

# **STAN WEIR**

# **SINGLEJACK**

# **SOLIDARITY**



**FOREWORD BY NORM DIAMOND**

**EDITED AND WITH AN AFTERWORD BY GEORGE LIPSITZ**

SINGLEJACK  
SOLIDARITY

CRITICAL AMERICAN STUDIES SERIES

George Lipsitz, University of California–Santa Cruz, series editor

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*Edited and with an Afterword by*

GEORGE LIPSITZ

*Foreword by*

NORM DIAMOND

STAN WEIR

Critical American Studies Series



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## “Singlejack”

The term singlejack originated with the hard-rock miners of the American West. The drilling of holes for the insertion of dynamite was a tough and dangerous job. The miners worked in pairs, with one kneeling to hold erect the steel drill, which he would turn slowly as his partner drove it into the rock with blows from a sledge (or single jack) hammer. They would switch tasks now and then, and because the job demanded as much mutual trust as skill, many lasting friendships were formed.

Around the turn of the century, on-the-job organizers for the Western Federation of Miners and the Industrial Workers of the World brought additional meaning to singlejack. They used it to describe that method of organizing where dedicated advocates are developed one at a time on a highly personalized basis—as between partners.

In turn, still broader veins of definition can be extracted from this rich historical term. We like to apply it to that private bond that ideally is sparked between a reader and a book. We hope you agree.

*—Note from publisher to readers appearing on the copyright page of all Singlejack Books*

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# Contents

Foreword *Norm Diamond* xi

## I. Working-Class Cultures

Meetings with James Baldwin 3

What Ever Happened to Frisco Jeans? 17

C. L. R. James: Revolutionary Artist 21

The Role of the Individual and the Group in the Creation  
of Work Cultures 26

Work Force Writers on the Rise 29

I Am Lonely 32

## II. The Human Costs of Automation

New Technology: A Catalyst for Crises in Collective Bargaining,  
Industrial Discipline, and Labor Law 39

The Human Cost of Automation 68

Containerization Makes for a Lonely Waterfront 73

Luddism Today 76

Effects of Automation in the Lives of Longshoremen 91



### III. Solidarity Networks

- Unions with Leaders Who Stay on the Job 109
- The Need for Labor Networking 149
- Rank and File Networks: A Way to Fight Concessions 151
- Introduction to Coordinadora 153
- Strike in Spain Reveals Sickness and Cure 156
- Longshoremen and Marine Clerks of Spain Building  
New Kind of Union 160

### IV. Workers, Politics, and Social Change

- Eric Hoffer: Far-Right True Believer 167
- The Artificial Isolation between Radicals and Workers 185
- Workers: Second-Class Citizens 187
- Bill Akagi and the Union 190
- The First Recorded Strike in History: 1170 BC 192
- Early U.S. Labor Policy Revealed by Archives Find 194

### V. The Vanguard Party and Worker Self-Activity

- A Leninist Vanguard Party Dying in a Foreign Land 199
- Life in a Vanguard Party 208
- After the War 214
- The Vanguard Party: An Institution Whose Time  
Has Expired 216
- Contribution to a Discussion on Bert Cochran's  
*Labor and Communism* 221
- The Vanguard Party: An Obstruction to Worker-Intellectual  
Alliances 227

## VI. Primary Work Groups

The Informal Work Group 235

Just a Matter of Gloves 252

West Coast Longshoremen and Informal Workers' Control 256

Review of *Punishment and Redress in a Modern Factory*  
by Carl Gersuny 275

## VII. The Failure of Business Unionism, the Rank and File Alternative

American Labor on the Defensive: A 1940s Odyssey 281

USA: The Labor Revolt 294

Doug Fraser's Middle-Class Coalition 310

The Failure of Business Unionism 324

The Australian Dock Strike *Stan Weir and George Lipsitz* 338

Stan Weir: Working-Class Visionary *George Lipsitz* 346

Notes 357

Publication History 367

Index 371

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# Foreword

NORM DIAMOND

To be human, one must have a story. It's one of the things humans do.  
Not just have a story, but tell a story.

—Chinua Achebe

Stan Weir may be his own best biographer. He is a fine storyteller with the ability, too rare on the left, to show himself in process, actually learning from his experiences and laughing at his own follies. Because they often draw on anecdotes from his life, his essays constitute more than the beginnings of a political and cultural autobiography.

The essays also provide an immensely valuable perspective on our era. Stan was both a thoughtful observer and an active participant in many of the key struggles that shaped the labor movement and the left from World War II to the present. He was working in the auto industry during the decisive fights over the nature of the industrial unions that were still forming. At stake, in particular, was the challenge unions would or would not present to management over control of the production process. Equally at stake was how distant or how responsive union officials would be to their own members.

Stan was also part of the resistance to containerization on the waterfront. He generalized from that experience to a critique of automation under capitalism as a whole. Both as a seaman in the merchant marine and as a worker in auto plants he was active in struggles over racial integration. These were struggles not only in the workplace but also within unions. Throughout this period, Stan maintained his independence within the left. His membership in the Workers Party during the 1940s and 1950s involved him in probably the least dogmatic and most democratic organization of the time. It also provided him with distinct concerns and reservations about most of the efforts to organize left groups subsequently.

Stanley Weir graduated from Garfield High School in East Los Angeles in 1940. He was an avid swing-era dancer, following the big bands. His freckles and hair color earned him the nickname "Red." Experience with the class structure of American society began to shape his perspective in a way that gave a political edge to the nickname. One striking lesson in

the politics of class came nearly a year after graduation. Almost by coincidence, Stan discovered that he and his classmates had been eligible for automatic admission to UCLA as a condition of his high school's participation in the "revised curriculum" of the Los Angeles schools. When he returned to confront his high school principal, Stan learned that the school had deliberately not informed the students of their eligibility. The thinking of the principal—and of the city department of education, as Stan found when he investigated further—was that kids from this part of town were needed as mechanics, drivers, factory workers, and garbage collectors, not as college graduates. Stan was able to enroll briefly at UCLA, but for some of his classmates who had been equally interested in a college education the opportunity was lost.

When the United States joined the war, Stan enlisted as a naval reserve cadet in the merchant marine. His first voyage was on an ammunition carrier, part of a convoy heading for Pearl Harbor and Australia. En route, he spent most of his time with the deckhands, learning splices and seamanship from former members of the Industrial Workers of the World. Gradually, he changed his cadet's khakis for the crew's Frisco jeans. The deckhands told him stories about the great 1934 strike, quizzing him to make sure he had understood their lessons. Three days before he would have become an officer, he resigned his commission, choosing to become an ordinary seaman instead. Membership in the Sailors' Union of the Pacific followed, as did contact with the organized left. As a young leftist, he found like-minded radicals in foreign ports, eager to get fresh news and share perspectives. On one of his voyages, from New York to North Africa, sixty-three of the eighty-two ships in the convoy were sunk, and only a few of the seamen survived.

When the war ended, Stan returned to California. He worked in auto plants in both the Bay Area and Los Angeles, drove trucks, and worked as a painter—all union jobs. In the East Oakland Chevrolet plant, he led a victorious "quickie" sit-down strike over management's failure to comply with a grievance decision on safety. The strike was also a wildcat, originating on the shop floor, designed and executed entirely by rank and file workers. Following the Workers Party philosophy, he was an activist supporting Walter Reuther when Reuther first ran for the United Automobile Workers presidency. Weir was soon disillusioned by Reuther's opportunism and refusal to back assembly-line workers on the issues of greatest importance to them, such as assembly-line speed. Rather than seeing the problem as how to replace bad leaders with good ones, Weir

developed a more structural understanding of union officialdom as a bureaucracy. He came to believe that workers at the point of production should make the key decisions about the purpose, pace, and nature of production, that job-based unionism and shop-floor democracy were the keys to broader social change.

During the period between 1958 and 1965, Stan and Mary Knox were married and began raising a family. In 1959, the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union created a new hiring category in San Francisco. According to the new scheme, "B" men would work irregularly and have the dirtiest jobs, in return for the promise of promotion to "A" status after a year. Within the union, "B" men were to be second-class citizens, barred from participation in union meetings. No longer a member of the Workers Party, Stan went to work on the waterfront and became one of three representatives of approximately seven hundred "B" men. During the next four years, the other two reps were fired by Harry Bridges and the leadership of the union. When Stan called for a replacement election, Bridges eliminated the category of representative, but "B" men remained. In 1963, Stan and eighty-one other "B" men seen as Bridges's opponents were peremptorily fired. Their united battle to recover their jobs led to a seventeen-year struggle that culminated in an unsuccessful lawsuit.

With his workplace and union background as a longtime organizer, Stan was a natural labor educator. Offered a position at the University of Illinois, he taught courses to union locals throughout the state for seven years. This provided him with the opportunity to compare his own experiences with those of the thousands of union workers he met in six- and eight-week classes.

His essays collected in this volume draw on anecdotes from his own life but are rooted in the stories, thoughts, and insights of many fellow workers he encountered. In the mid-1980s, after another stint working longshore (this time in San Pedro, California), Stan cofounded Singlejack Books. Its motto was "Writings about work by the people who do it." Singlejack published worker writers and made sure they got paid. The intention was not only to share work experience and make workers and workplaces visible in a culture that ignores them; it was also to encourage self-reliance and develop working people able to speak out and stand up for themselves and their class. Singlejack editions came out as "little books," able to fit in a purse, lunchbox, or workshirt pocket.

In all his efforts, Stan Weir's allegiances were to people on the job. His

critique of vanguard political parties and his observations about informal work groups are deservedly influential. His writings have the integrity of a genuine radical, someone knowing the right questions to ask, not always sure of the answers but with abundant confidence in the abilities of his fellow human beings, acting in concert, to make the needed changes.

# I. Working-Class Cultures



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## Meetings with James Baldwin

It is possible that some of the most creative and nurturing relationships being formed at any given moment in the life of a society are those grasped by young people newly “out on their own” and about to leave early youth behind, but who are not yet into the main competition. It is also fortunate, though rare, if over the following years they are allowed to meet again and so co-witness for their generation.

James Baldwin and I came to Manhattan’s Greenwich Village by separate ways early in the third year of World War II. He was eighteen, but knew that there was no other life for him than that of a writer. I was twenty-two, a merchant seaman temporarily ashore. We were introduced by Connie Williams, a Trinidadian restaurateur who was about to open her new cafe, The Calypso. She had recently told her friend and well-known artist Buford Delaney that she needed a waiter and to send her anyone he thought would be good. Delaney sent Baldwin.

During the same week, I rented an apartment a few doors from The Calypso with artist Marjorie O’Brien and Mark Sharron, a former shipmate. MacDougal Street was at near center of what was still a genuine Bohemia. Even chance encounters brought excitement. As I left the apartment early one morning, the door to the next apartment was open. Oil paintings stacked on edge covered the entire floor space except for a narrow path. It led to an easel covered with multi-colored droppings. In the path was a sleeping red-bearded man. He was wearing a long black overcoat, also with many droppings. A card tacked on the door said “Jack Probast.” We became friends. Even at later uptown exhibitions, I never saw him in any other garb.

I went outside and walked toward Fourth Street. A sign in a window announced The Calypso’s opening. The door was ajar. Connie greeted me as I entered, “We don’t open until Friday, dear, but sit down and let me fix you something.” We became friends while I ate a large breakfast.

I spent the day at the hiring hall of the Sailors' Union of the Pacific (SUP) deep downtown on Broad Street. It had been located there to re-crew West Coast ships then sailing the Atlantic. When I returned to *The Calypso* in the late afternoon Connie greeted me with the announcement that I was to be a temporary dishwasher and that her waiter, Jimmy, and I were special boarders. Then she introduced us. A unique yet natural adoption process had been set in motion.

At first, Baldwin was shy, but we soon had long discussions. It was not just the talk and the good food that quickly laid the basis for our friendship. *The Calypso* was catching on fast with a unique segment of the public, especially among radical intellectuals. C. L. R. James, for example, sometimes brought Pan-Africanists. Buford Delaney attracted the Henry Miller crowd, and then there were the dancers, musicians, actors, and singers from the equivalent of what are now the off-off-Broadway shows. Many were West Indians carrying well-developed political attitudes.

A common bond among many of these regulars was the feeling that the heads of state in both Russia and the United States were incapable of leading the world to more personal freedom and were themselves part of the problem. It is improbable that there were many other places in New York at that time where people were genuinely entertaining each other in this way, and as an extension of their enjoyment, discussing politics.

Neither Baldwin nor I had ever before been with people who shared their artistic and social talents so generously, almost as regular ritual. We joined the discussions and after-hours parties—both as equals and awed apprentices. He had grown up in nearby Harlem hampered by narrow opportunity to socialize with people of his own age. Until 1940, I had spent my entire life in East Los Angeles, a product of the big band era. The distances we had traveled to arrive at Connie's were close to equal. Life in the Village was as stimulating for him as for me. Just as important, this was the first time either of us had ever been allowed extended face-to-face access to a person of "the opposite race" and the same generation.

One mid-afternoon coffee break, Baldwin talked about what he felt was the work he could do best. He wanted to help make it possible for white as well as Black Americans to witness the Black Experience—and the white experience—as part of the same societal process. After we had talked of this for a while, I asked what he felt was one of the most important things for a white to learn about the history of racial conflict in our country. He countered that I would first have to give him some actual racial experience in my life. I told him about Willie Slayton.

The Slaytons were the first Black family with school-aged children to move into our part of town. Their son Willie entered Garfield High School in 1938. Teachers mentioned that he was the first. No matter that he became one of the school's football greats, his daily presence created openings for change. We all knew that somewhere there were millions of Black Americans. We had seen some of them from a distance. The streetcar that took us downtown passed through the wholesale produce market area where most Black Angelenos then lived. Willie Slayton made them more real. Going to a Stepin Fetchit movie or noticing the price of what we were taught to call "Nigger Toes" (Brazil nuts) in the markets was no longer an unnoticed experience. We got insight that the adult world had more than one kind of war in progress. For the first time the environment was demanding that we think in colors other than white.

"We have had to do the same thing almost from birth for over three hundred years," Baldwin replied when I had finished, "but from the other way around. And I suspect that, for us, the effort has been much more difficult. As people doing the lowest work, we have always had to think about this country in its racial totality, especially when determining our goals. Still, deep down, we have always known that we can't make it alone, and we have to make alliances. There are terrible segregations on the job everywhere. At the same time, when you look at the total production process in our nation, the people doing the work are so racially interwoven that it is impossible to unravel us without exposing how we are actually governed."

Days later Baldwin told me that there had been, for him, an element of positive surprise in my story of the Slaytons. His admission freed me to talk about the segregation in my union. I explained that members of the Sailors' Union had heroically fought scabs, police, and the military during the 1930s, in order to take control of the hiring process and then attain other conditions of dignity. Baldwin listened intently and let it go at that.

The subject did not come up again until a late-night party which had developed at The Calypso around a visiting Afro-Cuban band. I was dancing with a woman who was enjoying her first visit to Connie's place. We talked easily, but then I noticed she had stiffened and was staring at the lapel of my jacket. Suddenly she broke away pointing and yelling, "This man is a member of the SUP, the racist Trotskyist union run by Lundeberg's goons."

Few who heard had any idea as to what she was referring to, what a goon was, or could identify Harry Lundeberg. Baldwin spared me the

need to retaliate. He came out of the kitchen and took a seat nearby. She noticed him, assumed she had an ally, and again took up her attack. "How can anyone be in such a union when they could belong to a progressive union like the NMU [National Maritime Union]?"

Baldwin did not raise his voice. He made direct eye contact with her and explained that anyone accused of Trotskyism was not tolerated in the NMU. But no matter, if racism had indeed been eliminated from the NMU, "then that man you were just dancing with can best serve my people where he is."

I soon got a ship that would make a short North Atlantic run and return to New York only a few months later. It was during this stay ashore that, without asking directly, I nevertheless asked Baldwin to join my radical group, the Workers Party (later the Independent Socialist League). He already knew that it was the product of a split with orthodox Trotskyism and with Trotsky, but he paused longer than usual before tackling a difficult subject. "None of your Shachtmanites, if you will, have ever patronized me. You know that, like you, I do not like this war; you know I agree with you that after all the destruction and death it will probably end with more, not fewer dictatorships in this world. And I agree with you on much more, but what you are really asking of me is impossible. It took you months to become fully aware that I develop relationships that include what is sexual with men. It would have taken you longer if it were not for the presence of a sophisticated Black woman like Catherine Shipley, born and raised right here in the Village. The two of you left here last night after you and I had finished eating together. I saw it happen. She told you without alarm, just out there before you reached the corner. You had known it, and did not know it, because you had buried it. Yes, homosexual is a hard word to accept. You knew instantly that what she said was true. You did not turn on me, but you buried it still another time."

He was being kind and so more effectively judgmental. I had been making him invisible. He waved to plead that I should not interrupt and went on.

"I know that your group does not expel those who join and are then 'discovered' after the fact. But like you, they attempt to ignore this human difference. That it is a matter which cannot be discussed means that the discussion of every subject leads always to that closed door.

"And there is more. There are no active novelist artists among you. They are there in body, but have become silent, stunted. This makes me know that something exists unseen, that there are other unadmitted denials."

Anger had arisen in what he said, but not rejection. I had forced him to do something out of harmony with his style—to make ideology totally specific.

Sometime in the months that followed, I went back to using San Francisco as home port. The war had begun to grind down and the changes it had made were more visible. At the beginning of the war the San Francisco longshore local of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union had only a few dozen Afro-Americans in its membership; by the third year they constituted a majority. Men of European origin had been a minority in the Marine Cooks and Stewards (MC&S) for many years. The Marine Firemen, Oilers, Watertenders and Wipers (MFOW) and the SUP both had Hawaiians, Samoans, Cape Verde Islanders, and Brazilians among their members, but so far as was known neither union had one descendant of an American slave.

I was ashore in 1945 when the Coast Committee of the Sailors' Union developed its position paper on the "problem" caused by the large number of Black men who had recently taken permanent jobs in the West Coast maritime industry. The paper was ready for membership ratification or non-approval at a regular Monday night meeting. It complained that the leadership of the "Communist-influenced" unions on the waterfront were flooding their memberships with Black men in order to develop automatic yes votes for their union policies. (The statement obviously referred to the ILWU and Marine Cooks. The NMU had no West Coast ships under contract.) But the "checkerboarding" of ships' crews with Black and white seamen, said the paper, caused racial friction and so was not acceptable to the SUP. The presentation of the report concluded with the claim that regardless of its racial restriction, the SUP was still a democratic union because it promised that the day the membership came to favor checkerboarding, the official leadership would go along.

I was the first speaker to go to the microphone. I argued that the report "solves nothing" and so "the crisis will continue." I explained it was true that the SUP had conditions that were contractually superior to those on NMU ships, but there were no Black seamen who could hear that as long as we excluded them. I concluded with the claim that the Coast Committee's policy was a gift to the very "Communist leaders" they were so worried about.

The chairman of the meeting was Morris Weisberger. He later succeeded Harry Lundeberg as top officer of the SUP. Lundeberg stood speechless at his separate and personal podium. Weisberger shouted, "And

what would you have done, Brother Weir, if you had been on the Coast Committee?" With that, he stopped short, brought down his gavel, declared the section of the report passed and moved the agenda without a vote. He had realized in mid-sentence, it appeared, that his question gave me the opportunity to speak a second time.

There were out-of-order responses from the audience both before and after I had spoken. Those that came after were different and less racist. A drunken member who had stood immediately after the report was finished to inform all "that the day a nigger comes into this union I'll tear up my membership book," got up again when I had finished speaking to say, "Ah, I'll just take out a withdrawal card."

I interpreted the above incident as a measure of the change that had probably taken place in a large section of the entire audience membership. But the union's racism was now official, and the officials had won too easily. After the victories which established the union in the early 1930s, the rank and file had failed to prepare against two traps: failure to share what had been won with all, failure to make the maximum preparations against the formation of a bureaucracy.

Later that night I phoned Baldwin and described the meeting. I was down. The solidarity subculture that the older SUP men had built in the early 1930s had been a source of strength for me. Now it was a historical lesson. But Baldwin had not expected much. He was less despairing, even a little jubilant. Certainly it would have been better, he said, if more had been accomplished, but the matter had not come and gone in silence, "at least witnesses have been created."

I had almost totally lost contact with Baldwin until a chance meeting months after the war was over, and just hours before he left on his first trip to Europe. Suddenly we were face to face crossing Sixth Avenue at Third Street. We talked briefly on the corner out of traffic. We couldn't talk too long, he had to finish packing.

