they go away from here, in the United States. They go down to Latin America, elsewhere, and they certainly go down there because labor is cheap, and they exploit the labor if they can use the government to put a stop to the unions organizing or striking, they do that too. I don't know what the answer is at the time. But there's no one - there's one thing I do know, see. Only the workers in the world, organized or otherwise, are going to find an answer somewhere along the line.

MR. MOYERS: Well, if an American company goes to a place like the Phillipines, doesn't it help raise the standard of living for the workers there?
MR. BRIDGES: Yes, that's true, to some extent, yes.

MR. MOYERS: Well, if there's solidarity of the workers, then, can you complain too much about the multi-national corporations going to other countries?

MR. BRIDGES: No. I'm not going to give them credit for that, because I know darn well they're going down there for profits. But that's a side effect, you might say, that that small group of workers do get a better standard. I can't deny that. But, still, it's at our expense. If they're going to go over there, and leave workers - and we don't watch at the trade unions - if the trade unions don't guard against that, workers are being left unemployed here when a factory moves out, or an industry moves out and goes somewhere else. So the chaps have to find out what's going to happen to those workers. So, although it does help the workers there - and that's fine - and does raise their standard of living - and no other workers are directly involved - it's still at the expense of workers here in this country - that's a fact. So that's a rather simple political fact. What to do about it at this stage, I really don't know.

MR. MOYERS: The way you say the word workers ...

MR. BRIDGES: Workers - I mean all kinds of workers, including members of the working press - even including, maybe, union members that are working on this set-up you got here - running those cameras and things. I mean that they're workers, too.

MR. MOYERS: You don't hear that term, though, much like that any more.

MR. BRIDGES: Why not?

MR. MOYERS: Because workers are brought up as having become part of the middle class ...

MR. BRIDGES: Workers create all the wealth of this country, and any other country. Workers create all the wealth of this country. Nobody's kidding me. That gold in the ground isn't worth a damn 'til some worker comes along and digs it out. So, gold, and other things - when you add the labor of workers, then it becomes valuable. Otherwise it's not worth a damn. So all the wealth of the United States, as great as it is, is created by workers.

MR. MOYERS: I remember seeing a picture of you and Teddy Gleason at your 1971 convention, when you introduced Mr. Gleason to your workers. Mr. Gleason used to be as far right as you were to the left. Did this represent some change in the attitudes of both the ...

MR. BRIDGES: As he used to be? I got a hunch Teddy is over there still. Teddy's still a member of the trade union movement, you see. So I can reserve the right to be critical of Teddy, and say so; and he the same with me, because we're all in the one family despite these disagreements, you see. But when it's a question of tackling the employer, there's no basic disagreement between us. We get together. We get together. And so, in the meantime, we reserve the right to call each other names, and disagree on policy. I think that if he's going to boycott Russian ships on the East Coast, I think he's nuts. So we have to disagree on some of these things.

MR. MOYERS: How do you feel about using your strength as a union to affect foreign policy that way?
MR. BRIDGES: Oh, that's what unions are for - to help make foreign policy in the interest of the majority of the people in this and other countries. Certainly, I'm all for that. We tried to make a lot of foreign policy in years gone by that's recognized now that we were kind of right. We were tying up ships around here many, many years ago, trying to stop the elimination of trade unions in Germany, and the march of Hitler. I was getting telegrams here and letters, smuggled letters from the labor leaders in concentration camps in Germany and in Italy. And there was the question - nobody questions it now - when we shut down ships, and we refused to ship oil and scrap iron to Japan when it invaded China. That was a very radical, revolutionary thing. I got a telegram from Mr. Roosevelt, saying: "Quit interfering in the good diplomatic relationship between two nations." But we still shut down the ships. And we said, at the time, that scrap iron is going to come back on the heads of American boys. It did, at Pearl Harbor.

MR. MOYERS: What you're doing, when you do that, is to interfere with the foreign policy of your country.

MR. BRIDGES: Sure as hell - that's our job - that's our privilege - that's our right - that's our duty.

MR. MOYERS: How can you be sure that that isn't simply your personal ideology as opposed to what the rank and file want?