Yes, he had gotten the Saxton Fellowship to go to France and finish writing *Go Tell It on the Mountain*. A new part of his life was beginning and he was brimming with enthusiasm. I did not have a lot to say, except that I was working on the Chevrolet assembly line in East Oakland and had recently gotten married.

Baldwin saw I was a little down politically and noticed my need to talk. He put aside his efforts to quickly end our chance meeting. We talked briefly but without hurry and said good-bye. I walked to Sheridan Square, reminded of my former shipmate who had been expelled from

the Workers Party on charges brought by the Political Committee. Mark Sharron had gone to Europe to do some writing in 1946, "without party permission." It was the kind of tough discipline that came from the opposite of conviction.

In 1959, *Esquire* magazine sponsored a joint tour by Baldwin, who had just returned to the States after eleven years in Europe, Philip Roth, and, as I recall, John Cheever. The trio made appearances at three Bay Area universities. After Stanford and Berkeley, Baldwin's turn as featured speaker came at San Francisco State. My wife Mary and I attended. Baldwin came home with us to Berkeley, and stayed overnight so that we might catch up.

I had recently become a full-time longshoreman with B registered status along with over seven hundred others. On the second day of his visit, Baldwin accompanied me to the union hiring hall just before dawn. I introduced him around. He was impressed that more than half of the men were Black. At least a dozen of us did not take jobs that day. Instead we took Baldwin to Manjo's, a nearby waterfront cafe. A few faces in the crowd around the big table at Manjo's changed from time to time, but at no time were there fewer than fifteen, until we broke it up in mid-afternoon. This good experience for all the participants did not go unreported to those with power in the industry.

Because of policies initiated by ILWU president Harry Bridges and the employers, we "B" men were not allowed membership in the union. Our disenfranchised section of the work force had elected me as a representative. Without anyone knowing it, Baldwin's involvement in a twenty-year battle by rank and file dockers against the maritime establishment had begun. He left town in high spirits, though not talkative. To add measure to the time, he picked off the shelf our copy of *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and on the inside cover wrote, "It is good when survivors meet."

Connie Williams held a party for James Baldwin on May 20, 1963, at her then-famous San Francisco restaurant on Fillmore Street. It was a celebration of more than just old times. Since 1959, Baldwin had become a literary star, world class. He was in town this time, I believe, making a documentary film which featured the residents of San Francisco's waterfront view of the ghetto at Hunter's Point and the ILWU.

Connie's Restaurant was closed to the public that night. About a dozen old friends were present. Baldwin arrived very late. He had been drinking hard and was exhausted. A retinue of about ten men and women followed him in, including a white man introduced as his "representative." They



kept their party intact. The representative was equipped with records “that Jimmy likes to hear.” Connie selected and played Mahalia Jackson’s “Didn’t It Rain?”

The representative rose from his chair clapping in what was obviously his rendition of Black religious ecstasy. A contingent of CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) activists came in. Several latecomers had phoned friends. The restaurant quickly filled to capacity.

I had to be at the hiring hall early the next morning and interrupted several conversations to say good-bye to Baldwin. He got up protesting, “But we were going to talk. I want to hear what has been happening with the men on the docks.” I said we could do a bit of it right then if he had five minutes. We went into the kitchen for privacy.

I explained that Harry Bridges was offering the “A” men or union members of Local 10 a chance to get most of the “B” men into the union, if only the “A” men would let him fire about one hundred of the “B” men that he considered “bad eggs.” He would not reveal the identities of the “troublemakers” he had targeted. I felt it was all but certain that I was among the number.

When I had finished Baldwin said, “Will you do something, Stan? I can’t begin to absorb this right now. It’s impossible to explain. I apologize. I am leaving for New York in the morning, write me all this, just two pages, right away.”

The next day I outlined what I then knew about what would three weeks later develop into a mass firing. Some of that information is contained in a letter from Baldwin to Coretta King, and in an article he wrote for *Muhammad Speaks*.

I received a note from Baldwin a week later. It read, “Dear Stan: In haste. Have not been well. Apology to the men follows at once, and a more detailed accounting to you. I hope this letter is all right. Jim.” Enclosed was a copy of a letter he had written to Harry Bridges on my behalf. It read:

Dear Mr. Bridges,

I am writing this letter because I have been a friend of Stan Weir’s for nearly twenty years, and I know him to be incapable of dishonesty. This is an enormous statement: but it is impossible to know a man as long as I have known Stan without recognizing the man’s essential quality. If he is anti-progressive and anti-labor, then I am a dues-paying member of the Birch society.

We know each other from very far back—I was a waiter. He is not much older than I am *now*: but when I was a kid, the three or four years difference in our ages made an enormous difference, and I used him as a kind of moral model, a kind of moral older brother. He has never betrayed me, in any way whatever, and he is one of the people I have in mind when I write, when I speak—it comforts me to know that he is in the world.

I beg you, do not betray him. Good men are rare.

Very Sincerely,

James Baldwin

June 28, 1963

Baldwin's letter to Bridges must have arrived at the headquarters of the ILWU on the same day that I received my copy. I got a phone call that evening from a longtime longshoreman. He told me that photocopies of Baldwin's letter had circulated among the headquarters' staff of the ILWU and was received with enthusiastic support by many. The man reporting to me concluded with, "You've got him now. With Baldwin's letter he will never be able to carry out his plan to fire you."

My observations of Bridges during the previous years made me know that he would not relent. I did not pose a threat to him, but the survival instinct of total bureaucrats makes them know that they must stamp out any and every potential opposition. The only force that could save us was the membership of the union. If they were unable to sustain their support, we would experience what in terms of the job is capital punishment.

Eighty-two B longshoremen were fired in June 1963, after secret trial in an action openly directed by Bridges. I was one of them. No charges were given, but we were each asked to write a defense, stating why we believed we were innocent. We refused and demanded to be heard. Fake due process was arranged. We were given a first-and-last appeal hearing presided over by the same men who had fired us. ILWU Local 10 officials and members fought again to save us and failed. Rather than accept injustice in silence and submission, we took our last opportunity to resist by going to the Federal courts.

James Baldwin returned to the United States from a European trip in 1969. He immediately joined the Longshore Jobs Defense Committee that we had formed to raise money for legal expenses. Over 90 percent of the plaintiffs were Black men. Few of us ever regained the earning power we

had known as dockers. We carried the main financial responsibility, but it was impossible for us to do it all when resourced mainly by unemployment insurance and minimum wages.

Our ability to raise money nationally was enhanced in 1967. I had taken a job on the Labor Education faculty of the University of Illinois and was regularly meeting publicly prominent people with experience in fundraising. There were other benefits too. In 1969 the Miller Lecture Series of the University booked several prominent Black intellectuals to speak on the Champaign-Urbana campus. Baldwin was one of them. His turn came toward the end of the series.

At least two hundred Black students and young citizens from segregated North Urbana arrived early. They took the first four rows of seats. An hour later a mainly white audience filled the rest of the auditorium. During all previous lectures in the series the young Black front row audience had not allowed questions to come from the whites to their rear. Baldwin had heard and had understood. Without any reproach he made it clear that no one at that meeting would be denied voice.

When he had concluded his main presentation the third person recognized from the floor was a young white woman in the front row balcony. "Mr. Baldwin, would you respond to the attack made on you by Eldridge Cleaver in *Soul on Ice*?" I heard someone whisper, "My God, that's the part where Cleaver used Baldwin to attack the idea that homosexuality could be an alternative solution to the problems of Black males in this country."

Baldwin had the advantage of total silence. "I'm not going to pretend I like what he said. Nobody likes that kind of an attack, but he was using me to make a point, and take me out of it, he was right."

A gasp from every section of the audience demonstrated instant realization that we were all in the presence of an unusual integrity, someone who could attain objectivity sooner than most, the first prerequisite of leadership. Some wiped their eyes without embarrassment. By integrating ends and means he had given evidence of a greater human potential, and for a time, had integrated the meeting.

Mary and I were in the last row balcony. We had a reunion with Baldwin the next day. He had talked late into the previous night to Black graduate students about "the fight in longshore." The visit was short. When we walked across the tarmac to the plane for New York, we embraced at good-bye, able to show physical affection for the first time. Helped by the change that had spread with the student rebellions of the '60s, we had both shed some fears.

As soon as I returned from the airport I phoned Harvey Swados (1922–1971), novelist and reporter on labor and race conflicts. He had created a distance between himself and the Shachtmanites in the early 1940s in order to devote himself to writing. I knew he was right then writing an article on Eldridge Cleaver for the *New York Times Magazine*. “Yes,” he would like the story in his piece for the *Times*. Minutes later, I phoned Baldwin in New York to get his formal permission.

“What did I say?”

I repeated the question from the young woman in the balcony and his answer.

“Yes. That is the way I would have said it. Of course, give it to Harvey.”

Swados placed the bit in the middle of his article, which appeared late that summer. Months later, Burgess Meredith, who was directing Baldwin’s play *Blues for Mr. Charlie*, came up to Swados at a party: “That cameo of Jimmy in your article on Cleaver. It revealed the essence of the man better than anything I’ve read.”

It was in the weeks after Baldwin’s speech at the University of Illinois that he wrote Coretta King on behalf of the fired San Francisco dockers. At the same time he wrote an article in support of the case which was finally published in the Black Muslim paper, *Muhammad Speaks*. Both of these writings and the letter of explanation to me from Istanbul on August 7, 1969, also reproduced here, make clear the constant presence of near exhaustion in Baldwin’s life after achievement of fame.

Beyond the tensions imposed on Baldwin by career, add the effects of racism and sexism on his personal life, a social conscience that demanded he be available to every movement against injustice, and a sense of personal loyalty to friends, and then it becomes possible to see how impossible were demands on Baldwin’s health.

A Promethean spirit cannot forever overcome the limitations of a frail physique. But then during a phone call in late November 1976, it was clear that Baldwin would forever drive himself when he felt there was good cause: “Buford Delaney is in a madhouse in Paris. We are getting older, but he is seventy-six. In effect, the French government owns all his paintings. I went broke trying to get them out. When I return now I must take it up once more. I did get an apartment and put all the rest of his things in it. It’s too painful for me to say any more.”

Mary and I crashed a publisher breakfast to hear Baldwin speak during the 1979 Convention of American Booksellers Association in Los Angeles. He sighted us and arranged that we sit at his table. Several agents were

competing for his time. A waitress came and Baldwin would only order a double [Johnny Walker] Black Label. We arranged to meet the next day so that again, we might catch up.

Baldwin came down from his room to the lobby of the Bonaventure Hotel with three aspiring Black writers. The penthouse luncheon area was closing, but was kept open for our party only. Waiters were assigned to hover behind us. Baldwin and I were unable to talk so we drank together. When it was time for me to leave, he walked me to the elevator explaining, "I seldom get time for these young writers who must carry on the effort. Too much of the time I am surrounded by business people who have no idea who I am, but I can't as yet extract myself."

A year later, Baldwin and I were both in the Bay Area. I was there to raise funds so that our then sixteen-year-old longshore lawsuit might get reviewed by the Supreme Court. He was there to support a campaign for the improvement of life for prison populations. We made plans for him to meet with us, the surviving plaintiffs he had long championed. At the last minute he couldn't keep the date. There was a note on the screen door of the apartment where he was staying. His hosts had taken him away to a meeting about which they had not informed him in advance.

I wrote Baldwin a letter after he collapsed on the way to teach one day in 1983. We talked on the phone several months later and once again before he died of stomach cancer on December 1, 1987. But we never saw each other again after our Black Label drinking ceremony atop the Bonaventure.

Death doesn't end relationships. The living keep on talking to friends who have passed and continue to get insights from them long after the obituaries. I was recently visited by another friend and writer, Ron Greenspun. He did not know that I was involved in this writing and had come to share an insight in a quote from a work on psychology: "the occurrence of an event is not the same thing as knowing what it is that one has lived through."

The conscious effort to achieve that kind of knowing brought the quality of greatness to Baldwin long before he was published, or waiting on tables.

*Letter from James Baldwin to Stan Weir, August 7, 1969*

Dear Stan,

I finally got the King letter out, and I wired you to that effect yesterday. I sent my letter special delivery to my sister, for I had left Coretta's address on my desk in New York. I left New York that abruptly.

You must forgive me for my terrible delay, which I can hardly explain—exhaustion hit me like a hammer, and knocked me down. I can scarcely put it any other way, for, though I was, as it seemed, somewhat ill—first the stomach, then the eyes—I never really believed that any of it was physical, really. I think I simply panicked, or in effect, fainted. I'm Puritanical enough to be very ashamed of this, but perhaps I had something to learn.

I know that when I came back East, I immediately spent I don't know how long now, from early morning until late at night, in the corridors and court rooms of the Tombs, trying to help a friend fight for his life. I lost that battle, at least for the moment, that is, he's still in jail; and I had to calculate how to begin the battle, which has already taken nearly two years and far more money than I can afford again. There may be sermons in stones, etc., but there are certainly terrible witnesses in those halls: by watching the visitors, you know who's in jail. Enough.

There's also the Huey Newton business. And I've been asked, by the Biafrans, to go to Biafra, to write about it, and somehow define it to the world. This caused, as you can imagine, a very perceptible rise in the level of consternation with which my poor family has had to live, in regard to myself, for so long and led me into a veritable thicket of unanswerable questions. And I kept thinking of my friend in the Tombs, and of the DA who asked me to persuade him to plead guilty, and then, since he's already been in prison nearly two years—without trial—after a year or so they'd let him go. Honor, as it were, among thieves.

But Tony had already turned down the bargain, which, in any case, I could never possibly advise him to accept. The offer seemed—it was—so confident and brazen, and the morality which produced it so pervasive, that every human effort began to seem to me to be unutterably futile and all of my own effort mere doomed pretension: who am I, after all, and who do you think you're kidding, baby? Those big boys are playing for keeps, and nobody's life means anything to them, and you can never win.

That was why I left and why I left so abruptly. Thank God, I'm a writer, for I had to realize, as a writer, that I had reached the most dangerous possible level of demoralization—for, once you can say, why bother, you are free to become wicked. And I'm already wicked and blind enough.

I don't know Stan, the older I get, nearly as much about myself or the world as I did when I was young, and I don't know why it isn't possible to leave things as they are. I hope I'm not complaining, but God knows

I've never dreamed of finding myself in such a place: and all that strengthens me finally, is my own arbitrary decision that I don't after all, really have to know *that*. I have to trust *that*.

Of course, what paralyzes one in a crisis is the terrible wedding between one's private confusions, anguishes, joys—keep the wound open, Kafka warns—and one's public role: one feels like a drunken surgeon, confronting the most important operation of his life. But if I can't write, then I can do nothing whatever, and I'm pregnant with a book and I had to come away to listen to it kick in me, and live with that most particular terror and attention, to submit myself, again, to life. And also to make money to fight those various trials.

I meant to write an open apology to the men, but, in my present state, that strikes me, simply, as being the most insufferable presumption. Please convey to them something of my situation, and my very genuine regret. I also promised you a short statement which you could use publicly, and I now belatedly realize that Coretta's letter is now Coretta's property, and you may not be able to quote from that. And I don't know what to say, I am terribly weary of slogans and battle cries. Public as I am, my commitment becomes nevertheless, more and more private, more and more a matter of the most precise articulation. So, you must simply let me off that particular hook—you have my name, and you have my word.

Take care and keep in touch,  
Jimmy B, Arifi Pasa Korusu, Nazil Ap.14 (D-1), Bebek, Istanbul,  
Turkey

(1989)

## What Ever Happened to Frisco Jeans?

Among San Francisco seamen and longshoremen, the clothes we wore were known as Frisco jeans, white caps, and hickory shirts. Wearing the same clothes, using the same slang words, and sharing jokes enabled us to build a solid identity based on solidarity. The jokes that people tell in working-class port towns like Wilmington and San Pedro where I lived for most of the 1980s carried on that tradition. I first heard some of these in the lower west end of the San Francisco waterfront as told by then (1959) “B” man George Benet.

As one story went, a computer repairman who has just finished a job is walking toward the parking structure that contains his car. Halfway down the block he is approached by a shabbily dressed man with a rolling gait who steps out from a darkened storefront. When he is only a few feet away, it can be seen that he has a gun and that it is pointed at the repairman.

The repairman is wise. He raises his hands high and awaits the inevitable command to turn over his wallet. The gun packer seems unaffected by the repairman’s response. He reaches immediately into his own rear pocket with his free hand and pulls out a large bottle. He extends it to the waiting repairman, and orders, “Here, take a drink of this bottle of whiskey!”

“You must be crazy.”

“I said, take a drink of this bottle.”

The man’s gun still has not wavered. The computer technician is not a gambler, so he slowly lowers his arms and with his right hand reaches out and accepts the offered bottle. He raises it to his lips, and takes a large swig. His body reacts to the jolt almost as if to poison. He doubles over and then straightens out again with the chill that has spread from the base of his back to his scalp. By the time he catches his breath, his fear has been replaced by anger. “My god, that’s awful stuff.”



"I know," the gunman says with all threat gone from his voice. "Here, now hold the gun on me while I take a drink, will ya?"

There is nothing funny about poverty, but those who experience it never fail to invent ways to laugh—even if by graveyard forms of humor. Stand on any street corner with those who have been long unemployed and you'll hear it.

A passerby says a standard good morning to a group standing at a bus stop. In turn, he gets a standard response. "All right, how's it going?" The passerby keeps moving halfway out of earshot and then returns with the punch line, "Can't kill nothing and won't nothing die." The audience around the bus stop all falls out laughing.

The idea is to find some way to at least get a chuckle out of what otherwise would be a nothing situation, to put a laugh in a morning that would be totally drab unless some real-life comic arrives with a creative live effort. Live in these circumstances and you learn to count on the comics. You see one coming and so you wait. When he or she gets there, you set him or her up with an opening remark and you cease all conversation until the awaited one-liner is delivered.

There is nothing romantic about poverty. But hang out with those who have high incomes and you'll find something is missing. Porches are pretty and condos are clean. Still, the laughter you hear doesn't have a deep ring. It's not the money by itself; it's the bad choices that become so easy to make once you get some affluence. In fact, the whole setup is rigged to break you from your own past.

On the block where you grew up you knew everybody and what would and would not go, that is, you knew the way people around you felt and the rules that were built on those feelings. You've seen some of the people you were kids with make it and move out to a suburb where they found a roomy new house. You visit with them every once in a while. They seem lost. They still don't really know their neighbors after ten years. They no longer have signposts to guide them.

On the old block there were three families in which all the fathers worked on the waterfront and five of the mothers worked in the canneries in season. Your friend who moved out still works on the waterfront and commutes. You ask what kind of work his neighbors do. Most of them are salespeople. They're not home much and when they are they stay closed away in their back yards. You know he doesn't hang out at the old bars or around the hiring hall anymore; he's a steady man. You wonder if he has anyone at all to really talk to anymore.

Your dad and mom were special. There was something about them, they worked for every penny they ever got. They never kissed up to anyone and always stood straight. They had dignity. But about one thing they were dead wrong. They made the same speech to you countless times. "Don't be like us and work like a mule all your life, get an education, then you can dress good and sit at a desk." Follow that advice and you might well wind up being one of the guys your dad had to fight all his life on the job. No one can fault education, but what kind? The old man knew about a lot of things and he never finished grammar school.

You have another friend, Dom, who is a merchant seaman for a large oil tanker company. He makes good money and bought a place to keep his wife and kids in Orange County. He doesn't hang out in San Pedro anymore when he's ashore. He says they ruined things when they tore the heart out of Beacon Street for big real estate. Instead, when he's waiting for a ship, or just waiting, he talks with friends in Wilmington bars like Joe Keawe's, the Foc'sle, the Trade Winds, 329 Club, and Amelia's.

You can tell by the way Dom talks that he no longer feels alone when he's in Wilmington. "Christ, it's the only port town around that still has a street. It has all the maritime hiring halls. There's always someone you used to work with for you to run into. Wilmington is the only place left in the entire harbor where it's all real, where there's nothing for tourists or outsiders. Going to sea, for example, I couldn't make it without the kind of rent-a-car places that exist here. I'm going over and walk into one of them right now. I'll drive out in two minutes with a wave of the hand and sign nothing. I'll leave the car in the gangway three nights from now and the owners will come get it. When I get back in three weeks or three months, I'll go in and pay."

So you stay on in Pedro, or Harbor City, or Lomita, even though things aren't perfect. But you spend more time in Wilmington because you know that Dom is right; put aside that you wonder how lonely it must get for his wife out in the tract home boondocks. Yes, where could the action be any better for people who have worked around the water all their lives than between C Street and Anaheim when there are lots of ships in port? Or, what better place is there to be than Friday morning paydays around the longshore hiring hall?

There are people who put down the Wilmingtons of this world. Strangely, some do not want to be reminded of their own roots, maybe because of some bad memories, maybe because they take TV too seriously. But industrial towns, for all their scars, are vitally alive in the present and

are often among the better storehouses of things past. Even the graffiti on the toilet walls of Wilmington bars is more basic to life than generally found elsewhere.

“Once you get married there are three things you need in life, an alarm clock, a lunchbox, and a pair of coveralls.”

On an opposite wall, another sage has written:

The only labor-saving device, a rich wife.

Scrawled just below in brighter and more recent writing:

Or a rich husband.

In another bistro it is possible to read, “It’s safe to go through this hotel lobby at night, if you’re a bullet.”

You probably stay longer at Joe Keawe’s. Whole families hang out there and their kids are treated right. Sometimes you go in on Friday or Saturday nights and get to hear Joe or Joe Junior sing Hawaiian. It’s real. They’re very good, and so is Mrs. Doris Keawe’s cooking. A late-night joke-swapping session produces stories that should be shared like a good whiskey.

The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) was looking for an Australian named Fritz Sexhauer. A phone call is made to what is believed to be the man’s last place of employment, a shipping firm in Wilmington. A switchboard secretary answers. The Immigration officer asks: “Do you people have a Sexhauer there?” “Mister,” she replies, “they don’t even give us a coffee break.”

(1986)

## C. L. R. James

### *Revolutionary Artist*

I have visited with C. L. R. James only a handful of times in the last thirty-three years. I knew him best during World War II and in the period immediately following. Early in the war, I was taken to his cold-water tenement room in uptown Manhattan to be introduced to him. He was surrounded by piles of newspapers and magazines from around the world and was involved in reading and annotating articles from them as we entered. He was ill, but had just finished a draft of an article on the national liberation movement in Western Europe. Just feet away, Grace Lee Boggs was in the process of typing it at high speed. I was a merchant seaman at the time, twenty-one, and had been recruited to the Workers Party only months earlier. In large part, the meeting and ensuing discussion with James caused me to make New York my home port for extended periods.

James had been in this country only a few years when the war broke out. After having led the formation of the Trotskyist movement in England he had felt, it was my impression, the need to be in a major industrial society that contained a significant Black population. Immediately upon his arrival he involved himself in the biracial southeast Missouri sharecroppers' strike. At the same time the Trotskyists here were in deep debate on the nature of the Russian state. James, like Max Shachtman, James Burnham, James Carter, and Martin Abern, was unable to believe that Russia was any longer a workers' state in any form, "degenerated" or otherwise. The division of Poland and the invasion of Finland at Stalin's command had finally polarized the debate. A split in the movement occurred in which many of the intellectuals and youth left the orthodox Trotskyist group (Socialist Workers Party) of James P. Cannon and formed the Workers Party. They were dubbed "Shachtmanites," but C. L. R. played an important part in the formation of the new group, the only sizeable Marxist organization in America to refuse political support of the war.

Like Shachtman, James believed that it was impossible to defeat the forces of fascism from a capitalist base. It was felt that such an effort and war could only end in a devastation which would increase the degree of totalitarian rule worldwide.

Instead the Workers Party raised the idea of the Third Camp, maintaining that to continue to raise the concept of an independent socialist alternative to the policies of both Washington and the Kremlin was a necessity. But unlike Shachtman, James felt that Russia in no way represented a separate though reactionary or "bureaucratic collectivist" alternative to both socialism and capitalism. While he agreed with the Shachtman position in many ways, James pointed to the nature of social relations in Russian production and insisted that a form of "state capitalism" was the result.

For all factional tendencies, James's included, the Workers Party provided a valuable base for the generation and testing of alternative ideas. While only six hundred in number, as compared to the Communist Party, which contained the overwhelming majority of the left, the Workers Party provided basis for practical development of theory.

Most of its membership was employed in heavy industry. Its weekly newspaper, *Labor Action*, circulated in the tens of thousands. In nearly every branch there were people who influenced or led in the formation of progressive union caucuses that were trying to keep the employers from using the war effort as an excuse for taking back gains made by workers during the '30s. In turn, this automatically had them play a prominent role in rallying resistance to the Communist Party's super-conservative policies inside unions and Black communities. Many thousands of rank and filers whose struggles had until recently been led by the Communists faced a leadership vacuum as the war progressed. Suddenly, the Communists made all-out attempts to put unions on record for a wartime and post-war "No Strike Pledge," "National Labor Conscription," and "A Return to Piecework." Furthermore, they sought to postpone efforts to obtain a Fair Employment Practices Act for the war's duration. By default, responsibility for leadership was in large part placed on those who opposed the Communists from a radical and not conservative position. The ground was laid for an alliance between militant rank and filers and socialists who were to the left of the Communists. C. L. R. James, among others, did not sidestep this opportunity.

By 1942, C. L. R. James had formed a total faction inside the Workers Party. This development was inevitable and necessary for survival on the

part of any grouping with significant differences from the majority. The Workers Party was consciously structured with specific democratic practices as guarantees to prevent the development of bureaucracy, although we were still operating on an interpretation of Lenin's concept of the vanguard party. The presence of James's grouping of workers and intellectuals, among others, operationally maximized those guarantees.

Trotsky's evaluation of the objective situation going into the Second World War had been that the end of the conflict would see the disintegration of Stalinism in Russia and the outbreak of further revolutions in Europe. This did not happen. Even by mid-war, it became clear that the displacement of working class forces in Europe had become so total that there were no more critical mass groupings to win over. The rank and file associations that had been hidden strengths for the left were displaced, rearranged, even atomized. New conditions were an aid to organization from the top down only. Each expansion of Russian control in Europe, moreover, brought the roundup and disappearance of Trotskyists. There would be no quick recouping of the Russian Revolution or any revolution in Western Europe.

The Shachtman leadership, having lost the basis for any success in the Third Camp perspective for the foreseeable future, in major part lost its perspective. The goal became "to hold on," waiting for a break. James did not share this pessimism, and consequently was accused of romanticism. Not long after the war, he led his group back into the Socialist Workers Party, but this reassociation was to have short life. The Bolshevik success in the 1917 revolution against the tsar had shown that small groups could grow into mass parties almost overnight. We had been operating as if that was a permanent condition. It could now be seen, however, that periods of this sort are temporary; that adapting the Bolshevik vanguard party model to all societies under all conditions resulted in a form of elitism. On the agenda was the need for the formation of tendencies whose function would be the development of theory for socialist experiment that could be both revolutionary and democratic in relation to a new epoch. The going was to be hard for all.

In less than two years after joining the Socialist Workers Party, it became necessary for James to lead his group out again in a try at going it alone. By the 1950s, the organization suffered two internal splits. After continued government harassment of James during the McCarthy period, he was forced to return to England. Within a few years and despite heroic efforts, in effect, the group dissolved.

None of the above experiences caused C. L. R. James to give up a life design based on opposition to oppression. It was native to him regardless of changing political circumstances. Splits, for example, are experiences which often have devastating effects on the participants from both sides. To survive them takes a degree of objectivity. James understood that political organizational divorce is often what people must do when they find it necessary to test new ideas. But this goes only a little way to explain why James has continued to be a major presence in the resistance community of the world. It has always seemed to me that the strength of C. L. R. was some how tied up in his self-respect and consequent ability to have faith in the strengths of others. In the Workers Party, for example, when a feeling of demoralization began to raise a tendency which felt that the "problems" of Blacks might somehow be resolved without a socialist revolution, James countered without ambiguity. Moreover, he put forth the idea that to survive and build a new and integrated society, Black Americans would need to form their own separate struggle organizations, a development that would come and of which he had no fear.

James was the first and only leader in the entire Trotskyist movement, or any socialist movement, from whom I heard discussion of the special form of workers' control which develops in every workplace naturally and informally. He knew of the existence of informal cultures and felt they were the basis from which to broach the entire question of workers' control. In a somewhat abstract discussion within the Workers Party in about 1946, James wrote a document containing a sentence which went something like the following: "It is not impossible to conceive there could be workers' councils within the United States in two years." His opponents crowed that this was proof of a deep-seated romanticism overriding all his expectations for American workers and Blacks. If his prediction was firm, timetable intended, he was clearly mistaken. But that does not take away the fact that his methodology and approach were absolutely correct. I feel sure that he had not read any of the literature that had come out of the Hawthorne experiments, but he listened to workers. For me, he introduced the ideas which demonstrated the value of what is done socially from below on the job to get out production and to survive. All differences recede behind that, and I, like many others, am deeply indebted to him for that insight.

It wasn't all just politics. In my early twenties, C. L. R. was (and remains) one of the most attractive personalities I had ever met. In fact, in the 1940s he was one of the few leaders that I knew in any movement who

from childhood had experienced real social adjustment. A teenage star in cricket, the major sport of Trinidad at the time, he had early developed an ease which allowed him to relate without difficulty in almost any social stratum. I particularly appreciated the enthusiasm with which he ate good food and drank good booze, his eagerness and insight when evaluating moving pictures, and, at a time when we were both single, his ability to initiate discussions with attractive women without formal introduction. To mind springs a late supper in the Village at Connie's Calypso Restaurant after seeing *The Glass Key* starring Alan Ladd. Our table companions had never heard cinema analysis used so effectively to relate the depths of alienation in our society, but I knew as I switched attention momentarily from them, to myself, and back to James, neither had I.

For me, it would be impossible to comprehend James without seeing him as an artist and literary critic first, as is indicated among other ways by his novel *Minty Alley*, and by *Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways*. He is an artist upon whom history imposed the need for full-time participation in revolutionary politics—an artist who came to the world movement with the natural strengths of the heritage that is the history of Black revolution in the Caribbean.

(c. 1981)



## The Role of the Individual and the Group in the Creation of Work Cultures

At the time of this writing (August 1980) two large shipyards separated by eight thousand miles have been closed by illegal strikes. The fate of the sit-in at the Vladimir Ilyich Lenin shipyard in Gdansk and of the pre-revolutionary development it has initiated is still undetermined. The National Steel and Shipyard Company of San Diego, California, however, is running again. Thirty-two rank and file strike leaders at the yard, all members of the Ironworkers Local 627, have been fired. Their future awaits lengthy determinations by showcase arbitrators, case by case, victim by victim.

The dissimilarities between these two struggles are many, but there are ways in which the likenesses take on profound importance. Both groups of workers broke with routine conduct to battle openly in defiance of their employers, the law, top government functionaries, and union officials. Both strikes were illegal. The Polish maritime workers in Gdansk ignored direct government edicts, while the San Diego workers had to break the unconditional no-strike and arbitration clauses of their collective bargaining contract.

Both strikes were sparked by harsh disciplinary offensives by employers. The background of events in the Polish strike has been more widely reported, lines are more clearly drawn there, and people more easily named. Anna Walentynowicz was a leader of the 1970 strikes in the Gdansk yard. By the mid-1970s she was part of an alliance between workers in the yard and a group of dissident intellectuals. She was also an outspoken proponent of free trade unions and against those controlled by the Communist Party state. In early August, one month before her retirement she was fired. That act, as she told a television reporter, "was simply the drop that made an already bitter cup run over." Later she was quoted as saying that the real reason for the outbreak was the ". . . lying and cheating the government does." She was rehired after a hearing before a labor court.

According to pickets on duty in front of the NASSCO yard in San Diego, management had made it a habit to begin victimizing militant stewards in the months before the opening of contract negotiations. In late July, a popular steward was fired. The ranks perceived that as an opening shot consistent with management's pattern of intimidation. On August 2, about fifty local leaders and shop stewards demonstrated at the launching ceremony for a new warship against the firing and against poor working conditions. They made it impossible for the Undersecretary of the Navy to make his speech. The company retaliated by firing seventeen of the demonstrators. About half were local union officers. The Ironworkers Local then shut down the yard with the workers in all seven unions (six thousand workers) out in solidarity. Women were prominent in the strike leadership.

Local 627 is said to have a history of taking job actions to obtain quick settlement of grievances. It was already in tension with officers of the international union. The international sent two top officers from Washington, DC, who began a back-to-work movement, undercutting the largest local in their union, and destroying attempts at open solidarity from the ranks of the other unions in the yard. More firings followed and brought the total to thirty-two. Among them were the two top leaders of Local 627, Reynaldo Inchaurregui and Miguel Salas. The fired leaders were put in the position of urging their ranks to go back to work to avoid continued violation of the contract. Their ability to justify their work stoppage as a response to an illegal employer offensive had been undercut by the international. They called for a continuation of the struggle from the inside, the only way that concessions can be forced from neutral arbitrators. In the course of the attack on the local leadership there was talk about the presence of "communists," much in the same way that the Polish strike leaders were accused of being under the influence of "anti-socialist" elements.

There are other important parallels between the two shipyard fights and the people who conducted them. Both groups of workers were invisible in the media, until they quit work. Television, press, and radio have never reported what the San Diego workers do on the job when production is going. It is more than likely that the same is true in Gdansk. But most important to this discussion are the similarities in the work cultures of the two workplaces.

In each of the shipyards, the workers developed leaders loyal to them. This does not happen straightaway by official election. The leaders are

symbols of a complex process—and are one of its products. The process begins in informal work groups with (1) *the socialization necessary to the performance of the job*. It then graduates to (2) *fun socialization*, and then escalates to (3) a *socialization of mutual protection*. Leaders emerge from these groups by selection of their peers. In turn, from among their number, workplace leaders come forth with sufficient backing to challenge official union bureaucrats. At the Lenin and NASSCO yards, these native organizations took over. Their development would have been impossible without the support of a work culture. During the course of the three already mentioned forms of socialization, the participants (4) *analyze areas of their experience*, (5) *find attitudes in common*, (6) *make evaluations*, and (7) *come to agreements*. Actions by and personalities among opponents get labeled and nicknamed. All of this acts to legitimize the side that is “us.” Finally, it enables defeat of the fear that stands in the way of action. As submission wanes, group cultures and resources are merged. Out of the boldness that makes alliances possible, departmental cultures are forged. The integration of department cultures establishes a workplace culture which takes its place in the broader occupational culture.

In Gdansk and San Diego, we have witnessed strikes but also the existence of cultures which are related despite lack of direct contact. Experiences with similar technologies, conflicts with employers, and common human need reveal what sociologists call the “cultural convergences” or the universals in the two events.

In more than a dozen years of teaching courses for shop stewards in labor education programs I have found only a handful who were familiar with the terms “informal work group” or “work culture.” In every case, however, only the briefest introduction to these concepts created immediate recognition and instant insight as to their uses. The first reaction is inevitably joy of discovery and revelation, followed by a brief period of exasperation for not having seen the obvious sooner. “We’ve been living in these groups all our lives and doing these things and were so close to them and it all came about so naturally we didn’t see it. Why is this the first time that this subject matter has been brought to our attention?” The self-criticism never lasts long because all present have found better self-esteem and previously unrecognized sources of strength, all due to the focus on a subject virtually ignored by both unions and radical political organizations.

(1982)

## Work Force Writers on the Rise

Last January 14, the *Wall Street Journal* carried a front-page story titled “Workers Who Write about Factory Life Can Be Riveting,” by staff writer Alex Kotlowitz. Aside from the cute journalism of the title, the article was a serious report on published writings by working people about life on the job. This development is the first of its kind in our country.

The main focus of the article centers on three writers: Ben Hamper, a Flint, Michigan auto worker; William Pancoast, also an auto worker, employed at a GM plant in Mansfield, Ohio; and Reg Theriault, who has been working on the San Francisco waterfront for twenty-six years.

The article also mentioned my publishing firm, Singlejack Books, and three of the titles that I publish: *A Machinist’s Semi-Automated Life* by Roger Tulin, *Night Shift in a Pickle Factory* by Steve Turner, and *Longshoring on the San Francisco Waterfront* by Theriault. “California publisher Singlejack Books,” said Kotlowitz, “almost exclusively prints books by blue collar authors.”

There was no mention anywhere in the article of the precise location of Singlejack Books, but by noon of January 14 two major metropolitan daily papers, a major publishing house, a prestigious magazine, and two top-rated television shows phoned for interviews. The experience of this media attention carried some shock, mainly because of the apparent power of the *Wall Street Journal*.

Along with veteran San Pedro longshoreman Robert Miles, I founded Singlejack Books in 1977. The very first title that we published, *A Place in Colusa*, a volume of short stories and poems by San Francisco longshoreman George Benet, generated rave reviews not only in the *Long Beach Press-Telegram*, but the *Chicago Tribune*, *Detroit News*, and a dozen other respected major league publications. Miles and I built on that foundation by producing a full-length novel by and about a Detroit welfare case-worker, Oliver Cote, and three shirt-size or “little books” for on-the-job

reading. The first of these was by Theriault; the second was *Steelmill Blues* by Steve Packard; and third we brought out was *Labor Law for the Rank and Filer* by labor lawyer Staughton Lynd. These books also received positive critical response in the regular press, academic journals, and labor periodicals.

With the possible exception of *USA Today*, the *Wall Street Journal* has the largest circulation of any daily in the country. Not only does it report business and industrial news, but it devotes space regularly to art, literature, and music. There is some evidence that newspaper people everywhere are in awe of the *Journal*, but this observation aside, there is far more significance in the small “p” political sensitivities reflected by the *Journal*’s attention to all matters concerning the attitudes of working people. The article on worker writers provides a case example.

There is a question posed by the Kotlowitz feature story: “Why is it that American workers are now seeking to bring visibility to their lives through the printed word?” Kotlowitz put the question to the leading labor folklorist, Archie Green, who grew up in East Los Angeles and now lives in San Francisco. Green responded with words to the effect that there is presently a failure of the top labor union leadership, and that the new worker writing may well reflect the efforts of the rank and file to fill the vacuum from below.

I have known Archie Green for many years. We come from the same part of Los Angeles and we were on the faculty of the University of Illinois at Champaign together for eight years. I am sure if he had more space he would say that every new social development has more than a single cause. The educational level in the labor force is higher today than in the 1930s. The people have more formal education, and have learned more on their own in this new world of television and instant international news. At the same time, the technology of printing has advanced to the point where people publish books without the backing of large sums of capital. For an example, one need look no further than this writer. I returned to California in 1975, and settled in San Pedro in order to conduct some research for the National Institute of Mental Health. As a former merchant seaman and member of the Sailors’ Union of the Pacific, I began to meet old shipmates like the late and well-known waterfront personality Lideo Baldiez. Partly because I was a former longshoreman, he began to introduce me to his co-workers. Through him, I met Robert Miles.

Robert Miles was the founder and operator of the Small Press Book Club in the mid-1970s. He knew how to publish books. I had a former

longshore partner in San Francisco, George Benet, who had a manuscript but no publisher. One day I asked Miles how much it would cost to publish a thousand copies of a sixty-four-page book of Benet's poems and short stories. Miles's estimate now seems somewhat low, "Just under five hundred dollars." "But," Miles asked, "what will we do with the books?" "Give them to Benet," was my answer, "he will get them into the hands of hundreds of libraries and readers within months, he's a performer."

We took delivery on the books four months later. Miles sent out over a hundred review copies to various newspapers and journals. In mid-July 1977, the *Long Beach Independent Press-Telegram* published a high-praise review by Dr. Eileen Lothailer of the English Department at Long Beach State University. Her review carried the publishing company name we had chosen and a post office box address. We soon began to get orders for Benet's book, and so we had to go out and buy jiffy bags, stamps, labels, and a stapler. We were in business. We felt good. Benet was riding the top of a new self-image and became the book's best salesperson. The good reviews kept on coming, in the *Chicago Tribune*, *Los Angeles Times*, *San Francisco Review of Books*, academic journals, and other national dailies.

We knew there were other worker writers out there. I had also worked partners on the waterfront with Reg Theriault. Friends led us to other writers. After we had published four or five titles, however, writers began to seek us out. A case in point is Maynard Seider, who published *A Year in the Life of a Factory* with us. He wrote us asking if we would be interested in a book about his factory experiences. Roger Tulin was in the audience when I made a speech on automation at Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He wrote me later to discuss some of the ideas I had presented. The letter was so well written that I suggested he write a book. The result was *A Machinist's Semi-Automated Life*.

(1986)

# I Am Lonely

I am lonely.

I have a wife and family, relationships with them that would hit median on most scales.

I have a number of friends, yet, I am enshrouded by a sense of isolation. I do not dwell on it, but it overtakes me daily.

It is a political, intellectual-artistic loneliness. I lack a sense of intellectual-artistic community. There are too few in my daily contact with whom I can share thoughts and find legitimacy. Few? None would be a more accurate word.