MR. BRIDGES: It could be, in some of those cases. But the way I make sure is I go down and ask the rank and file, and they take a vote on it - and they have a vote - and, furthermore, they have something else. We have in our union - I put it in there many years ago - any officer can be recalled by a 15% vote of the membership. A petition - the members sign a petition, and say: "Get rid of the guy. His nose is too long." That gets rid of me. 15% - even I have to be elected by a majority secret ballot. That's the 15% recall.

MR. MOYERS: Do you feel little stirrings down in the ranks of the younger members in particular about you and about the fact that you're 73 years old, and the fact that you've been around a long time? Do you feel any pressures from them?

MR. BRIDGES: Oh, sure. They say the same thing as the presses. "He ain't the man be used to be. He used to be a good man once upon a time." All those things are there. That's right. They say that. That's their privilege, too. So, I got a simple question: "So what's your idea? What should we do?" We sit down, and talk it over. That's their right and privilege. And many of the younger people say that, in this union, and in every other union. Well, you're right. I'm 72 years old. It's time I got the hell out. I know that. And I'm well on my way.

MR. MOYERS: Did you ever change your mind about this country during the midst of that ... hounding by the government?

MR. BRIDGES: No - no. I didn't. I figured that it would all work out, and - well, I don't like to give these things a faith, and all the rest of it - a pretty simple thing to me. I knew the Constitution would work somewhere along the line. I had that, and I was going to stick around to see if it didn't - put it that way. I figured it would work. Legally speaking, if I couldn't depend on it, I didn't have much else to depend on, except my union. But the rank and file stayed solid. And if worst had to come to the worst, they'd have put me on the ship at Uncle Sam's expense, and I would have had a big welcome - and a big send-off from our guys, and gone back to Australia. That wasn't such a big happening. You know - worse things could happen. I could always figure that. So I really had nothing to lose. I really had nothing to lose. And all the way through, I wasn't exactly, you know, victimized in any way. There were all kinds of people - millions of
people in the last few years have suffered all over the world in concentration camps, died, and everything. I had it easy. It was a breeze.

MR. MOYERS: Do you really feel that you've won the big battles you were fighting for over the last thirty years?

MR. BRIDGES: No - no - no - no, too much to be done. Look, I've given you a few examples. I won't consider the battle won until I know that everybody that wants to work - my kids - kids growing up - they've got a job to go to - and they're going to be able to work - and not to get rich, but work in that job for life. They'll have housing, they'll have good health, be educated if they want it - see. I have to work for that. So we've got a long way to go. And that's just in this country. Then there's a question eliminating a few other things. There's been a lot of tremendous progress, see. So we still have a lot of racial discrimination, in this town, as well as many other places. I look upon it as discrimination. And we do have the responsibility - the great things that made the United States - I don't want to be, you know, start waving any flags - but one of the great things that made the United States great and got its great reputation: it was supposed to give a helping hand to other countries. We call it foreign aid, or the Marshall Plan. And in many ways, it did. But there's still a lot of unfinished business we should address ourselves to instead of getting mixed up in lousy wars like Vietnam and a few other places - trying to dump the government in Chile - that's a disgrace. There's plenty of unfinished business.

MR. MOYERS: How do you feel now about the tumultuous events of the 30's, here in San Francisco, of which you were such an integral part? How do you look back on them now?

MR. BRIDGES: They were wonderful - they were stirring, historical days - time and money and effort well-spent I think, and so we moved ahead and all our people will agree on that. They seem to have done better for them - they made it better - everybody will agree now they made a better city of this, despite the outcry of the time. And I think they did benefit themselves, as a lot of other people, and I think everybody will agree - look what I've suffered for - for some of these things that come to pass now are all down the drain, as it were - what's the term? - mellowed - or whatever you want to call it.

MR. MOYERS: You keep coming back to that - I think you're sensitive to being called mellow...

MR. BRIDGES: I'm a little sensitive about it, I'm a little sensitive about it ... but I can't help it.

MR. MOYERS: One of the contradictions that bedevil me is that here is a man who's one of America's best-known radicals, called a Communist in his earlier days - the Government tried to hound you out of the country - who's a registered Republican.