It might be that a large part of the problem is San Pedro. From a distance, though still in sight, I sense community with the maritime workers I see around me as I move about the area. But this is obviously not enough. Nor, I suspect, is the real problem San Pedro.

In my mind, I list my friends around the country. They're all politicals, either small or large "p." With none of them have I sufficiently parallel depth of interest to supply me with kindred soul company.

What I am really looking for are friends who are intellectuals of the sort represented by Jean Malaquais in *War Diary*; Harvey Swados in "A Story for Teddy" and "Coney Island Uncle"; by Gide of *The Journals of André Gide*; by Rilke, Goethe, Dzerzhinsky, Max Sterling, Albert Goldman, Clement Greenberg, James Jones of *From Here to Eternity* (not the succeeding books); Yasunari Kawabata (all titles); by *The Harp of Burma*, of an earlier Clancy Sigal in *Weekend in Dinlock* and *Going Away*; Ignazio Silone, his unrevised *Bread and Wine* and *Fontamara*; André Malraux of *Man's Fate*; John Fowles of *Islands* (especially); Jimmy Baldwin of *Nobody Knows My Name* (and other essays); and Carolyn See—her reviews in the *L.A. Times* on *Mother and Son*, *Her Side of It* (Thomas Savage), and *Mary*.

Of the above, Malraux and strangely enough Silone fall into secondary places. C. L. R. James could be added. The greatest authors explain the

human condition in a way so that none turn up as villains, so that no matter the depth of corruption of the people they describe, all are understandable as part of the total human condition.

Some of those mentioned above I have known personally. I have failed with most of them. I found that while they were able to provide the nurture I am seeking in their writing, face-to-face it was not possible. Sterling, Goldman, Baldwin are the exceptions. Why was that sense of kinship possible with them and not with the others? It seems to me that in each case they were more concerned with how they lived their work or political life than with how they lived among those in their circle of reach.

Baldwin provides examples of both. Exceptional communication was possible before he became a superstar, not after. C. L. R. James was always too preoccupied with building his grouping. He made new friends, but once it was clear they would not join, they were cut off. Harvey was completely swamped by the necessity to make a living as a writer. To a slight degree the same is true of Clancy. Who knows what category the people I did not list would fall into? Probably the lesser one, for most of us are dogged by the necessity in some way to get involved in the market: the commercial market as writers and academics, the political market as sectarian politicians.

From this it appears that the pitfall that one must try to avoid is being swept up in self to the point of preoccupation, wherein one has little or no time to devote to friends, to give freely, to display intellectual generosity when there is no publication reward or political advantage to be had.

Selfless? No. It is absolutely necessary to have this high sense of responsibility and generosity. Neither sacrifice of self to the point where one loses one's own hold on one's potential nor sacrifice for that potential to the point where one loses sight of the human condition. For that, more than anything else, distracts from one's sensitivities and "career."

The crisis of loneliness within me has reached that point where I must sometimes seem to some to be uncool. Yesterday I phoned Carolyn See. I do not know her, but simply got her phone number from information. On my second try, inhibited but driven to make contact, I got her. It turned out that she had just returned from her father's funeral. I told her that she did not know me, that I had read her reviews and was thrilled with her ability to articulate the most complex of human conditions. I read for her some of her own formulations from the reviews. I told her that this



ranked with the best of what has come from the top French intellectuals. Also, that she obviously understood the effects of work on people.

From that point I went on to let her know of Singlejack and what kind of an effort it is so that she could see the motivation on my part. I told her, "this is not a lonely hearts club call, I'm married and not looking for an intellectual singles club, etc."

"Gee whiz" . . . she was overwhelmed and that was all that came from her at first. Finally, she said that it would be best if we could meet by my attending the writing class she teaches. (I had told her that I wanted to meet her.) I was now a little embarrassed and inhibited with what I had done.

"I know it's strange to get a call like this. I may come out to your class, but I don't know. If you are ever down this way, please let us know."

Overnight I dangled in my own embarrassment some more. Today I sent her all our books and the promo material, and gave her some explanation of how we got Singlejack going. She may now understand a little better.

In that phone call I did something not usually done. All out front and no reserve, almost. Just here we are out here and we think that you are someone we want to list among kindred souls. I do not think I would have handled it that way unless I were in the crisis I described.

It used to be that I counted Kim, our older daughter, in on the closest circle. I always knew she understood what I was about. Now, or for now, that is, in large part, not there. She has to develop her own independent life and can't spend a lifetime being one of my support agents. Laurie, our younger daughter, understands it all, is living it more and more as she sees the intellectual jungle that surrounds the architectural artistic community. But she, too, has to live her own life. Just thank the gods that I know that there are two young people out there who do understand even though they cannot be in my immediate circle.

If, among my friends all around the country, there was the real thing potentially anywhere among them at this time, it could be sustained even by correspondence. But no, it is not in the cards. They are all taken up with their own race towards . . .

What I am really saying here is that the condition in society has all so sewn up that the quality of life is deteriorating.

I am also afraid that in part it is age. When younger, we all had more time. Those who still survive of my generation are into the race all the more because they are on the last laps—and know it.

There may be something that I can do from here to get in with a group-  
ing, but I doubt it. Better if I lived in New York City or even on the West  
Side of Los Angeles, if I could stand what goes with it out there. Frisco  
would be a halfway house. For now, I must work and look and watch and  
wait for opportunities as I develop something on my own.

(c. 1981)

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## II. The Human Costs of Automation

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## New Technology

### *A Catalyst for Crises in Collective Bargaining, Industrial Discipline, and Labor Law*

Eighty-two San Francisco longshoremen, myself among them, were fired from their jobs on the same day in 1963. While we were at work on June 19, letters were delivered to each of our homes. They contained notices that we had been “deregistered” (discharged) as full-time employees of the Pacific Maritime Association (PMA), an employers’ association. Somewhere in the port of San Francisco in the preceding weeks we had been tried, found guilty, and received the maximum sentence—economic capital punishment—all by secret process. These events constituted the first mass firing of longshoremen represented by the International Longshoremen’s and Warehousemen’s Union (ILWU) since that union was founded in the general West Coast maritime strikes of the 1930s. It also marked the first time that the ILWU had ever been party to the discharge of dockworkers.

Written under the letterhead of the Joint Port Labor Relations Committee (JPLRC) of the PMA-ILWU, the identical and unsigned discharge letters did not specify charges. Instead, they told us only that the firings had been accomplished “pursuant to the provision of #9 of the Memorandum of Rules Covering Registration and Deregistration of Longshoremen in the Port of San Francisco . . . Such deregistration was based upon the determination of the Committee that you have violated the applicable rules.” Upon studying this provision, we discovered that it contained a list of all the “applicable rules,” ten of which outlined specific violations; the eleventh, and last rule, allowed the governing parties to fire “for any other cause.” This failure to specify charges was a violation of the Memorandum of Rules, which contained in its text a model of the letter to be sent as notice of deregistration. In the appropriate position on the model was a blank space under which were the instructions, “Here list the charges.”

In addition to this omission, the joint committee’s letter read: “In the event that the Joint Labor Relations Committee receives within fifteen

days after the date of this letter, a detailed written statement signed by you, satisfactorily demonstrating that there is no ground for your deregistration, and requesting a hearing, you will be given a hearing, at which time you may show cause, if any you have, why such deregistration should be rescinded.”

Even had we been willing to endure it, it was impossible for us to give proof of our innocence as asked, or in any other form, for we were denied a list of the charges against us. The ILWU had a national reputation as a progressive union, yet every concept of democratic due process was being violated. There was no precedent for what was happening to us, and although we knew that the ILWU rank and file exercised limited power, we were witnessing a complete reversal in the basic role of a union. This was not the result of some veiled form of gradual bureaucratic drift. In this instance, the top officialdom of the ILWU was collaborating with employers, literally doing management’s job out in the open. The joint parties to the collective bargaining agreement obviously felt free to select victims and then design new rules to dispose of them in brazen disregard of long-established procedures.

At least twenty-five of us responded by asking for an immediate hearing. All requests were granted and appeal hearings were set for July 9, 10, and 11, 1963, in the cargo shed on Pier 24 of the Embarcadero in San Francisco. Our attempts to learn the charges and prepare a defense continued to prove futile. Union officials would not meet with us, or answer our phone calls, registered letters, and telegrams. A state of confusion existed within the general membership with many conflicting rumors circulating throughout ILWU San Francisco Local 10. The joint committee had accomplished the firings without making the identities of the victims known to the rest of the bargaining unit. Since the rank and file were no more organized than we, there was no vehicle for communication between them and those who were terminated.

In an effort to exhaust all possibilities, I sent the following telegram on July 7 to R. R. Holtgrave, then Secretary of the JPLRC, with copies sent to ILWU International president Harry Bridges and PMA president Paul St. Sure:

RECEIVED YOUR LETTER NOTIFYING ME THAT I AM TO HAVE HEARING JULY 11TH. I WILL BE PRESENT BUT YOU HAVE NOT YET TOLD ME THE CHARGES YOU INTEND TO TRY ME FOR. I AGAIN REQUEST YOU SO INFORM ME AND NOT FORCE ME TO APPEAR WITHOUT PREPARATION.

Holtgrave's answer by return wire on July 9th became the one break in the official silence that lasted until the opening day of the hearings. It read:

YOUR UNION IS YOUR EXCLUSIVE BARGAINING REPRESENTATIVE ON YOUR GRIEVANCE. UNLESS YOU INTEND TO PROCEED INDEPENDENTLY WITH THE EMPLOYERS UNDER SECTION 9 OF THE NATIONAL LABOR RELATIONS ACT, YOU SHOULD CONSULT WITH YOUR UNION REGARDING THE HEARING.

Section 9 of the amended National Labor Relations Act, commonly known as the Taft-Hartley Act, allows employees to bypass their union and to process their own grievances with management on an individual basis. This was of no use to us because our fight was to get union representation, not get away from it. We wanted to get collective protection and put an end to the vulnerability we were experiencing as individuals. In a last-ditch effort just hours before the appeal hearings, I sent a copy of Holtgrave's wire to Local 10 president James Kearney along with an appeal for representation and the provision of charges. Even though Holtgrave's response designated the union as the terminated dockworkers' sole legal representative, I received no reply.

On each of the hearing days, the scene in the waiting room outside the makeshift hearing chambers on Pier 24 had a "death row" atmosphere. We gathered by numbers as instructed and awaited our turns. None of us was broke or broken, but the experience was taking its toll. There was none of the good-humored banter that is commonplace at dockworker gatherings. We had all now experienced unemployment for three weeks. It was futile to file new job applications without listing our employer for the previous four years. The PMA had denied our unemployment insurance claims on the ground that we were "voluntary quits," that we had allegedly followed a course of conduct that we knew could end only in termination of employment. There was a silence among all of us at the hearings because the futures of whole families were about to be determined. Many of us could expect to never again find employment that equaled our chosen occupation. Ninety percent of us were black. They and the others as well faced the specter of returning to their marginal jobs of pre-waterfront years. We had temporarily fallen to that "low" which is the hope for individual escape.

The door to the hearing chamber opened. A sergeant-of-arms stuck his head out and called a name. One of our men answered, rose stiffly, and went inside. The door opened again a few minutes later and another name



was called. But what had happened to the first man? It wasn't hard to make an accurate guess. As each hearing concluded, the appellant was being ushered out a rear exit, down an alternative stairway, and off the pier. The contrivance exposed the true nature of the hearings and made us angry. When my turn came, I entered and took the lone chair facing the judges on the other side of the long table. Local 10 president James Kearney and business agents Joe Perez and his two assistants did not look up from their papers. These six comprised the Joint Port Labor Relations Committee (JPLRC). It was they who signed the official deregistration notices. Now they were acting as their own appellate court.

The biggest unknown for me in that room at that point was the presence of eight or nine other men. The man in the bow tie seated at the center of the table I guessed to be Richard Ernst, head counsel for the PMA. The younger man next to him was obviously an assistant. In the next seat was Tommie Silas, a local union business agent with a longtime reputation as an errand runner for Harry Bridges. Both Silas and the other former Local 10 official next to him had stacks of paper in front of them, but Kearney and the other union officials did not have a scrap. Clearly, it was Silas and his colleagues who were being cast in the role of prosecutors. Yet they held no elected office. Where did they get the authority?

My memory began to provide me with some possible explanations. These men were members of the Joint B List Committee. Five years earlier, they had processed our applications and interviewed us along with about seven hundred others who were being recruited to the industry. The formation of this committee was viewed by some longshoremen as a defeat for Local 10. Previously, from the beginning of the union, Local 10 had held substantial control over entry to employment in the port. With the establishment of the Joint B List Committee, control over hiring was now in the hands of the employers and the leadership of the international union. I surmised that the B List Committee must have been the body that tried us in secret and decided to discharge us. Already under way was a plan by the international union essentially to eliminate Local 10's control of grievance procedures, a control that had held firings to a minimum. Local 10 president Kearney had thus far refused to make an issue of it before the rank and file. To avoid open battle, he was rubber-stamping the victories of the PMA. The mass discharge was going to remain a smoke-screen for a continued power grab.

JPLRC secretary Holtgrave confirmed my chain of deductions. In his role as hearing chairman, he read to me from a list of rights and instructions

for appellants and stated that I was not to be allowed counsel, the right to face accusing witnesses, nor the opportunity to produce witnesses in my own behalf. I would be informed of the general area of the rule infraction that I had committed, but I could only learn the exact detail of the charges by going to the Joint PMA-ILWU Records Office two weeks later. The chairman concluded his instructions to me with a statement to the effect that I was now free to make any defense in my own behalf that I deemed appropriate. I questioned Holtgrave and learned that the committee was going to make its final judgment before we had the opportunity to learn the exact nature of the charges in the Records Office, and that none of the signatory judges would be present at that time to hear our defense. Holtgrave then turned the hearing over to Silas who quickly stated that over a four-year period I had falsified entries on job dispatch records to give me more hours of work than I would have received had I not, in effect, crowded into line ahead of co-workers during the daily hiring process. I countered that his allegations were false. It was my word against his, and the only evidence of my innocence was on the forms on which I had allegedly made dishonest entries. Not surprisingly, they had somehow been destroyed.

I warned all present that we would not submit to this frame-up silently. I rose to leave, but before I could reach the exit door, the assistant PMA attorney called me back. He had a set of questions designed to get me to say that I considered the discharge action a form of discrimination according to Section 13 of the union contract. That section established an exclusive grievance procedure for anyone who claimed he had been discriminated against for racial, religious, or other reasons. Had we invoked that section, we would not be able to file suit against the firings later in federal court. His efforts failed. During a trial in federal court eleven years later, this same man would be one of two former PMA attorneys to testify in the plaintiffs' behalf.

On the night of July 11, just three hours after the hearings concluded, President James Kearney called to order a regular business meeting of Local 10. He then made a motion demanding that the eighty-two men who had been fired for alleged falsification of job dispatch sign-in sheets be returned to their jobs at once. Even if finally proven guilty, thirty or more of the men who had been fired would have been first offenders. The rules called for discharge only on the third proven offense. A second motion was immediately made from the floor by Hal Yanow, a former bodyguard of Harry Bridges. It demanded that those of the eighty-two

men who were fired for paying their dues late eight times or more during their four years of employment be reinstated because there was no rule in existence to make that a disciplinary offense. All the men in question had each paid the standard one-dollar fine for each day they had paid late, and none were in arrears at the time of discharge. Many of those sitting in that meeting could probably have been terminated under this very same rule. Both motions passed by an “overwhelming majority.”

Kearney presented these motions at the next meeting of the JPLRC. The PMA contingent voted “nay.” Due to the ensuing deadlock, the motions were passed up to the next organizational level, the Area Labor Relations Committee, for a decision. A member from each side of that joint committee was present. They called themselves to order, and Local 10’s motions were denied. Local 10’s short and concerted effort to save us was dead.

About ten days later, we lined up in front of the Joint Records Office. We wanted to exhaust every possibility for learning the specific charges against us. Our efforts produced little more information than we already had. B List Committee members, one from each side, were present to confront us with our supposed rule violations and another stalemate ensued. They still were unable to present us with any evidence of record falsification, but insisted on their right to apply retroactively the heretofore unheard-of rules.

Several days later, we began to hear conflicting rumors from the waterfront. We had heard that two of the firings had been rescinded, and that there might be an extension of the appeals procedure. Approximately twenty-five of us gathered to talk over what had happened. We sent a delegation to the PMA headquarters to learn if any further appeals were possible. The answer was no. This response and the lack of rank and file support required us to make a decision—either to drop the whole matter and walk away, or resort to the courts. Few of us felt we really had a choice. Most had relatives still working on the front. We were determined to prove our innocence, and we knew that without jobs as longshoremen, many of us would be demoted to poverty-level incomes.

It is necessary to provide some of the historical background for the discharges and their direct relationship to our employers’ investments in mechanized and computerized cargo movement machineries. The eighty-two men fired in 1963 were not members of the ILWU. We worked under its jurisdiction, but by agreement between the PMA and the union we were not allowed to join. We were “B” men, part of approximately 750 men who began work on the San Francisco piers in 1959, eventually known as

the '59 men so that differentiations could be made as more "B" men were brought into the industry in 1963, 1965, 1967, and 1969. The San Francisco '59 men were the first to enter the shipping industry in that port without membership in the ILWU since the formation of the union. In effect, we were second-class citizens.

Earlier, in 1934, West Coast longshoremen had established the most complete form of rank and file control over the daily hiring process known to waterfronts around the world. As a result of an arbitration award in 1934 by the Roosevelt administration's National Longshoremen's Board, longshore workers in each port took virtual total control of recruitment in the industry. The local unions, rather than the shipping companies, began to issue work permits to new longshoremen. In San Francisco, "permit men" quickly became probationary members of the union, and at the end of a six-month period they became eligible for full membership. After their formal induction into the union, local union officials applied for—and routinely obtained—registered status for them. This procedure involved a substantial form of workers' control. It was weakened during World War II, and came under full attack in the 1950s with the introduction of new technology.

In 1952, top military transportation authorities, acting under the auspices of the National Academy of Sciences, began to urge the nation's ship operators to jettison traditional man-handled or "by-the-piece" cargo operations in favor of new methods utilizing large metal containers moved in and out of new-type vessels by giant cranes or on truck trailers. As the first container ship was being introduced in the Pacific trade by Matson in 1957, the waterfront employers went to ILWU president Harry Bridges with a proposal for a new method of recruiting longshoremen. They wanted a pilot program that would take control of that process from the rank and file and place it in the hands of top officials. After several attempts, Bridges was able to overcome rank and file resistance to the program. He implemented it the following year.

During 1958, the appointees to the B List Committee screened over ten thousand applicants and made selections for employment. In June and August of the following year, over seven hundred of these applicants went to work as full-time hold men who work inside the hatches of the ships in port. The conditions of their employment were new and in many ways consistent with the "B" label. Not only were they denied union membership, but in order to attend union meetings they had to sit in a segregated section of the balcony in the meeting hall.

It is hard to imagine a more restrictive definition of “permanent status” employees than the one applied to us as ’59 B men. It did not matter that our incomes were often less because we got the work that was left after the A men (union members) took their pick of the jobs available each day. If we took a second or part-time job outside the industry—or enrolled in a school—we were subject to deregistration. We received the same basic pay as the A men, but in other conditions of employment there were substantial dissimilarities. For example, our inability to participate in the election of union officials meant that we too often worked without on-the-job union protection. This arrangement was formalized by the creation of an especially stringent set of disciplinary rules governing our conduct. At the same time, there was no limitation put on the time we had to serve before getting union membership and A status, even though we had been promised that “graduation” would occur within a year, at maximum.

The official reason which circulated around the waterfront for the creation of a B category of longshoremen was that most of the “old-timers,” who were registered prior to 1948, found hold work difficult. In their advancing middle age, they had taken the less physically arduous jobs on deck and dock. This meant that in the years just prior to the recruitment of the B workers, most of those doing hold work were hired off the street on a daily basis. The recruitment of a new cadre of hold men was a necessity for the employers, but there was a problem. The planned container technology soon to be introduced would eliminate thousands of jobs in a few years. It would be difficult to lay off all recent hires if they had a voice in the union. The B list program was the attempted solution to the employers’ dilemma.

The program had additional dividends for the employers. It performed the function of dividing the work force, which would be particularly valuable if resistance to the introduction of new technology developed. On the Pacific Coast waterfronts and around the world, hold workers are traditionally the most militant section of the labor force. Not only are they the youngest and most active, they comprise the tightest unit within the total longshore gang operation because they work deep in the hatch where entry by supervisors can involve some risk.

The ’59 B men came to the waterfront at the time when the first mechanization and modernization (M&M) collective bargaining agreement was being negotiated. It was ratified by the A men on a coastwide basis in 1960, and went into effect in early 1961. Bridges had made a bargain. Most of

the work rules won by the union in the 1930s were sold out in return for the creation of a special money fund. It gave all A men retiring at age sixty-five a bonus of seventy-nine hundred dollars, or the bonus could be used by those who wanted to take early retirement.<sup>1</sup> This hastened the disappearance from the waterfront of the generation that had built the union.

In 1960, the port of Los Angeles was the second largest on the West Coast. Its ILWU Local 13 organized the strongest resistance to this agreement and was the only local whose majority voted against the contract. As a result, the local came under hard attack. A popular business agent was fired after representing men involved in a work stoppage. Bridges negotiated a special and more restrictive version of the mechanization agreement for that port and subsequently a majority of Local 13 approved it. Short of waging an all-out rebellion, they had no choice. We in San Francisco were unaware of any resistance in Los Angeles until we found ourselves working cargoes originally destined for that port.

In San Francisco, the only group resistance to this agreement, however modest, came from the B men. During the long negotiation period, we badgered A men informally on the job about the concessions that Bridges was making to the employers. The resentment among us became very apparent in the early months of 1960. True to its word, as soon as we had put in six months on the job, Local 10 formed its investigating committee and began to process us for membership. They were stopped by higher-level authorities within management and the union. The freeze on A registrations was rationalized because the automation of the industry was just ahead. Many jobs would be eliminated and the jobs of even senior men were in jeopardy in certain ports. The men in those ports with high seniority had a right to move to ports not yet "distressed." They took precedence over B men. Our admission to the union and registration as A men would have to wait until the impact of containerization was studied on a coastwide basis.

The top officials of the local, and many rank and file members, expressed deep doubts about these delays. There was talk that the international union and the PMA were using automation as an excuse to encroach upon the rights of the local. Fear of the effects of the coming containerization was running high, but it was hard for many of the workers to suddenly develop a distrust of Bridges. He came regularly to local meetings and talked as though the introduction of the new technology and a resolution of the B men's concerns was months instead of years ahead. Over

half of the members of Local 10 were black men. In vast majority they had come to the Bay Area in search of jobs at the outbreak of World War II. Circumstances had led them into longshore work. Unlike the experience of many of their friends who entered other industries at that time, the ILWU did not segregate its black workers into "colored" locals. For them, Bridges symbolized that positive experience. It was extremely difficult for them to believe now that this same man was manipulating them.

Not long after the freeze on A registrations and union membership, the executive board of Local 10 passed an unexpected motion which urged that the B men elect representatives to the executive board. At the next B men's meeting, three representatives were elected. I was one of them. All three of us openly expressed our own feelings and those of the men who had elected us against the mechanization agreement. We were under full attack the moment we arrived at our first board meeting. What some members called the "Bridges group," led by International Representative William Chester, raised so many objections to our presence that no business could be conducted. Several months later, two of the B representatives, William Davis Edwards and Robert Marshall, were fired.

On the first day that the mechanization agreement went into effect, hold men found themselves working sling loads of hand-handled cargo that were double or more the weight of those that had been hoisted in and out of hatches the previous day. Thus, the first change to be felt was the elimination of the work rule that had for twenty-five years limited man-made sling loads to 2,100 pounds. Other work rule losses were experienced in turn. First among these was a rule the longshoremen had won in order to protect the autonomy of each work gang. The rule denied "walking bosses" the right to fire individuals from gangs and make those who replaced them work short-handed. This eliminated the employers' ability to single out so-called troublemakers. "If they want to fire one of us they will have to fire us all" had been the 1930s approach to the problem. The new agreement circumvented the rule by cutting the number of hold men in a gang from eight to four. Eight men were still required on hand stowage operations, so half that number were dispatched to the gangs with the artificial label of "swingmen" who could then be fired singly.

While these changes in relations between supervisors and workers on the job were being made, there was little change in the nature of cargo handling methods. Despite the negotiation of a so-called "automation" contract in 1960, the mass introduction of container technology, as some

had suspected, did not occur until the late 1960s. For half a decade, employers were able to run hand-stow and discharge operations virtually free of work rules. Production almost doubled. Thus, the longshoremen were directly subsidizing the purchase of the very machines that would kill over half their jobs by 1980.<sup>2</sup>

As productivity climbed, so did accident rates. Between 1958 and 1967, U.S. waterfront employers reported a 92.3 percent increase in the number of workers' compensation cases "despite efforts to engineer problems out of the workforce."<sup>3</sup> This condition increased the open lobbying by B men for entry into the union, but the long and gradual growth in their boldness was reversed in one night by Harry Bridges. The founding president of the ILWU addressed a compulsory meeting for B men in early 1962. His blunt speech climaxed with the statement that "[we B men] were getting black marks all the time and not just from the employer side." Minutes later Bridges returned to the microphone and announced that the B men no longer had any representatives of their own because "we are representing you." He added that if we wanted responsible advice, we should seek counsel from a B man and close friend of his, Pat Tobin (later to become the ILWU representative in Washington, DC). Local 10 vice president Walter Nelson chaired the meeting and was the only local union official present. He heard Bridges totally wipe out the representation of B men on the local's executive board. The international union had just violated the local union's autonomy, yet Nelson made no challenge and the meeting adjourned.

For the next six months, there was far less communication between A and B men on the job. The silence of the B men was so sustained that probably it was construed as a threat. Informal pressures were being felt off the job as well as on. Waterfront talk that originated in official circles had already made it clear that the cargo movement needs of the war in Viet Nam were sustaining shipping activity at high levels, that rapid attrition in the ranks had pushed the average age of A men to fifty-six years old. Late in 1962, Harry Bridges went to a Local 10 membership meeting to announce that he had a "Christmas present for the B men." There was applause. Many A men had sons, nephews, or relatives on the B list. Bridges climaxed his speech with the promise that sometime early in 1963, the B men would be promoted to the A list. He added that a new B list would be recruited to take their place. The audience's mild elation disappeared with that last bit of news. There were groans, but no formal objections.



Regardless of the seeming good humor with which Bridges made the "promotion announcement," the development presented a potentially deep threat to his leadership, its supporters in Local 10, and the employers. Over five hundred new members would enter the headquarters port of the ILWU at one time, all with a strong voice and vote. These men had already shown a willingness to attend local business meetings in large numbers even though they had been relegated to segregated balcony seating. Unlike so many of their elders, they were not awestruck supporters of the union's international president. For almost four years, they had watched Bridges attend meetings and personally frustrate the efforts of rank and file A men to bring B men into the union. An important and additional crisis factor existed because the participation of A men in union meetings had dwindled with their advancing age, so much so that the quorum for a meeting had to be reduced to four hundred. Enfranchising the '59 B list meant that all of Local 10's long-established power relationships were about to be changed. The men who governed the industry were faced with a whole series of unknowns. The Bridges leadership and the employers had the choice of either letting democratic processes naturally determine the course of change, or to intervene. They intervened.

Harry Bridges attended another Local 10 membership meeting in early 1963, where he announced the near finalization of plans to open A registrations or "remove the freeze." He concluded by revealing that there were about a hundred "troublemakers" among the B men who would have to be eliminated from the industry altogether. Previously the plan had been to hold any workers who did not meet existing membership standards in B status for a penalty period. This action was not even contemplated now since none among the B men were awaiting disciplinary trial for any alleged infractions. Bridges's proposal was booed and openly rebutted from the floor. It was probably right after this rejection of Bridges that the three top officials of Local 10, headed by James Kearney, made plans to induct the nearly four hundred B men who had already been processed by the local's own investigating committee. Two weeks later they did just that over Bridges's objection. When the ceremony ended, Bridges took the microphone to state that the A registrations of those just initiated would be held up. The secretary-treasurer of the local, Reino Erkkila, was outraged and announced that he had only that day seen, in the PMA offices, the signed and completed registrations of the men who had just taken the oath. Bridges returned to the podium once more to state that that action

could be “reversed.” The next morning the new members of ILWU Local 10 were dispatched to the job as A men. By noon, the word spread around the front that their registrations had been rescinded. The rumor proved true. The next day they were returned to their jobs as B men.

Bridges went back to the local membership for a second try in May. He presented a motion that would allow some higher authority to fire a hundred or so “troublemakers.” In support of his own motion he urged that those present not allow “a few to stand in the way of the many.”

Everyone knew what he meant. Over four hundred were to be denied A status until the membership allowed him to fire four of five score unnamed, but already marked men. The motion passed. Hal Yanow jumped to a floor microphone and called attention to the union’s flag in its stand behind Bridges’s chair. In six-inch gold letters across its breadth was the statement: “An injury to one is an injury to all.” Yanow was one of the handful who understood that there are no rain checks in the fight against injustice.

It is doubtful that more than a few longshoremen were yet aware that the B List Committee was the administrative vehicle for carrying out Bridges’s motion. There was a perception that Bridges now had the power to fire anyone on that list, and with this came an even deeper disintegration of on-the-job relationships. Which one hundred among the more than five hundred B men were on the list? I, for one, experienced a marked increase in isolation. Not only had I been one of the B representatives, there was talk that I was handicapped by having previously held membership in both the Sailors’ Union of the Pacific and the United Auto Workers, both of which were said to have leaderships that Bridges held in disrepute for political reasons. I did in fact occupy a place on Bridges’s list, but in those weeks there was hardly a B man who was not examining his past to find something within it that might now cause his undoing. Given all the unknowns it is doubtful that many were at peace. Rumors went out that several workers had begun to go daily to the offices of the international union and sit hat in hand waiting for an audience with William Chester, a union official, who it was said had the power to launder them. Even among those who would surely be deregistered, hope existed side by side with despair. Each of us felt that somehow maybe we would make it and we conducted ourselves outwardly in postures of normalcy. There are experiences far this side of “holocaust” which make the ordinary conduct of European Jews about to enter oven compounds absolutely understandable.

On the same day that the eighty-two of us received deregistration letters, the hostage A registrations were released. The survivors of the "promotion process" entered the union in an atmosphere of defeat. Attainment had come without satisfaction. There was a sense that the position they occupied was actually closer to A-minus and was possibly still revocable. It was not hard to conclude that anyone could have been among the deregistered if the new and previously unknown set of disciplinary rules had been applied to his employment record. "If they want to bad enough, they can get anyone." The men who governed the industry had won an important victory. They had conducted an offensive, and not once had their opposition stepped outside the containment of existing collective bargaining relationships. So successful was their strategy that it was not until 1971 that open rank and file resistance to the mechanization concessions resurfaced, though still in established channels. The rebellion took the form of the longest longshore strike in American history.<sup>4</sup> But the eight years between 1963 and 1971 gave the industry the time needed for the mass introduction of the container moving machineries. In 1964, or one year into that eight year period, the first real victims of longshore automation on the West Coast became the plaintiffs in *Williams v. PMA*.

The Pacific Maritime Association made it relatively easy for us disenfranchised longshoremen to organize. It is probable that most of our motivating anger was directed at ILWU officials, but the employers provided an immediate and practical reason for unity. The PMA had denied our claims to unemployment benefits. In order to appeal that denial we were faced with the necessity of hiring a lawyer. The initial step in our self-organizing drive was accomplished in the lines at the unemployment insurance office on the Monday following the Friday that we were fired. Late in July, after we had exhausted all appeals, approximately thirty of us met in San Francisco at the home of one of our number, Cleo Love. Our informal organization and division of labor needed structuring. We formed the Longshore Jobs Defense Committee (LJDC) and elected a steering committee which included James U. Carter, Willie Hurst, Arthur Jackie Hughes, Willie Jenkins, Jr., and Arthur Winters, with Ethan Gumbs, Jr. and me as co-chairs. This committee became the core group that held the LJDC together for the next seventeen years.

After developing a plan to track down and recruit the others who had been fired, the steering committee was assigned the task of interviewing attorneys to represent us at the unemployment insurance appeal hearings.

We could not find a pro-union labor law firm that was willing to consider taking our case. None could afford to participate in a suit against a union. We also found that law firms regularly associated with liberal social reform movements could not conceive of representing anyone against “a progressive union like the ILWU.” Finally, our search was reduced to tracking down random leads. We were always treated with courtesy. Many took time out of their busy schedules to listen carefully to our story but candidly explained that a case like ours was outside their area of expertise. Others simply could not afford to take on a case with more than thirty plaintiffs who could pay the needed fees only on a contingency basis. We also met some who felt they could not afford to take on an important segment of the power establishment in the San Francisco area. We could understand how easily we could become a liability to our own counsel.

Within five months after our deregistrations, we participated in hearings before California Unemployment Insurance Appeals Board Referee Donald Gilson. Sidney Gordon, a Los Angeles attorney and high school friend of mine, represented the LJDC’s thirty-three members. After hearing fifteen days of argument and testimony from both sides, Gilson ruled that the claimants were “not subject to disqualification,” that the employers’ account was to be charged, and our benefits paid. He had been unable to find any “just cause” for our discharge in the explanation given by the PMA.

In the “Reasons for Decision” section of Gilson’s ruling, he noted several of the conditions surrounding our deregistration that later caused the federal courts to hear our case. Among them, he listed that we had been subjected to double jeopardy, that the JPLRC minutes for July 16, 1963, contained statements by the union members of the committee to the effect that the discharges had been accomplished by use of a new and previously non-existent set of disciplinary rules applied on an ex post facto basis, and that there was no evidence that we had left the employ of the PMA voluntarily.<sup>5</sup>

The Gilson decision in May 1964 boosted our morale. We had gone through the long hearing without a traumatic expenditure of energy and had won with relative ease. The facts of the case were still fresh in our minds. Recounting the story of our discharges had not yet become routine. The victory raised our hopes for success in upcoming court battles. A month earlier, attorney Gordon had filed a complaint in federal court on behalf of fifty-six LJDC members.<sup>6</sup> It sought relief in the form of job

reinstatement as B men, back wages, and six hundred thousand dollars in special damages. In addition to listing the PMA and ILWU as defendants, individual defendants were named. Officers of both the employers' association and the union were designated. James Kearney and Harry Bridges were included in the union grouping. While Kearney had tried to save us in his fashion, he had also signed the order for our deregistration.

We plaintiffs found it difficult to accept the idea that because we were B men at the time of the firings, we could not now seek restitution to jobs that had A status and union membership for legal and technical reasons. The others on the 1959 B list who had not suffered discharge for unjust cause were now secure A men. We had to downgrade our expectations.

Victory in the courts could bring only partial relief. Our desperation made that sufficient reason to go on. Then, too, there was no other choice. Even the complaint itself had given us additional tension because our lawyer had not reviewed its contents with us before submitting it to the court. Shortly after Sidney Gordon filed his second amended complaint with the clerk of the district court, the Joint Port Labor Relations Committee (JPLRC) revealed that they would soon hold a hearing to decide if we should get another hearing. The committee scheduled a second set of appeal hearings to take place in March 1965. Our counsel obtained a restraining order against them, but the hearings were conducted even though the order was still in effect. Only one plaintiff appeared, Cleo Love. ILWU counsel Norman Leonard offered to represent him. Love had a heated verbal exchange with Harry Bridges and received yet another affirmation of his discharge. Approximately six months later, the Joint Coast Labor Relations Committee (JCLRC), on which both PMA president Paul St. Sure and Harry Bridges sat, held a hearing on the basis of the previous hearing and found us guilty as charged.

Our case experienced its first full-scale internal crisis in mid-1965. The third amended complaint that had been submitted to the court on our behalf failed to make a clear statement of our case. Equally disturbing, Gordon once again made a series of statements about the nature of the discharge action without discussing them or his basic theory of the case with us. Friction grew all the more rapidly because several of the more needy among us were behind in their monthly payments to Gordon. He was accepting payments without regularly issuing receipts, but we had not yet formulated a method of raising money from outside sources. After a disturbing separation from Gordon by all but three of us, the group began looking for new legal representation. Gordon took action to garnish the

wages or attach the belongings of over half of us. We then hired an attorney who specialized in matters of this sort and the harassment ended.

We were absolutely broke, but had recently armed ourselves with several hundred reprints of a two-part article about our case that had appeared in 1964.<sup>7</sup> By using it as a way of introducing ourselves, it became possible to build a support group of prominent public citizens under the auspices of the Workers Defense League (WDL) of New York, then headed by the renowned labor–civil rights attorney Rowland Watts and his colleague, Robert Joseph Pierpont. The LJDC-WDL Defense Committee was put together with the special help of labor and anti-nuclear journalist Paul Jacobs. He got Bayard Rustin of the A. Philip Randolph Institute and organizer of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s March on Washington to co-chair the committee with Michael Harrington, author of the epochal book *The Other America*. A dozen more were added to the committee's roster including Harvey Swados, Herbert Gold, Nat Hentoff, Julius Jacobson, Rev. William Shirley, Phillip Selznick, Daniel Bell, Norman Thomas, Herbert Hill (then labor secretary of the NAACP), Norman Hill (then national secretary of CORE), Herman Benson (founder of the Association for Union Democracy), and Gordon Haskell (then a full-time official of the ACLU).

The WDL provided us with the services of federal bar and famed civil rights attorney Francis Heisler as well as Irving Thau of New York. Thau came to San Francisco and hired Arthur Brunwasser as co-counsel. Together they filed a fourth amended complaint. It sought relief in two forms: job reinstatement as B men and payment of all wages lost. The late Judge George B. Harris was assigned to our case. He ruled against giving us a trial, indicating that our complaint had not established a solid argument for trial in civil court. Harris argued that the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) was the appropriate agency to approach for relief.<sup>8</sup> In 1967, the United States Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit in San Francisco remanded our case back to the court of Judge Harris for trial. An appeal, written by attorneys Brunwasser and Thau, had successfully turned the tables. Ninth Circuit judges Pope, Hamley, and Merrill gave clear instruction to the lower court:

It should be noted also that the appellants assert the complete invalidity of the so-called new rules. Some of the affidavits filed on behalf of the defendants purport to set out what these new rules were. But, if there were an agreement to such rules, they were not adopted in accordance with the requirements of the basic collective bargaining agreement which provided

in Section 22: "No provision or term of this agreement may be amended, modified, changed altered or waived except by written document executed by the parties hereto." An examination of the text of the so-called new rules discloses that they do not cover or authorize deregistration of Class B longshoremen; they deal only with the requirements for promotion from class B to A . . .

Some of the affidavits disclose the powers of the joint committees, referred to, and they indicate the manner in which the plaintiffs became registered and they show that the joint committees found against these plaintiffs and ordered them deregistered. But the basis of the complaint is that the union representatives on the joint committees should not have taken such action in that by agreeing thereto they had failed in their fiduciary duty to all longshore employees.

As indicated above, the complaint alleged that these plaintiffs were in good standing, were guilty of no current infractions, had corrected all past violations of rules, and were entitled to the assignment for work. Nothing in any affidavit negatives the allegation these plaintiffs were arbitrarily and capriciously being penalized for conduct that was not ground for deregistration at the time the acts were committed; that the deregistration was a retroactive application of alleged violations of invalid rules. Furthermore, many of the assertions made in these affidavits are not entitled to consideration under Rule 56(e) which provides that affidavits must be made on personal knowledge, and that the affiant is competent to testify to the matters stated. None of the affiants would be competent to say whether any of the plaintiffs were guilty of any misconduct or rule violation, or that the action of the union members of these joint committees was anything other than a disregard of the union's duty of fair representation.<sup>9</sup>

In the process of instruction, the Ninth Circuit's remand order cited the precedent set earlier in the year by the United States Supreme Court's *Vaca v. Sipes* decision:<sup>10</sup>

The Argument of the Supreme Court is a very cogent one. For instance, the Court noted that the Board's general counsel had unreviewable discretion to refuse to institute an unfair labor practice complaint. Therefore the injured party having a valid claim based on denial of fair representation could not be assured of a remedy if the courts were deemed ousted of their traditional jurisdiction in such cases. At any rate, this reason given by the trial court for denying jurisdiction is demonstrably wrong in view of *Vaca*.<sup>11</sup>

The employers and the union appealed the Ninth Circuit's reversal and remand of Judge Harris's summary judgment against us to the Supreme Court. The high court refused to review their appeal.<sup>12</sup> Despite our victory at this point, our opposition was soon able to frustrate us again in our efforts to obtain a trial. Shortly after we organized the LJDC-WDL Defense Committee for the purpose of making our case known to the public and raising monies to cover legal costs, Harry Bridges sued most of the committee's members for libel. Bayard Rustin was particularly singled out. The action cited a written appeal for funds sent out by the committee mentioning Bridges's role in the discharges. The suit was withdrawn in 1969, less than a week before it was to go to trial.<sup>13</sup> It cost us a great deal.