MR. BRIDGES: That's true. I registered Republican many years ago as a form of protest, one, against Truman and his cockeyed policies of conquering the world by force of arms - him and Churchill - and second, that I wanted to demonstrate that labels are meaningless and I still think that way - that the Democratic label, the Republican label, are meaningless. But now I think it's time for a change - I'm a champion of the mayor of San Francisco, who I think, is going to be, I hope, the new Governor of California, at least - I can't say vote for him myself, because I'm a Republican. The one thing I'm going to do is to change my registration now. So I changed years ago. I couldn't register communist. There was
no Communist Party. They put that out of business, temporarily. I didn't want to say: declined to state. At least, at that time, the communists did have the name - you know - a bit of a reputation of being a Peace Party.

MR. MOYERS: If the old labels no longer apply, what is meaningful? How do you describe yourself?

MR. BRIDGES: I'm a trade unionist. I'm a worker. I'm a trade unionist, and that is my job - my number one job. And if I do that job well, the good effects will slop over elsewhere, in my opinion. I might be wrong, but this is my faith in it. What's good for the workers, I think, will have a beneficial effect on all the other people in the country.

MR. MOYERS: Any regrets about this life you led?

MR. BRIDGES: No - no. Just that, maybe, I didn't do enough.

MR. MOYERS: I don't want to imply that this is the end, but are you going to write your memoirs?

MR. BRIDGES: No plans yet, but now, in the last convention of our union, early this year, by unanimous vote, ordered me to write a book. I don't like writing books. One of the reasons is, I used to spend a lot of time with John Lewis, especially towards the end ...

MR. MOYERS: John L. Lewis?

MR. BRIDGES: John L. Lewis, yeah. I'd go to Washington, and John used to sit there, towards the end of his life, to talk especially about old times - and I went there once, and I said: "Say, John, I heard you're going to write a book, huh?" He said: "No, more gossip." "Why," I said. "Well ..." - the way he used to talk - "Why, you know, these publishers come around, and others come around, and get me writers, and get me royalty to write a book. Can't do it." I asked him: "Why?" "Just can't tell the truth." And he went on to say of course, he loved to think about the old days and all those dark, turbulent thirties - He says: "You know we had a lot of work to do. Me, you ..." When John Lewis appointed me, in the early days of the CIO to direct - you see, the CIO Director of the eleven Western States - you see, that's what he was referring to. You know, we had to sit down, and we had to work on a lot of things with all kinds of people, many of them the accepted enemies of the workers, and others. "And when we made agreements, and we gave our word," he says, "as far as I was concerned, I didn't say as long as I live. I said for all time." He says: "What did you do? I thought you did the same." He told me: "That's why we can't write a book." That's one reason. So he says: "If we're going to write a book, we couldn't tell the truth about a lot that happened. First, nobody would believe us. And we'd be breaking our word." So he said: "There's not going to be any books." And there never was. And he says: "And I can't write a book, because I can't tell the truth," he says, "and neither can you." And I kind of thought the same way.

MR. MOYERS: How do you feel about the way the press has treated you over the years?

MR. BRIDGES: Well, the press is lousy, but they've got a job to do. The press doesn't represent workers, they represent the establishment. So I don't trust the press. That doesn't say anything against the working members of the press
They're with the establishment. And I can give you a simple thing - a simple test that you can't ignore, and it's the truth. In all the years I've been around here doing business, I've never yet seen a leading newspaper in a capital city, not only never support a strike, but say a good word about us. In all the last forty or fifty years, there must have been some time when the workers were right in a strike. I never heard a newspaper admit that. So I think they're kind of prejudiced when it comes down to unions and workers struggles. So that's what I think...

MR. MOYERS: When you were being represented as a communist, a scoundrel, a bogeyman, the scourge of the poor - that didn't bother you?

MR. BRIDGES: No.

MR. MOYERS: How did you hold on to what you knew yourself to be?

MR. BRIDGES: I had a bunch of guys down below that I represented, and if I made a mistake - and I made plenty - and led with my chin - they'd throw me back in the ring, and say: "Get back in there, you stupid fool, and duck next time." I had something going for me that way, like other people didn't. I always had a rank and file down there, I knew I could always fall back into their arms. I made a mistake, and explained it that way, they understood. That's where I was better off than other people. There's different kinds of hatred. I'd say, in the labor struggles, or political struggles, left wing radicals, after all, were all the cases the government had against me. All the evidence they introduced was 95% true. Always, what they said was true. I was guilty as all hell. It was the 5% - that little 5% that they hung up on - and that is: was I ever a member of the Communist Party? When that got dumped by the high court, then they changed a law - passed a special law - and changed the meaning of the law to "affiliated with" - see. So when the membership went down the drain, then I had to come along with this information. But the truth of the matter is that all the evidence introduced against me in that fight with the government was 95% true. The technical point of "being a member" wasn't there. So this is where a lot of this stuff comes from.

MR. MOYERS: What do you mean: It was true? Were you sympathetic to communist causes?

MR. BRIDGES: Certainly - still am.

MR. MOYERS: Were you a member?

MR. BRIDGES: No - that's the point. That's the technical point.

MR. MOYERS: What do you mean you still are sympathetic?

MR. BRIDGES: Well, give me - what's the communist cause?

MR. MOYERS: What about the Soviet Union?

MR. BRIDGES: I'm a champion of the Soviet Union, and always had been. When that revolution occurred was the year I went to work. So two big things happened in '17 - I went to work, and we had the Russian Revolution.

MR. MOYERS: How can a man who has fought as hard as you have, and as effectively as you have, for the rights of the common man, say: I'm for the government of the nation that was known for its brutality and its tyranny?

MR. BRIDGES: Where - over in the Soviet Union?
MR. MOYERS: Yes.

MR. BRIDGES: I went over there to find that out. I found out to the contrary. Came back - made my report to the Commonwealth Club of San Francisco, and got subpoenaed before the Un-American Committee, and spent four hours before the Un-American Committee - Mr. Waller was in command then - told my story - the way I saw it. I checked it out daily with the United States Embassy in Moscow. They didn't contradict me.

MR. MOYERS: But if you went today, you wouldn't be able to see Solzhenitsyn ...

MR. BRIDGES: Why should I waste my time on people like that? I agree with the people having the right to defense over there. Why this sudden interest in a couple of people over there like that? They just want - those people don't know what they're doing - they just want to take the schools, and the training of those people who know how to do it, and use them against the welfare of that country. I'm not being fooled by that kind of junk.

MR. MOYERS: Which is a better system, in your judgment?

MR. BRIDGES: Well, both systems have, you might say - they're good parts and bad parts, see. There are a few little things that come through to me, as I've just told you. Whatever the reasons are, there's no unemployment in Russia.

MR. MOYERS: But at what price?

MR. BRIDGES: What price - in what way?

MR. MOYERS: In terms of human liberty ... personal values ...

MR. BRIDGES: All those things are relative - human liberty - personal values. Human liberty and personal values - you got the right in this country - you only use them to starve to death. They're not so darn good. How are you going to use them when you're sick and can't be taken care of. There's plenty of weakness. I was highly critical when I went to the Soviet Union. They sat down and discussed things with me. As I checked things out, one by one, I went to the United States Embassy, and I said: "Look, this is what I think. Is that true?" They finally came around and admitted I was right. But never mind the Soviet Union. We're talking about the United States. Here's where I belong. This is where I care by choice. And I reserve the right to criticize, and I reserve the right to support. The same is true of China, and any other place. That's a part of our life here in this country - to support another country, and to do something effective about it. I think that's what the United States was all about.

MR. MOYERS: Well, if 95% of what the government introduced as evidence when it was trying to deport you was right, were they right to try to deport you?

MR. BRIDGES: No. No. Finally the courts said that. When I say 95% - they - "Isn't it true that you went down to your workers and said: 'Don't ship - tie up those ships and don't ship that scrap iron to Japan' ..." - That was a crime - that was part of the charges. "Isn't it true - is it true that you sat (talking about the national committee) with a known communist, Louis Weinstock - advocating unemployment insurance in this country?" "Yeah" - "and old-age pension?" "Yeah" - "Is it true that you advocated industrial unionism and rank and file control?" "Is it true that you advocate a labor party dedicated to the ownership and control of the means of production?" I said: "You're damn right - just like the Post Office." So, in all these things - guilty - guilty - guilty - guilty.
MR. MOYERS: Did you ever advocate the overthrow of the government?

MR. BRIDGES: No. But that's not the whole question. The question is always "... by force and violence." People - the citizens of the United States have a right - it's in the Constitution - implicit in the Constitution, and more or less in the Bill of Rights, and the Declaration of Independence - when the government doesn't serve the people, they have a right to dump it, get rid of it, and get another government. But the thing - the zinger of it is always - was always added in my case - that is the charge "... by force of violence." "Not guilty."