Time and serious illness had eliminated attorneys Thau and Heisler from participation in our case. Arthur Brunwasser had been acting alone on our behalf, but the libel suit made it impossible for him to devote time to the main case. In 1965, all the plaintiffs signed individual contracts with him. He was to receive payment for his efforts only if we won. In the interim, we were to pay all legal fees and expenses. By 1969, he had already worked for us for four years without compensation. The libel action had cost us more than a year's time at that point, for it would be three years before we would again be able to raise the money necessary for trial in the district court.

In the years just prior to our 1974 trial before Judge Harris, our case came under a unique handicap. The attorneys for the PMA and ILWU went before the court and were successful in getting an order that struck the names of individual defendants from our complaint. At the same time, the international union established that ILWU Local 10 was a third responsible party of their side. Thus the membership was obligated to pay a share of the legal costs incurred, and if we prevailed, a portion of the settlement. We knew that we not only needed the support of the rank and file upon our possible return to the docks, but during the period of legal battle as well. But the court order pitted us against Local 10. Additionally, a majority of us still had relatives as well as friends working the ships. This all added up to increased strain in the case. Before the litigation was over, longshoremen in locals up and down the West Coast would be assessed for the legal costs incurred by the union defendants because of Bridges's leadership.

Time and polarization of differences on national political issues in the late 1960s and early 1970s had caused disintegration within the LJDC-WDL



Defense Committee. It was reorganized. We got James Baldwin, Kay Boyle, Staughton Lynd, Phyllis Jacobson, Hal Draper, Clancy Sigal, Dan Georgakas, Stanley Aronowitz, and others to fill the vacancies created by the deaths of Norman Thomas, Harvey Swados, and San Francisco civil rights leader Dr. Thomas Burbridge. A new fund drive was successful. The time for trial preparation had arrived.

Early in the long depositions period, the book *Harry Bridges: The Rise and Fall of Radical Labor in the United States* was published and immediately received prominent display in San Francisco bookstores. Its author, Professor Charles Larrowe of Michigan State University, was already considered an authority on the ILWU because of an earlier book comparing daily longshore hiring systems on the east and west coasts of the United States.<sup>14</sup> The later book on Bridges contained a ten-page discussion of our case. Despite Larrowe's statement that I had been victimized by Bridges for political reasons, the entire section was filled with part-truths that were totally misleading and that could only misinform people who had no way of checking the accuracy of his reporting. Worst of all, he dressed his discussion of the other men who were fired in just enough fact (given him by ILWU staff) to give it the ring of an informed source. His assessment of the firings ended with the sentence, "in almost all of these cases, the men admitted the charges and accepted the verdict."<sup>15</sup> Regardless of Larrowe's intention, his statement that any of our men confessed to the allegations against them fails to reflect reality. In truth, some of our men, for example, had not only admitted late payment of dues, but had confronted their accusers with a counter-offensive: "How is it that lateness of dues payment for which I have already paid the fine has suddenly become a rule, a rule that can be retroactively applied and a rule whose violation brings unappealable discharge?"

Let us take another example, that of Willie Hurst. During his first year of employment on the waterfront, a dock walking-boss fired the entire banana gang in which Hurst was working for drinking on the job. Before being cited by the Port Labor Relations Committee, Hurst went to Local 10 president James Kearney and explained that the gang had been fired for the remainder of the day because of the drunkenness of one man. Kearney easily confirmed that Hurst was a lifetime "teetotaler," but advised him not to testify to the facts when the case was heard. If Hurst were to accuse the particular A man in question of being drunk and the cause of the firing, he would probably never get promoted to A status. Kearney was right. Hurst was given the penalty for first offenders, thirty days off the job without

pay, and was told to avoid further violations. He served his time and heeded the warning. Almost three working years later, in 1963, he was penalized a second time for the same incident, but this time he was given the sentence reserved for three-time offenders, discharge. So in a sense he did admit the charges, but only if one is operating without regard to context. In no way did Hurst or the others accept, approve, or agree with the verdict. Larrowe's book served to obscure the entire question of the new rules and the escalation in the punishments connected with old rules often twice applied.<sup>16</sup>

Our federal case, *Williams v. PMA*, came before the court (sitting without a jury) on January 14, 1974, and continued until July 3rd, with more than sixty days of live testimony.<sup>17</sup> The trial revealed a number of facts in the case that startled us. PMA officials testified that the special rules by which we were discharged did not originate in any of the joint PMA-ILWU committees, but in a separate session of top officers and legal staff. It was then that testimony revealed how the special rules were not adopted by the Joint Coast Labor Relations Committee until *after* the appeal hearings in July 1963, and remained in effect only a few short weeks. To this date they have never been revived.

Judge Harris sat through testimony of this sort as well as routine procedural matters without any reaction. We hoped that this was part of his professional demeanor but it was about this time that a number of the plaintiffs began to wish that the case had been heard by a jury. It bothered us that Judge Harris seemed to be in awe of head ILWU counsel Richard Gladstein. Harris had been one of the judges involved in the early post-World War II (McCarthy) era during which the federal government made several "witch-hunt" attempts to deport Harry Bridges. Gladstein was Bridges's main counsel when the bulk of San Francisco's power elite still considered the ILWU president a threat. We plaintiffs wondered what effect the past might have now that Bridges was in great favor as a "labor statesman" and member of the Port Commission.

For me, one of the greatest shocks at trial was supplied by the long opening statement given by head PMA counsel Richard Ernst. The opening statement of our lawyer, Arthur Brunwasser, had focused on the specifics of the discharges and the absence of all fairness in the process. Ernst laid a foundation for the case on grounds vastly different from Brunwasser's. He took an openly political approach. He recounted how, in 1919, the waterfront employers had broken the waterfront unions, initiating a fifteen-year period of oppressive experiences by longshoremen. The strikes

of 1934 re-established the union and ushered in a fourteen-year period of militant confrontation between the union and employers. After the strike of 1948, Ernst pointed out, the employers embarked on the "third period." They saw that the union was maturing and so began an era of increased trust and collaboration. Around 1958 they felt that the union had made so much progress that its members could participate in the process of selecting new men for the industry. Four years later, the alleged development of maturity within the union caused the employers to involve the union in the firing process as well. He then pointed out that we plaintiffs were the first product of both developments.

Ernst's opening statement developed full direction on January 23, and continued with routine interruptions over several days. He made the logic of his case absolutely explicit; if the judge ruled for the defendants he would be in the company of a long list of great social engineers such as Wayne Morse and Clark Kerr who helped structure intricate and operational working arrangements between a large employer and a union in a vital industry. If, on the other hand, the judge ruled for the plaintiffs he would be destroying labor peace. Contrary to my first impression, the counsel for the PMA was not wide of the mark. He was right on it. He was operating on the premise that had increasingly directed the development of labor policy in all three branches of our government since passage of the Taft-Hartley Act: the promotion of "labor peace" through containment of the work force through collaborative contractual arrangements which essentially substituted arbitration for any concerted action by the workers. According to Ernst, our deregistrations symbolized such an accomplishment and it should not be tampered with.

The last shocking segment of the trial, possibly for all participants, came on the last day. Attorney James A. Carter, former PMA lawyer and legal staff member of the Port Labor Relations Committee (JPLRC) at the time of the 1963 deregistrations, gave the following testimony under cross-examination by Arthur Brunwasser:

I had heard that Mr. Weir was one of the persons that was being deregistered; that it was very definite that he should be deregistered; and there was simply no doubt in my mind, and I believe in the minds of the other people who worked on the case, that the feelings were very strong that Mr. Weir should be deregistered.

Well, what I heard was that Mr. Weir was opposed to the M and M agreement, that he wanted to make work for people and stop the use of labor

saving devices and things; that he was interested in more longshoremen, et cetera; and that that ran counter to the prevailing views of Mr. Bridges. I think it was more—what I heard was a philosophical thing—presumably, this lost case had been made public—that he was philosophically opposed to the concept of M and M; that he was of the old fashioned union school that felt you ought to have a lot of people out there working, and you shouldn't have labor saving devices.<sup>18</sup>

Finally, and only as the trial neared conclusion, the court got its first opportunity to understand not only the major reason behind the discharges, but why we were being pursued with such hostility. Earlier in the trial the court had heard testimony by Curt Johnston, then president of ILWU Local 13 (Los Angeles), that a former San Francisco employee, Robert Hall, had told him how “eighty-two had been fired just to get Weir.” Hall subsequently testified that Johnston had fabricated the story. Later toward the end of Carter's testimony, an explanation very similar to Johnston's was offered:

But what I did hear was that the—that a decision was made at a very high level—and those words may not have been used either—but I can read shorthand—but that a decision had been made to deregister Mr. Weir; and that in order to facilitate that, I suppose, it was decided to deregister other people at the same time.<sup>19</sup>

We had heard this theory several times, twice directly, from ILWU staff employees who were disillusioned with Bridges, but because they were still in the employ of the union their depositions proved fruitless. Nevertheless, to have heard the theory early on had value. It forced us to think through our own analysis of the ILWU-PMA strategy with greater care. There was probably no way that we would ever be able to prove or disprove the theory but its persistence showed us the potential vindictiveness with which we were dealing. We agreed with the political analyses put forth by Herman Benson and Gordon Haskell of the Association for Union Democracy: Bridges represented a highly developed bureaucratic conservatism that retaliated full force against even the slightest potential of opposition, no matter how far in the future it might take to materialize.<sup>20</sup>

On August 31, 1975, Judge Harris ruled for the defendants. They won based on the argument that B men were probationary employees and not union members. Yet Bridges's handpicked successor as president of the

ILWU, James Herman, had become president of an ILWU local union in the 1960s as a B man. In a post-trial meeting for the plaintiffs, our attorney told us that the judge had not even written the decision. Instead, he had taken the closing brief of PMA counsel Ernst, transferred it to court stationery, and applied his signature. The content of the decision offered an even more detailed interpretation of the political conflict on the San Francisco waterfront:

43. Factions developed within Local 10 on the subject of promotion of the limited registration Class B men. One group included Selden Osborne, Asher Harer, Hal Yanow, Frank Stout, James Kearney and others; it favored the granting of union membership to the limited registration Class B men and their dispatch with the fully registered Class A longshoremen, even though this would be in violation of the contract and the law. Another faction included Harry Bridges, William Chester, Robert Rohatch, Tommie Silas and others; it was of the opinion that the union should comply with the contract with the PMA and promote only on the basis of joint action between the ILWU and the PMA.<sup>21</sup>

There was a quarter truth to Ernst's (Judge Harris's) interpretation of the political fight within Local 10. The first group had all individually, at one time or another, taken the floor of a union meeting to oppose our deregistration, but they had never operated as a faction. It had been many years since any who opposed Bridges had felt secure enough to organize against his ideas in concert. It was rather shrewd of Ernst to wait until the very end to offer this interpretation and thus leave no chance that our side might begin to dispute his distinctly political interpretation.

After the setback at trial, we once more appealed to the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, with very different results. The political climate in the entire nation had changed markedly in the decade since the appellate court had ordered that we be given a trial. Oral argument on our appeal took place on February 5, 1979. To get there had taken yet another fund drive with donations from many well-wishers. Once more we filled the courtroom to capacity but it did not appear to have any visual effect on the judges.

The argument took little more than two hours. We left with an uneasiness we could not shake. We felt it would be impossible for the judges to do ample research in the more than twenty cases of printed matter which constituted the record in our case. Even more disturbing, we had not heard them ask what we considered the substantive questions in the case.

Judges Duniway, Kennedy, and Bonsal handed down their opinion a year and two days after taking argument.<sup>22</sup> Their conclusion was:

We believe that the district court erred in concluding that appellants failed to exhaust required grievance procedures. We nevertheless affirm on the merits because appellants have not demonstrated that PMA or ILWU or its constituent local breached either a duty of fair representation owed to appellants or the terms of the Pacific Coast Longshore Agreement.<sup>23</sup>

We were sixteen years down the road when hit by this decision. No longer were we in awe of the court. Underneath their robes these three men wore pants that they got into one leg at a time just like other mortals. The gap between the letter of the law and the way life is actually lived was so wide for them that an *Alice in Wonderland* logic dictated the terms of their decision. They agreed that the ILWU and the PMA had denied us due process, but ruled there was no evidence that the union had failed in its duty to represent us fairly. Yet due process is the forum or vehicle that makes representation possible. The two are totally interdependent. There cannot be one without the other. For the justices, unjust means could somehow be used to arrive at a just end.

From beginning to end, a pivotal area of the law which was applied to our case was whether or not the acts of the defendants had been legitimized by the collectively bargained agreement. One of the major reasons for the Ninth Circuit's 1967 reversal of Judge Harris's summary judgment against us was that the new rules used to discharge us had not been arrived at via the collective bargaining process. Contrary to this, Judges Duniway, Kennedy, and Bonsal held that the new rules had been negotiated into existence by the two parties on the Joint Port Labor Relations Committee (JPLRC). The July 16, 1963, minutes of the JPLRC cited earlier here were still among the case exhibits. They revealed that the union members of the committee, who would have had to be half of the negotiating effort, were protesting our discharges because the new rules had not been adopted by the bargaining process.

In an example of "doublethink," the decision of the Ninth Circuit also held that the new rules were actually not new at all. The court observed that we appellants knew, for example, that our "dues" should be paid on time and that fact was not changed by the creation of a new, additional, and maximum disciplinary penalty. In fact, the addition was legitimate in the judges' eyes because the well-known Section 9 of the 1958

rules covering deregistration contained an eleventh “or, for any other cause” rule.

The underlying rationale of the judges on this point was not hard to determine. The new mechanized technology that was being introduced to the industry in the early 1960s demanded the creation of a “permanent work force” composed of high-caliber individuals. By applying the new rules (or penalties) the employer and the union were setting the standards necessary to the needs of the new era. The old era in which all jobs went through the hiring hall was now in the past. The deregistration of people who had a propensity for “unreliability” represented an imperative updating whose correctness and success was indicated by the fact that 80 percent of the 1959 B men met the higher standards. The final block of reasoning in the stone wall erected against us by the courts was tragically laughable: because not all B men had been taken hostage, the court ruled that none of those taken were hostages.

On the surface, the court was refusing to see that our discharges were part of a conflict but, below the surface, other factors were at work. The unjust decision of the Ninth Circuit verified Professor James B. Atleson’s thesis on the values underlying decisions on labor cases by the courts: “[t]he belief in the inherent rights of property and the need for capital mobility, for instance, underlie certain rules, and some decisions turn on the perceived superior need for continued production or the fear of employee irresponsibility.”<sup>24</sup>

We appealed the decision to the Supreme Court. There were two court decisions against us by now, and only a narrow margin of hope. But the majority of the plaintiffs needed our jobs back as much then as we did the day we were fired. Unfortunately, though not surprisingly, it had become harder to raise the money to cover legal expenses. By 1980, six of the plaintiffs had died. Others had moved in order to obtain employment. Some, like Manuel Nereu, were as far away as Saudi Arabia. Mario Luppi had returned home to his family’s village in Italy. I had been living in the Los Angeles harbor area for five years and had resided in Illinois during the previous eight years. Communication was more and more difficult to sustain, but the necessary mobilization was made easier when Teamsters for a Democratic Union, Independent Skilled Trades Council, Union Women’s Alliance to Gain Equality, *The Bell Wringer*, National Labor Law Center of the National Lawyers Guild, and Association for Union Democracy offered to file a friend of the court brief on our behalf.<sup>25</sup>

The brief, authored by Burton Hall, stimulated new interest. It gave

added emphasis to the arguments made by attorney Brunwasser. For example, it showed that the written job dispatch rules provided us until the day of our discharge ended with the capitalized statement: "THERE ARE NO OTHER RULES." Hall's brief also contained what for us was a new idea: the argument that the union's agreement to deregister us was a bill of attainder. In 1963, at the time that Local 10 and ILWU agreed to the new "standards" and agreed, also, to deregister those "B men" who failed to meet those "standards" because of conduct prior to their adoption, the identities of those persons who would thereby be deregistered were either known or were easily ascertainable from records in the bargaining representative's possession. Thus it was known, or could easily be learned from the records, that Graves had been found guilty of an instance of intoxication in 1960 and had been suspended for thirty days as punishment. It was known, or could easily be learned from the records, that Cafeterio had, however innocently, committed a Low Man Out violation in 1962 of more than ten hours by failing to add hours to his time for his unavailability on Sunday, August 12. The decision to deregister the class of persons who were shown by the records to have committed any violations of the "standards" was, in short, a bill of attainder.<sup>26</sup>

The Supreme Court, in its October 1980 term, denied all briefs filed for the plaintiffs. We were finished. It felt just that abrupt. The case had been a central activity half our adult lives and a period of adjustment was forced upon all participants.

This account represents only one small portion of the *Williams v. PMA* story. The events profoundly affected all of our lives. Some among us were more fortunate than others in rebuilding work careers and keeping our families together after the discharges. The story of every man and his family deserves telling and, if told, would reveal that anguish can develop strength as well as diminish it.<sup>27</sup>

We surviving plaintiffs make no claim to objectivity, and that applies as well to the opinions expressed here. Like all who are party to a violent fight with many casualties, we will never cease to be partisan. The human costs have been high. One of the most oppressive aspects of our experience with the law was our inability to afford the financial costs. In our view, any legal action in which the attorneys are to be paid on a contingency basis is in deep trouble if it lasts more than a few months. A case with the workload the size of ours quickly became destructive to our lawyers' personal lives and professional images. It is true that in the beginning there was gratification by the very nature of the case. But we witnessed the coming of those



times when other attorneys would loudly call across court building lobbies with derisive guffaws: "Hey, you still have that big five (ten, fifteen) year old law suit?" We watched as our attorneys over-worked without pay. The greater their resentment and our guilt, the more we felt like charity cases and consequently lost client control over direction of the suit. This resulted in the development of deep doubts and the destruction of friendships.<sup>28</sup>

There are several areas in which some generalization of our experiences can be made. We would not have filed suit in 1964 had we known that the action would take so many years. At the same time, by 1964, the only alternative to filing suit was to walk away in submission, and that was unthinkable. That we put up a good long fight is a source of pride. It is gratifying to hear, as we still do from former co-workers on the front, that the men of the four B lists recruited after our discharge got much better treatment from the ILWU and PMA because of our suit. Another outbreak of resistance after ours, especially a second lawsuit, might have triggered alliances and the reversal of bureaucratic victories.

A statement commonly heard among LJDC veterans is that we stuck together through it all, and, as a result, we formed unusually strong bonds of friendship and experienced considerable personal growth by getting an inside look at the way law actually works in our land. We have seen that labor law is a special segment of the total body of American common law. In worker-employer-union conflicts, the worker often does not have due process protection as guaranteed by the Constitution and Bill of Rights. Labor law legitimizes the loss, makes it legal, and provides a framework for the application of private government in the workplace by employer rules as modified by employee resistance.

I agree with the idea expressed in varied contexts by labor attorney Staughton Lynd that the filing of a lawsuit is not by itself an effective way to fight, and in fact often creates an artificial context in which facts become distorted.<sup>29</sup> It is more effective to use the lawsuit as a back-up action and only as a last resort.<sup>30</sup> We could have pursued a return to our jobs far more effectively with continued organizational support and with some form of political-organizational support from the general public, particularly in the Bay Area community. We feel certain our story would be quite different if we had received even the most indirect support from the membership of ILWU Local 10, and especially if there had been the development of open resistance to containerization. In the absence of direct support of any kind, we needed far more backing from public sources than we were able to generate and maintain.

The availability of the documents in our case for public scrutiny and research is a positive development.<sup>31</sup> Still unnoticed anywhere, for example, is the fact that by simple self-interest and self-preservation B men became critical of Harry Bridges because of the conservatism of his leadership and his eager acceptance of the employers' new technology program. Quite logically, those who cast their lot with the B men or came to their defense both from inside the industry and from the public, were persons who were viewed as having a more radical worldview than Bridges; probably a very threatening experience for a labor official whose entire method of operation historically had been based upon presenting himself as a leftist.

The largest and most important part of the fight continues on the job in every port. More than half the fifteen thousand registered longshore jobs that existed in 1963 have been automated out of existence. We were the first fatalities in an ongoing liquidation. There is not a day in which the remaining seven thousand rank and file West Coast dockworkers can afford not to resist. It is they who need allies, primarily from other industries and unions, but from the informed public as well. Plans for the "Second Containerization Revolution" by computer controls are emerging from the drawing boards in greater numbers. The number of options available has diminished for both sides, particularly for the workers, who now have much less faith in established grievance solution channels.