MR. MOYERS: You're a paradox, Harry Bridges. You're a registered Republican, with a picture of FDR on his wall. You're a radical who's flirted with communism - who's greeted in the best clubs with a cheery greeting - you're a paradox. How do you explain it?

MR. BRIDGES: I'm reminded, in 1936, Mr. Roosevelt had to take to the airways in one of his fireside chats to what? To defend himself against charges of communism. And he did a beautiful job - an eloquent job. He laughed. He said: "Well, well, well, things never change." He said: "You know, somebody is always trying to drag red herrings across the table." He said: "You know, not too long ago, it was French. Then it was British. Today, it's Russia." He said: "And we're talking about a few simple things." And he said: "Like I said, one third of the nation (remember that thing?) ... some jobs, some housing, some clothes ...," and he said: "...That's communism. That's what they're saying." - in 1936, defending himself against the charge of communism. Remember the press of this country - the daily media - had a rule: Never mention his name - "that man in the White House."

MR. MOYERS: Things have changed.

MR. BRIDGES: They sure have, in that sense. I agree. Now, everybody is mentioning Mr. Nixon.

MR. MOYERS: One of his critics once said of Harry Bridges that the first thing he does in the morning is to brush his teeth and sharpen his tongue. Bridges put it another way. "If you want to fool the politicians in the press," he told me, "all you have to do is to speak the truth, and they'll never believe you."

Because Harry Bridges is such an unusual man, and his public appearances so rare, we continued the conversation well into the second half of this hour. In the remaining minutes, I'd like to share with you some of the mail that's been pouring across my desk since this series began last October. Literally thousands of people have written. Most of you have written favorably, for which I'm grateful. But this evening, I want to read you some excerpts from letters that were quite critical. Let's begin with two excerpts from the programs that triggered this avalanche of response:

SENATOR TALMADGE: If the President could authorize a covert break-in, and you don't know exactly where that power would be limited, you don't think it could
include murder, or other crimes, beyond covert break-ins, do you?

MR. ERLICHMAN: No, I don't - I don't know where the line is, Senator.

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MR. MOYERS: There, in brief, is the Watergate morality embedded in the Nixon White House. Belief in the total rightness of the official view of reality, and an arrogant disregard for the rule of law - the triumph of executive decree over due process. By arbitrarily, and secretly invoking the national security, the President, or his men can nullify the Bill of Rights, and turn the Constitution into a license for illegitimate conduct. The President is set above ordinary standards of right or wrong. What's right is what works, and he alone decides what that is. One man, in effect, becomes the State. It was close. It almost worked. And it would have changed things for keeps. The public conscience smothered, the Congress intimidated, the press isolated, and the political process rigged - the President would have been free to dictate the popular morality for his own ends. And we would have been at the mercy of unbridled, capricious and arbitrary rule.

PRESIDENT NIXON: Theodore Roosevelt called the Presidency a "bully-pulpit." Franklin Roosevelt called it "Pre-eminently a place of moral leadership, and surely, one of the President's greatest resources is the moral authority of his office." It's time we restored that authority. It's time we used it once again to its fullest potential - to rally the people - to define those moral imperatives which are the cement of a civilized society.

MR. MOYERS: But, as time went on, Richard Nixon made it hard to believe. In following a long train of unblushing deceptions, incredible contradictions, and admittedly criminal acts done in his behalf by men he chose to serve him - those words, today, seem hollow. I, for one, am convinced that Mr. Nixon, not only has failed to provide the moral leadership he pledged in that speech, but that he has fostered a lawless extension of power throughout this government, and that he has systematically robbed this country of its ability and willingness to trust the President.

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After the first program on Watergate, I received this letter from a man in Blytheville, Arkansas: "Bill Moyers' Journal was biased and unjust. Moyers' attitudes and morality are more to be questioned than the so-called political scandal he examines. Mr. Moyers, surely, can come up with another essay on corruption and scandal he was aware of during his experience as Special Assistant to President Johnson."