(1984)

## The Human Cost of Automation

As automation has developed from its original mechanical form to the application of micro-processors to automatic machines, it has accelerated job killing far beyond industry's ability to create new jobs, even at minimum wage rates. The new computer technology has also enabled employers to export jobs. In sum, millions of primary jobs have been eliminated in the U.S. alone since the 1970s, and no end is in sight.

Among the survivors in the increasingly machine-intensive workplaces, there is deep fear, even terror, especially for the young. The distance between layoffs and homelessness is no longer a giant step. No need to ask why the rank and file, under attack and leaderless, are not conducting many battles.

The new automation kills jobs in two ways: directly and permanently, by substituting machines for people; and periodically, by accelerating productivity to the point where more commodities are available than there are people with money to buy them.

The well-known statistics on the drastic decline of union membership reflect the millions of jobs lost to automation. Ironically, the labor leadership has not only accommodated to the negative impact of automation, but has proved incapable of dealing with the problems it actually helped to create by its acquiescence.

In 1981, for example, the William Wimpisinger leadership of the International Association of Machinists (IAM) organized a "Scientists and Engineers Conference" held in New York. Led by Harley Shaiken and Seymour Melman, the participants developed a "Technology Bill of Rights." They were used! Their action raised the question of how American unions can possibly gain control over the uses of new technology when 90 percent of IAM contracts contain unconditional pledges not to strike during the contract term—precisely when the strike weapon is most needed. Is control over the uses of the new technology to be won by arbitration, which the

official leaders of labor have voluntarily agreed to substitute for the most basic right of working people? There is no evidence that Wimpisinger ever planned to do away with the no-strike pledges. Ten years after the conference, automation continues out of control.

The failure of the union officialdom cannot be solved by voting "the old guys" out. Too often new leaders have been elected only to become captives of the old bureaucratic structures inherent in business unionism. American unions are business unions, based on the principle that employers can be expected to make concessions only when business is good, and when business is bad, it is the workers who must sacrifice.

The ability to move production oceans away made it far easier for manufacturers to automate. Business schools now routinely recommend against automating workplaces with longtime employees. Such employees will resist change. Better to shut down the plant and send the work elsewhere, to be done by new employees whose first day on the job is in a new plant with the automatic machines already bolted down.

It is often overlooked, but before highly automated factories could be opened in faraway places, the entire process of maritime cargo movement had to be automated. In the 1960s, sea-going ships were too small and too slow to transport giant tonnages of raw materials to poor nations for the manufacture of finished products which then would have to be returned to be sold in lucrative markets. The necessary planning for the automation of longshoring and shipping began in 1952 at the initiative of the Pentagon and maritime employers, under the auspices of the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), whose National Research Council (NRC) produced the enabling studies. They were quietly done, mainly in the port of San Francisco with the cooperation of the Harry Bridges leadership of the ILWU (see the *San Francisco Port Study*, NAS NRC [National Academy of Sciences, National Research Council], Washington, DC, 1960), and without alerting the working longshoremen. As a result, by 1970, automation was widely introduced in its early mechanized form, called "containerization." This involved the use of metal boxes 20 or 40×8×8 feet.

Containerization provided the needed uniformity of the cargo unit for automation and quick transfer between ships, railroads, and trucks and the now-in-progress robotization of cranes and lifts. The era of multinational manufacturers was made possible at the expense of over half the jobs on the waterfront. Neither the human suffering nor the new colonialism brought into being by employers equipped with computer automation produced any response by the AFL-CIO unions. What they did react

to were the changes brought by the new technology that affected the status of the union bureaucracy. The labor leaders were distressed by the root damage done to the contract-based relationship of business unions with corporate manufacturers who could now escape union agreements by sending work outside U.S. borders. Equally distressing to the union leaders was that these employers are not as heavily dependent on them to discipline their hourly employees. The workers who have been laid off have lost what they once tried to protect by obedience to union authority (backed by management). Those workers who are still on the job in each location are aware that their employers are free to do whatever they please against them without any fear that the union leaders will mobilize immediate counterattacks in other locations.

While there are fewer open labor struggles today than there were in the early 1970s and before, workers do fight back every day in the workplace in ways that the mass media and intellectuals have no way of witnessing. When working people mobilize to control their working conditions, they rid themselves of the old vertical structures and turn to horizontal forms of organization. They network at their level with their counterparts in other places. Very often their first step is to establish unofficial mutual aid agreements with others in nearby workplaces to protect their jobs, as well as contacting workers in other plants owned by their employer, and then reaching out to workers producing the same or similar products regardless of the employer.

In the multinational era, the networks must be extended beyond national boundaries. The AFL-CIO made some feeble attempts to do that bureaucratically, mainly at conferences with the token participation of a few workers. Those attempts failed because the rank and file was bypassed. An important example of rank and file networking which occurred in the early 70s might well provide a model for similar actions today. At that time, the West Coast longshoremen rejected two contracts negotiated for them by ILWU president Harry Bridges. They conducted a 130-day strike, the longest dock strike in U.S. history. The workers at General Motors in Lordstown, Ohio, were also on strike at that time to end speedups caused by the use of automatic machinery. The dock strike gave them the idea of sending a rank and file delegation from their assembly line to talk to the West Coast dockers. Their plan was a solidarity action, to ask the dockers to continue their strike and to keep Japanese cars out of the country until the UAW strike was won. UAW international president Leonard Woodcock quashed the idea.<sup>1</sup>

The Lordstown local then generated a plan to send a delegation of workers from key assembly-line positions to Japan to talk to auto workers there about jointly developing a set of work rules that auto workers internationally could follow, thereby ending the murderous competition among them. Woodcock, later to become the U.S. ambassador to China, killed that proposal, too, indicating that he was about to go to Japan personally. What if the Lordstown workers could have used their dues to send some of their own number on that trip instead of financing Woodcock's? It is much easier to consider that option today than it was twenty years ago. The Lordstown men and women have never been given proper credit for the genius of their commonsense approach, anticipating the need for an alternative unionism that draws its strength from solidarity agreements rather than cooperation with employers.

By the very nature of life experience in the nation's largest industry, auto workers have long been a source of ideas for democratic unionism. In the early 1930s, Michigan GM workers formed semi-autonomous multiplant councils of shop stewards committees. When John L. Lewis took the CIO out of the AFL in 1937 after the GM sit-down strikes, the councils and shop stewards committees were treated as dual unions and eradicated. If those rank and file controlled councils had continued to grow as the basic leadership structure of the union, auto workers today would not be handicapped by the control of officials from outside the workplace.<sup>2</sup>

It is true that CIO unions in 1937 founded this country's first formal federation of industrial unions. But that was done at the expense of the job-based industrial unions that began to form as early as 1932 without assistance from the older unions. The bureaucratic takeover took several years, facilitated by removing union presidents from the workplace to offices outside, making them more accountable to the International than to the rank and file, leaving chairpersons of shrunken shop committees in the plants with weakened authority to handle grievances.

The same business union leaders who moved the power base of our unions from where we work to their offices have long been telling us that any form of unionism but theirs "will kill the goose that lays the golden eggs." That old tale worked for them until the geese began to fly away, leaving empty nests. To survive the attacks by corporations turned multinationals it is necessary to develop and strengthen unions capable of taking the offensive. That requires bringing union control back to the locations where working people live most of their waking hours. The AFL-CIO is incapable of making such a change.

A possible alternative to business unionism is one our parents' or grandparents' generation began but were cheated out of in the 1930s. It would be based on official or unofficial committees of shop stewards working alongside and accountable to the workers who elected them. It would demand the same number (or more) of grievance bargaining representatives as management has foremen or supervisors. Finally, it is job-based unions and leaders that can most intelligently interact with their counterparts in public and private employment across the nation and across the seas. In fact, it is this kind of unionism that can—without highly paid staff members—best begin to develop the contacts for international solidarity agreements by making alliances with the growing ranks of immigrants among us on the job and in our communities.

(1992)

## Containerization Makes for a Lonely Waterfront

KATE CALLEN: Stanley Weir has twenty-three years' experience as a blue-collar worker, during nine years of which he was a longshoreman and a merchant seaman. He also has a Ph.D. in sociology. He has taught bargaining skills to practicing unionists at the University of Illinois. Together with a Los Angeles longshoreman, he currently [1978] operates a publishing house that specializes in books on the subject of work.

Weir is also the principal investigator of a National Institute of Mental Health-supported study of "The Effects of Automation on the Lives of Longshoremen." On March 28, Weir described his work and findings at a special presentation given by the Center for Studies of Metropolitan Problems.

In the two years that he has roamed longshoremen's cafes, barber-shops, and homes for the study, Weir has chronicled a variety of lifestyle changes on waterfronts where machines are rapidly replacing men. Weir points out that containerization, or automated ship-loading, was mass-introduced in the late 1960s and that by 1983 it may eliminate 75 percent of longshore employment in West Coast ports. With more aluminum cargo containers and fewer human beings on the docks, Weir foresees a lonely waterfront.

STAN WEIR: When you work in a containerized situation, you don't have any audience. When I'm working break bulk cargo—manual ship-loading—I'm working with five to seven others, and they see me work, so there's some incentive to show a little class. But if no one's watching, who cares? . . . The disappearance of an audience of fellow workers robs the job of self-respect and socialization.

In eight years of teaching shop stewards, I asked every class what was the best thing about the job. I got only one answer in eight years: "The best thing about the job is the people on it." Those who are isolated



and can't socialize are usually the people with the biggest absentee problems and the people who are least happy on the job.

KATE CALLEN: Weir reports that containerization has divided longshoremen into two categories. After 1934, all West Coast longshoremen were hired out of union-controlled hiring halls. In 1966, the container terminals won the right to hire permanent employees or steady men, to run the giant ship-loading machines. The hall men who now do the remaining manual work are getting an average of two to three days' work each week, and the paychecks of the steady men contain amounts that are double those of the hall men. Weir has seen how both sets of men and their families have had to adjust their lifestyles to fit the new technology.

STAN WEIR: Whether they're steady men working more regular hours or they're hall men working less, longshoremen seem to feel more a part of their neighborhoods now. There's probably more socialization in neighborhood bars now than in waterfront bars. It's my impression that some relate better at home now. They are more dependent on their families now. Some wives have had to go out and work to supplement incomes. In other families, the men have gone out and gotten second jobs, and these men are away from home more than ever. An advantaged few have developed new career talents and have experienced an expansion of personality so that the changes work to these men's benefit.

A sizeable block has refused to take second jobs or become steady men. They continue to work out of the hall and simply spend less money by keeping old cars and not painting their houses. Others become more active in the union, and there is some talk of rebel action.

Another group is seeking early retirement; in their discouragement, they go to the doctor with old and bothersome waterfront injuries. None of the men in my sample has sought out any radical organizations to join up with. I do find a number of longshoremen turning to religion. For the first time in anyone's memory, there's a "Longshoremen for Christ" organization in Los Angeles. And then there are the men who lose their identities in this change and drift into alcohol, divorce, self-destruction. As one wife told me, "he doesn't know who he is. Before, he had all you guys every day to reassure him who he was. Now I have to stick pretty close to keep him going to AA."

KATE CALLEN: According to Weir, containerization has turned many old waterfronts into tourist attractions. Loading docks that once teemed with workers have been converted to hotels or dinner-theaters and some waterfront cafes seek ways of not serving longshoremen. With the loss of job, lifestyle, and place, maritime workers have lost confidence in established values. Weir feels that frustration has changed the longshoreman's once-vital image of himself and his society.

STAN WEIR: The longshoremen see this change in their work life as part of an overall change in society. They connect containerization with freeways, high-rises, inflation, the whole works. I don't think it's a consciously thought-out political evaluation, but there is a real sense of powerlessness in the face of this tremendous change. They equate their occupational experience with the American experience and, as a result, they express far less identification with their government. What happens to them on the job is something they blame on their government, as well as their union officials, their employers, and themselves.

(1978)

## Luddism Today

Luddism emerged as a movement from below in the last decade of the eighteenth century. It impeded the factory-ization of cottage industry and the mechanization of stocking weaving for over three decades, postponing the introduction of the harvesting machine two score years. The Luddites accomplished much of this through the tactic of selective machine-breaking, but Luddism's success also stems from its identity as a mass political movement.

Seldom centralized in more than a handful of districts at a time, Luddism developed into a force that challenged government power across the English Midlands. So formidable was its strength that in 1811, the British government put a larger army in the field to put down Luddism than it had mobilized against Napoleon under Wellington—twelve thousand armed men or more than half of its land forces. One can well understand how this restricted England's ability to make a winning fight against the United States in the War of 1812.

In a series of lectures at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1964, Eric Hobsbawm contended that the period of factory-ization which England experienced almost two centuries ago yields more comparisons—actual and potential, political and social—with the present period of automation than any of the periods in between. This thesis is worthy of close analysis.

The key to understanding the success of the Luddites is to see that Luddism was based on an alliance between the working and the middle classes. The circumstances of factory-ization created close mutual interests between the two strata, a solidarity. Cottage industry not only created large numbers of industrial jobs for poor farmers in the Midlands, but it was also the basis for the tremendous growth of a middle class to organize and service it. The elimination of cottage industry threatened a vital job base of that class. Working-class Luddites secured the advantage of having

middle-class allies. Sections of the middle class brought to Luddism their sophisticated technical and cultural skills.

In our time, the period since the 1960s has been a time when hundreds of thousands of jobs have been eliminated in the meatpacking, printing, longshoring, and warehousing industries, among others. No end of the job killing is in sight, unless resistance is mounted. The development of the silicon chip has made possible the mass introduction of computer automation and robotics. The “new tech” threatens to create not only new levels of technological unemployment, but also the deskilling of remaining jobs, thus undercutting the power of working people on the job. Downward displacement of workers in the core economy is on the agenda. Those in the peripheral sectors face being bumped below into marginal jobs. Marginally employed persons can look ahead to lives of permanent joblessness. Segregation of their living areas can only further injure the quality of all city life.

At the same time that mechanization and automation erode industrial work-life quality, they also undercut the autonomy of people in white-collar employment and the professions. “Middle-class” workers are being proletarianized, Taylorized, and made the subjects of experiments in human relations “work motivation” schemes. In some professions, like engineering, many jobs are being casualized. Clearly, new technology has created an objective need for a working- and middle-class alliance.

There is a new basis now for building movements that could connect the struggles of radicalized industrial workers, white-collar workers, and professionals—an updating of what the “Old Left” once called a “worker-intellectual alliance”—but larger in scale and not programmatically sectarian. Around the country there have sprung up hundreds of movements formed mainly by young middle-class intellectuals for the purpose of stopping the destruction of wildlife and the biosphere itself. The same new technology that is permanently eliminating jobs, making total prisons of factories, and factory-izing office and professional work is also the major vehicle for accelerated damage to the ecology, whether by direct war or uncontrolled expansion of the nuclear, oil, aerospace, arms, chemical, and plastics industries. A common opponent exists.

How can we begin to exploit the potential for alliances between industrial and middle-class workers? Industrial workers are concerned about the pollution of streams and lakes, the extinction of wildlife, wilderness amenities, slums, sprawl, and all the rest, yet the threat to the quality of their life on the job is such that it must be given first priority. Consequently, it is

around those and related issues that alliances can most likely begin, creating a nexus of goals that include environmental conservation. Still, the question nags, how to develop a unity of effort operationally? Intellectuals, in their high sensitivity to the environmental crisis, have been able to organize groups to save the earth's resources. How can they approach industrial and public workers organizationally for the purposes of joint action?

With a handful of exceptions at present, this can only be done only through official labor unions, controlled by leaderships that have no more than shaky alliances with their own ranks at the local level. This includes the top officials of even the most liberal and sophisticated unions. It is today highly difficult for anyone in the general public to get even an impressionistic view of the structure of feeling in the ranks of labor. Rank and file opposition movements get little coverage in the media. They remain hidden from view in the workplaces where the public has no access. The message constantly relayed to the middle class is that the memberships of unions are an undifferentiated mass of television-watching and beer-drinking hedonists. Television and beer? Yes, and more. Many means of escape from barren work lives are used. Leisure is an extension of what is the reality of life on the job. The more denial of natural human needs experienced during a shift, the more total is the need for what Clement Greenberg called "distraction and vicarious experience that will give those immediate satisfactions denied during working hours by constraint of efficiency."<sup>1</sup>

Martini circuits and Club Med-type vacations attest that there are parallel results from the condition of life on professional and management jobs. Actually, the stereotypical image given industrial workers by media representations like Archie Bunker in the television show *All in the Family* is testimony to the isolation of workers and intellectuals from each other. This is due, mainly, to the contrived separation of mental and manual work in our society, a separation now accelerated by new technology.

In 1964, an entire series of rank and file worker revolts broke into the open at the local level. One of their major goals centered on the desire to enrich mindless work tasks. They got little press coverage proportional to their importance and the little coverage they did get was neither favorable nor accurate. While isolated from each other, even in the same industry, the revolts toppled five longtime incumbent international union presidents. Half a decade later, when employers and union heads learned how to deal effectively with the revolts for the time being, the form of the rebellion shifted. Nineteen sixty-nine saw the largest single wave of absenteeism,

tardiness, and minor sabotage actions ever to hit this country. In turn, the widespread use of "Quality of Work Life" experiments was instituted by employers to deal with the crisis. Resistance and radicalization had in no way disappeared from the working class, contrary to the theories expressed by liberal academics during the 1950s. It was there all along. It's just that it was obscured from sight behind chain-link fences and time-card racks. Official union leaders did not speak of it in public, and it did not lead them to turn toward their own ranks for the purpose of making any shifts of perspective or changes in program.

Why is it that for more than thirty years the struggles of the American working class have been contained within the workplaces and unable to break out into the national arena? The question is operationally the most important of our time. Forces for progressive social change will never be able to equal the media resources of established institutions. They certainly will never be able to equal the armed might of those institutions. The only equalizer available is the numbers of the working class and their power to affect production and transportation. The leadership and presence of the ranks of workers in the struggles of the 30s was the basis for optimism in progressive circles of that period. Their absence since that time has caused despair. The question of why this containment has taken place is one which can be pursued on its own terms, yet literally no grouping outside establishment and conservative academic circles has attempted serious study of it.

What are the reasons for the containment of workers' struggles to the workplace and their absence from broader political battles? Commonly, the blame is laid on the workers themselves. We hear, "They are handicapped by racism." "They continue to be preoccupied by the two-party system." "They still believe that capitalism is viable." There is some truth in all the statements. But what alternatives have been offered to workers? How many of the statements made about the conservatism of the working class are made on the basis of firsthand contact? The questions need not be begged, and in fact, they must be answered. The main thing is that there was at least as much truth in such statements during the 1930s when the working class revolted against dictatorial means used to rule their lives on the job and off.

After World War II a series of strikes broke out. The strike wave grew to become the largest of all time, with over four million participants. The government and the employers were faced with the problem of how to reestablish authority over labor comparable to what they enjoyed during

the war. Obviously, strikes could not be outlawed altogether. Policies were developed instead to allow strikes only to support negotiations for new contracts as old ones expired, actions that the top leaders of labor would be able substantially to control. The goal of the peacetime policy was to eliminate strikes in support of grievances during the lives of contracts. The Taft-Hartley Act was legislated into being in 1947, the same year that the automation era opened. As a set of amendments to the National Labor Relations Act it laid the foundation for a series of judicial and National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) decisions which between the mid-1950s and mid-1970s cemented arbitration into contract grievance procedures as the final binding step in grievance redress processes. Listed just below are six of a long list of decisions that have forcibly raised the question of collective bargaining as “an additional master.”

1. *Lincoln Mills*, Supreme Court, 1957<sup>2</sup>

This decision held that there is a trade-off whereby workers in a bargaining unit give up the right to strike in return for the right to grieve with binding arbitration.

2. *Steel Workers Trilogy*, Supreme Court, 1960 (three decisions handed down in one day)

All three decisions pushed the notion of arbitrability, “a presumption of arbitrability,” as opposed to previous precedent that a matter covered by a labor contract is not arbitrable. In short, that the courts should resolve all matters of doubt in this area in favor of arbitration.

3. *Lucas Flour*, Supreme Court, 1962

This decision strongly implies that any contract which has an arbitration clause is also a no-strike contract.

4. *Boys’ Markets*, Supreme Court, 1970

This decision constitutes a negation of the anti-injunction section of the Norris-LaGuardia Act. If workers are striking over an issue which is arbitrable—practically everything—a court can then issue an injunction demanding workers arbitrate instead of using the strike weapon.