Failures of policy I was well aware of during the Johnson administration. Vietnam for one, and our extravagant ambitions for the War on Poverty. But corruption - I never saw any. We did have our problems with credibility. When I said "Good Morning," at my daily press briefings, Dan Rather would call the weather bureau, just to make sure. But perjury, breaking and entering, using tax audits to harass individual citizens, running a secret police from the basement of the White House, secretly taping all of the President's conversations - no, I never was aware of these things. The Nixon people have run the government for the last five years with the full powers of the Justice Department and the FBI available to them. If there were any skullduggery, they could have exposed the administrations that preceded them. I think that men like Charles Colson, and his colleagues would have had their field day. Instead, they keep saying: everybody's done it. We've only been following precedent. That brings to mind a letter, or a speech, that Abraham Lincoln made once in response to the repeated charges that the Republican
Party was behind John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry. Lincoln said this: "If any member of our Party is guilty in that matter, you know it, or you do not know it. If you do know it, you're inexcusable for not designating the man and proving the fact. If you do not know it, you're inexcusable for asserting it, and especially, for persisting in the assertion after you have tried and failed to make the proof."

Here's a letter from a viewer in Lone Pine, California. "Your honest and sincere face is disarming, and will probably convince many of your listeners that, indeed, what you try to convey to the public is true. But it is not the truth. It is only the truth as you want to believe it to be. You want the President to look bad. You want to get the President."

Mr. Nixon and his friends almost succeeded in making the American people believe that the press was out to get him - that, somehow, the press had some independent, self-serving reason to malign the President. Fortunately, they failed. No one I know in the press is out to get Mr. Nixon. Reporters I know consider themselves your surrogate. They're not trying to get the President. They're trying to get the truth about Watergate.

Here's a letter that makes much the same argument. "Why this talk of whether or not the President should be impeached? He is impeached every day by reporters who think their press cards give them the right to pass judgment on everything that happens. They do not, of course. The cards give only the right to record the news."

Well, it isn't the press card that gives reporters the right to try to find out what's going on. It's the First Amendment.

A lady writes from Willow Springs, Illinois. "Yet you condemn Joseph McCarthy, that great American patriot, for his vigilance against our Nation's traitors. Says Eddy Rickenbacker: "Some day, when the American people wake up, they will erect a great statue to Joseph McCarthy."

Perhaps - but, in the meantime, Senator McCarthy left his own monument: broken reputations, ruined careers, unfounded charges, and the poisoned wells of politics.

Another, on the press, from Washington, D.C. "We're now in the embrace of the news media's capricious, immoral, untruthful force in reporting. You failed in not mentioning the destruction of the votes in Cook County, Illinois, and Texas which made Jack Kennedy President of the United States."

And here's a letter that didn't have a return address: "Please be advised that until indictments are drawn, presented and voted up or down, and judgment is forthcoming from the proper tribunal, you can take your place among the legion of the vindictive who, so overwhelmingly, smother the public sensibilities with, as yet, unproven charges."

I'm constantly amused, in this business, by the fact that viewers listen with the same degree of prejudice they attribute to those of us who do the talking on the media. They simply tune out what they don't want to hear. Last week, in the special program on impeachment, I made exactly the point the author of that letter made: that the President is presumed innocent until proven guilty, and that impeachment, in fact, is exactly that - a function that serves to dispell the charges, and doubts, or to confirm them.
Finally, here's a letter that takes a slightly different tack from a viewer in Chicago. "One man, and a cheap, self-serving hustler at that, is stealing your country. Where is your rage - your passion? Don't you care? How can you be so cool and objective?"

Well, every normal man is tempted, at times - as Lincoln said - to spit on his hands, hoist the black flag, and start slitting throats. But those are the passions Western man has been trying for centuries to subdue. Watergate does anger me. They did try to steal the country. They tried to subvert the best traditions of the country I love. And, more outrageously, they thought so little of the American people, as to believe they could get away with it. My first program on Watergate, in fact, was triggered by a deep-seated fear and disgust I felt last April, that they might be able, after all, to pull it off. But I've never believed in journalism in fighting fire with fire. I come from a part of the country where due process too often became, in the past, six feet of rope dangling from a tall magnolia tree. I prefer the quiet working of due process, even against the most extreme offense, to the rage of a lynch mob.

I hope you'll keep writing. And, from time to time, I'll try to answer some of your letters. I'm Bill Moyers. Until next week, good night.

NOTE: This transcript is to be used for news and review purposes only. It has been edited to eliminate interruptions and garbled speech.