5. *Collyear*, National Labor Relations Board, 1971

This decision held that when any conflict is subject to grievance procedure and to the filing of an Unfair Labor Practice Charge with the NLRB, the disagreement must first go to arbitration before the charge can be filed. This creates a “catch-22” situation because of the insistent stand by the Board that it cannot hear a case after arbitration because arbitrators’ decisions should not be overturned.

#### 6. *Emporium*, Supreme Court, 1975

This decision resulted from an action by a group of Emporium Department Store employees in San Francisco. In their perception, union officials were not responsive to their grievances, and so they demonstrated and issued a leaflet to the public on the sidewalk outside their workplace. In this case, the Court upheld the decision by a lower court which issued an injunction against the action on the grounds that the workers' contract had an arbitration clause and that outside actions such as the leafleting by workers in this case was not protected because they should have taken the dispute to arbitration rather than initiate any action that could lead to a strike. In its total effect, this decision also holds that once workers have chosen freely a collective bargaining representative (a particular union), they must thereafter stay within channels of representation administered by that union.

Under this web of Court and Board rulings (and those decisions supplementary to them), it is not unusual today for local union leaders to spend brief periods in prison for refusal to demand that their ranks obey various court orders and injunctions. The effects of these rulings, however, are not at all limited to legal repression. Today, over 90 percent of all labor agreements outlaw unconditionally the right to strike as a means of pursuing grievances during the time period covered by the contract. Too often, the filing of a grievance is a meaningless action. For most union members, the grievance procedure is, in a sense, "the union." By national average just over 2 percent of union members now attend union meetings. Mandatory overtime has become a fixed condition of life in industry—destroying the forty-hour week and increasing the negative effects of work that is speeded up and increasingly monotonous. This, together with the long commutes demanded by suburbanization makes it hard for workers to go home only to have to gather energies to then drive back to town to attend union meetings. Moreover, attendance at union meetings often appears like an exercise in futility. The main function of the membership at meetings is to listen to reports of actions already taken by union officials and to rubber-stamp them after the fact.

On the job, however, organized workers are confronted daily with grievances against management and by the conduct of the union officials who handle their complaints. For large numbers of workers, this creates a contradiction in relation to the grievance process. Despite the ineffectiveness of these juridical processes imposed by management, the courts, and



their own unions, they are all that is legally available for purposes of redress. The ranks are forced to use them, even though, at the same time, these procedures are objects of ridicule and contempt. It is not unusual for rank and filers to make fun of the grievance procedures, as well as of union representatives, the union, and themselves for having to resort to such unsatisfying and unproductive channels.

The crisis I am discussing here does not turn on the question of bad versus good human material. The present institution of collective bargaining and its lack of alternatives corrupts good people. Or, it attracts the participation of those already made cynical by what they have seen before taking office and by their perception that no alternatives exist.

I have stated that over 90 percent of all American collective bargaining agreements contain unconditional "no-strike" clauses. What about those that do not? No more than a handful of contracts unconditionally allow for strikes upon exhaustion of grievance procedures. The vast majority of those that do allow strikes provide that the strike weapon can be used conditionally, that is, only under a certain specific instance or two. The winning of conditional clauses is not unimportant, and the clauses are not always inoperable. Nevertheless, by and large, they are unable to create the needed effect. De facto, over 99 percent of all union contracts eliminate the strike weapon during the life of agreements. A good example of this is supplied by the conditional no-strike contracts with the Big Three auto manufacturers by the United Auto Workers. They permit strikes during the life of the contract at the local level (after all steps of the grievance procedure have been exhausted) under two conditions—lack of safety and speedup. But, in order to utilize the clause, local unions must obtain the approval of the international union. The UAW's international headquarters at Solidarity House allowed the ranks this freedom in only token instances. The mainline history of the UAW leadership under Walter Reuther, Leonard Woodcock, and now Douglas Fraser has been one of struggle (mostly successful) against the ranks on this issue. Since 1955, most major strikes at master contract time have been waged against the contracts negotiated by the leadership. This same conflict between the leadership and the ranks sparked the outbreak of the rank and file revolts in auto in the 60s. These revolts, I should add, were simultaneous with rebellions of university students on campuses across the nation against undemocratic and bureaucratic procedures in educational institutions.

The anti-Communist hysteria in the U.S. that developed during the period of the Korean War was previewed three years earlier inside American

labor unions. The initiating tool was the non-Communist affidavit required from union leaders by the Taft-Hartley Act in order to maintain their organizations' status as legal bargaining agencies before the National Labor Relations Board. John L. Lewis of the coal miners' union urged that all union officials refuse to sign, as did the top leaders in several other unions. Walter Reuther, however, swung the pivotal UAW in favor of conformity, a boon for both the affidavits and the act. Both became established precedent without serious opposition. The ensuing witch hunts worked their way down to the "shop floor" levels. Radicals that survived found themselves isolated. All tendencies among the left were essentially eliminated as a public presence inside the unions.

All labor movements contain an entire spectrum of ideologies, including revolutionary tendencies on their far left. During the 1930s, the overwhelming majority of radicals in the American labor movement came (in one way or another) to look to the Communist Party for leadership. Few of them anywhere were yet aware of the party's anti-democratic internal structure or knew that its policies were dictated primarily by the needs of the dying socialist experiment in Russia. In the ultra-left or "Third Period" of the Communist International before Russia was able to get diplomatic recognition from large capitalist countries, American Communists established high credibility among industrial workers. At the workplace level, Communist militants were free to champion almost any fight that emerged against the employers. The "Third Period" ended in 1935, but the credibility carried over into the early 1940s despite repeated instances of "leadership interruptus" during the Popular Front period which began in 1936. That the Communists had done little, if anything, to institute rank and file democratic organizational forms in the unions where they had influence or control was still unnoticed by many. When the war broke out, however, Communists and Communist sympathizers who had been mainstays in daily grievance struggles suddenly underwent a deep change (if they remained loyal to the party), and reemerged as champions of giveaways to the employers. In the National Maritime Union, for example, whose leadership was at that time pro-Communist, official publications and educational programs conducted an all-out campaign entitled "Readin', Writin', and No Strikin'"<sup>3</sup>

Parallel campaigns were conducted in many unions led by pro-Communists. Employers responded with enthusiasm and praise.<sup>4</sup> New types of shop stewards began to be developed by these unions. Real militants, or "troublemakers," designated as such because they showed a desire to

hold on to the gains of the 30s as much as possible during the war, found it especially hard to survive in the self-designated “progressive” unions. The only opportunity remaining for these unions to appear to still have a left stance was provided by Jim Crow unions that equated admission of blacks with “Commies.” Radicalized workers, white or black, weren’t fooled by either side. From the beginning of the war, the Communists had been counseling racial and ethnic minorities to put aside their struggles for the “duration.” Never before had a working class been so completely and voluntarily cut adrift by a left-wing organization. Thus it is no wonder that the Communist Party received almost a total lack of defense from the ranks of labor during the McCarthy period, or that the rank and file resists socialist preachments to this day. Many other factors help play a role in creating the isolation between workers and radicals, but it is probable that this one has been the most devastating.

The local union level rank and file revolts that broke into the open in 1964 were neither inspired by nor led by “leftists.” They were representative of a new radical mood developing across the working class. New values were replacing old ones, a process accelerated as large numbers of young workers entered the labor force. The primary stated goal of the revolts was the improvement of working conditions. The slogan that swelled out of the auto plants in the mid-1960s—“humanize working conditions”—was not so much a call to obtain clean toilets, lunchrooms, and work areas so much as it was a signal that workers needed a voice in decision making about production in order to survive. They wanted the pace of work decreased and its meaning increased. This was more than a resumption of a drive that had been neglected since 1942. It was, as well, a response to increased production quotas and to negative experience with new technology.

Every introduction of new technology manifests an active application of employer strategy to control the purpose, pace, and nature of production. Worker resistance has to be anticipated and then dealt with directly once it actually begins. Depending upon the particular management’s perspective, attempts will be made either to coerce or co-opt employees into acceptance of the change.

The rank and file revolts of the 1960s were followed by the largest single wave of absenteeism, tardiness, and minor acts of sabotage ever experienced by American industry. The two waves of revolt, the first collective, and the second individual, delivered a body blow to management strategists. How could they sustain motivation? What options were left to them?

They turned at this point to the results of the Hawthorne experiments of the 1930s that had shown that even minor and highly controlled workers' control schemes introduced from the top could increase production. The employers were not about to utilize the findings of the experiments in the 30s. They had other ways than of getting more production that were still effective and did not necessitate any loss of control over immediate work tasks. In the wake of the rank and file revolts of 1969–70, however, desperate employer strategists suddenly revived the Hawthorne experiment. By the thousands, efforts emerged to “revive the dead work ethic” in the American working class. These plans, called “Quality of Work Life Experiments,” were often funded by taxpayer monies with government supervision.

By the time Quality of Work Life programs got stylized into industrial relations jargon as “QWL,” the element of workers' control was being stripped from them. The experimenting employers had found it impossible to control “workers' control.” Rank and filers were going along with the experiments. At Polaroid, they used them to gain more autonomy through phantom informal agreements. American management lacked the control mechanism that allowed wider experimentation of the same sort in Mao's China for several years—they couldn't put a party member in each control group.

QWL programs continue. All government work in this area has been given over to the Productivity Commission, which openly admits that increased productivity is the primary concern. Nevertheless, there is ever wider use of QWL by many large employers. General Motors, for example, some time ago dropped all experiments involving workers' control in any form, no matter how minute. But in 1973, GM and the UAW established by contract a National Joint Committee to Improve the Quality of Worklife. Early this year, the *UAW Washington Report* announced that “QWL programs between General Motors Corporation and locals of the UAW result in more constructive collective bargaining relationships, a more satisfied work force, improved product quality, and reductions in grievances, absenteeism, and labor turnover,” according to UAW vice president Irving Bluestone. There are now fifty such programs, although most still are in the early stages. The parties to the 1973 pact “agreed to urge local managements and local unions to cooperate in quality of work life experiments and projects.” When interest in establishing a program develops, local representatives meet with representatives from the corporation or the union international. As a basis for proceeding there is to be “no

increase in production standards as a result of the QWL program”—an assurance against speedup. (Of course, increased production due to technological change is another matter.) Also, “There must be no loss of manpower . . . an assurance of job security.” Obviously, layoffs due to business cycles are another matter. Under this approach, “no separate quality of work life committee is formed.” Instead, the local union shop committee, the representatives who handle the grievances and bargaining, forms the union committee. This avoids any conflict in determining which subjects fall within the purview of adversarial collective bargaining and which are subject to cooperative effort of QWL, Bluestone explained.<sup>5</sup>

This announcement reveals that GM and UAW top officials intend to institute their collaborative arrangement down to the shop floor. The entire program can be put on a plant without any consultation with the ranks in the bargaining unit. It will further undermine the power of the official union and is a risky step for those at the top to take, despite the momentary stability it might achieve.

Why have companies and unions taken this gamble by putting even the local officials in the position of being enemies of the ranks? There is a direct connection between this particular QWL program and GM’s plan to introduce soon into the plants a large number of computer automation devices, both on the assembly line and in the skilled trades departments. There are many new robots that can perform operations more detailed than spray painting and welding. Numerical control (NC) lathes with far more sophisticated abilities are available. All kill jobs and all have the capacity to enrage assembly-line witnesses to job killing. Clearly, the new machines could not have been designed if Taylorized humans performing the same operations had not been watched hard and long by engineering departments for many years. An employer will spend vast sums of money to ensure industrial peace during the introduction period of new technology and until its use becomes established precedent.

The persistence of rank and file rebellion and continued high levels of absenteeism, tardiness, and product sabotage document what is apparent when any close contact is made with either the ranks or the management people who govern them on the job daily. American workers are not satisfied or apathetic. There is no stability of rule in the private governments that run the places of work in the U.S. Working people cannot live with the conditions I have described. Breakout awaits the appearance of alternative forms of struggle and visualization of ways to undo the institution of arbitration no-strike (contract) unionism. If the past provides

pattern for the future, change awaits the time when a grouping of workers, even in small critical mass, somewhere in the country, by trial and error come up with a new struggle form for others to view and then test. It could entail the creation of rank and file organizations formed in addition to the unions. English workers, for instance, support two sets of labor organizations. Their national unions negotiate mainly wage and money item minimums. Their shop stewards committees and councils are in most cases formed independently of the unions. Once the unions establish the minimums, the stewards in each workplace go after more. A development in some way similar—were it to occur in the United States—would enable American workers to make up for a major shortcoming of the unions, their failure to seek qualitative improvements in working conditions. Moreover, it would allow the ranks to do that which their officials refuse to do, to meet the clear and present danger of computer automation and robotics.

During the last forty years, American labor leaders have become more and more insistent that collective bargaining goals be limited to money items. For at least the last half of those four decades, it has become increasingly clear that this is not consistent with the interests of labor's ranks as shown by the nature of opposition from below. Just as important, there is clear indication that large sections of the labor force have undergone deep changes of attitude, values, and structure of feeling in this area while their leaders have not.

It is probable that the twenty-five-year period of relative "full employment" which our country experienced starting in the 1940s laid the basis for a radicalization more profound in many ways than that which resulted from the Great Depression. Expectations about the quality of life heightened. By the 1960s it began to come clear to many people of the 30s and 40s generations that happiness was not to be had primarily through home-focused consumerism. They learned this about themselves through direct experience aided by the vision of their children. Millions of families had levels of material abundance undreamed of in the pre-World War II period—washers, dishwashers, ironers, dryers, television sets, power mowers, mixmasters, electric toothbrushes, and even motor boats. It may be that their sons and daughters noticed first that something was out of sync. Their parents brought new appliances into the house with smiles and body language heralding the arrival of "happy days," but they still came home from work tired and with a sense of having spent their dignity. Many of the same parents had always preached that a college education

was the key to “the good life” and sacrificed so that “the kids will never have to work like we do.” The “kids” went away to the universities and, beginning in 1964, began to send a mass message home, that life in the higher institutions of learning was “crap,” training for professions that sustained status artificially.

Working-class families today are still sending sons and daughters to college, but with fewer illusions. It is a matter of playing the survival game and little more. The common pre-World War II expression about how “three square meals a day” and “a roof overhead” spelled security has disappeared from the conversations of most Americans. It is true that the fight to improve working conditions was the primary drive of the new militants in the 30s, but of almost equal importance was the need to improve standards of consumption. Thus, much of the collective struggle was to obtain solution to off-the-job problems which were perceived as individual problems. The rank and file revolts that peaked with the strike against General Motors at Lordstown in early 1972 again documented revolts totally oriented toward the improvement of life on the job where most of waking life is spent. For the first time, the membership of the mass unions formed in the 30s were conducting collective actions to improve on an area of life activity that is carried on in a collective environment.

In a number of ways, the ranks of organized labor today are in a position somewhat like that which a previous generation found itself in during World War II. Their ability to strike and affect union policy is seriously restricted. Union officials administer, but do not lead. Workers have lost touch with the middle class, despite the recent mass growth of unions composed of professionals. Life as it is actually lived on industrial jobs has lost means of obtaining public visibility. At the same time, there is an increase of workplace consciousness among industrial workers.

Over fourteen thousand strikes involving more than six million workers occurred during the Second World War. The majority of the actions hit one workplace at a time and lasted no more than two days. Union officials, particularly at the international level, commonly acted in a disciplinary role.<sup>6</sup> Nelson Lichtenstein says that the wartime wildcats “resembled those work stoppages which flared in the auto industry before the organization of the international union: uncoordinated except on the department or plant-wide level, short in duration, led by a shifting and semi-spontaneous leadership.”<sup>7</sup>

This is true as well of today’s wildcats, conducted in desperation and in violation of contracts. In fact, almost all rank and file activity—whether

it be a move to refuse to ratify a contract, illegally extend a legal strike, organize a wildcat, or diminish efficiency—has a phantom quality in its leadership. It is no mystery why—simple survival precautions. Were any of these actions to be reported in detail, qualities of genius would be revealed to the public from a social stratum that is often portrayed as a monolith of weak minds and strong backs.

Given the present alignment of forces against them and their lack of allies, the ranks of American labor at times go all-out to conform to the wishes of employers. At other times they withdraw, and as individuals do only what they have to in order to make it through the day and get home. At still other times, they unite and resist. It is not unusual for the same people to implement all three modes of conduct over a period of time, the goal of all three being the same, preservation of self, group, and the energies of both until openings appear that allow struggle for new levels of autonomy.<sup>8</sup>

In any forced truce or stalemate in social conflict, what is always awaited by the side of the underdog is a chance for an unexpected breakthrough. Who would have guessed, for example, that the nature of the strikes in the textile industry in the very early 1930s would capture imaginations and open the era which created the CIO? But repetitions of history are not inevitable. What is inevitable is conflict. To achieve success within it requires expenditures of energy to strengthen one's chosen side in the present so as to maximize any breakthroughs which appear in the future.

The most difficult alliances for progressive issue movements to develop are those that allow direct involvement with rank and file workers in either public or private employment. No matter that many of them belong to unions, the leaderships of most unions keep their ranks isolated. Top labor leaders are often willing to aid progressive causes as individuals, but only alliances involving the ranks are powerful and dependable.

How many organizations formed by intellectuals have ever put out the word that they are available to any bona fide rank and file opposition movements in need of aid? Many rebel groupings might have survived if only they could have gotten some recognition of their struggle in the media. Even a brief mention in a weekly newspaper or on a small radio station affords vitally needed protection in many cases. Invisibility is a potent killer. Organizations containing intellectuals have media contacts, writing and publishing skills, and, when needed, access to lawyers. When on-the-job rebels cannot afford to be seen talking to each other at work



or off the job, a regular meeting of a popular issue organization can provide needed shelter. In the process of receiving shelter, the workers could become the supporters and popularizers of their new friends' causes. It is possible that they might grow together, providing each side respects the abilities of the other. Might it not also be that such meetings could be where the ranks of industrial and public/professional unions finally get meaningful introduction to each other? That would be one way of registering that intellectuals no longer have to go to labor struggles as total outsiders as they were forced to do in the 1930s. The middle class now has its own independent base in the unions via teachers, social workers, technicians, and more.

(c. 1980)

## Effects of Automation in the Lives of Longshoremen

In the late 1950s the longshore industry began to experience its first major technological change in almost a century, or since the introduction of steam-driven cargo hoisting machinery onto the decks of ships. The decade following World War II saw the development of large containers in which freight could be hauled by trucks as trailers or on railroad flat-cars, "piggyback." Maritime shipping was left as the one obstacle to a totally integrated freight transport system.

By 1975, more than two-thirds of all dry cargoes moving across the docks of the major American ports were containerized in metal boxes, 40×8×8 feet in length, height, and width. Ships of traditional design whose double bottoms and sweat battens once felt the burdens of sacked coffee, spices, sugar, and various cartoned goods and absorbed their smells—became unusual sights at long-used piers. More common were new or remodeled ships whose holds are slotted exactly to receive and nest the rectangular, locked, sealed, clean, and odorless containers.

The automation of the cargo shipment process continues apace. The ships of newest design do not require the presence of longshoremen on their docks or in their holds. The interlocking containers are stowed or discharged by giant shoreside cranes with automatic hook on and hook release devices. Not only is it increasingly rare for one longshoreman to touch the same piece of sweated cargo touched by another longshoreman somewhere in the world, longshoremen of different ports and countries are seldom anymore allowed to sense each other's presence. The old ships which carried break-bulk cargoes provided hold and dock longshoremen around the world with physically identical work environments. The work-places traveled the globe and were the same. What changed in each ship as it went from port to port was the cargo and the nationality of the men who worked on it. As each longshore gang boarded a ship and uncovered the hatches, they found each other's city and union newspapers, cargo

hand hooks lost or left behind, and evidences of secret feasts made possible by edible or imbibable articles in the cargo. This very special form of international communication is becoming extinct. More and more, longshoremen work exclusively on the dock in the shadow of the ships, but not inside them.

The movement of traditional break-bulk cargoes demanded that longshoremen form partnerships. Most cargoes came in sacks, boxes, cartons, bales, or barrels which were too heavy to be lifted by an individual. Then too, the stowage of each piece within a vessel or its discharge from its place of rest within the vessel onto a sling, board, or net regularly presented one or more logistical problems. Improper stowage could cause shifting at sea and consequent unseaworthiness of the ship. Incorrect stacking of loads could cause cargo damage and serious accidents. The problems were best solved by consultation and the critical double checks allowed by the partner system. Moreover, a partner provided another set of eyes for the detection of a dangerous condition in an industry where the number of accidents is second only to those in hard coal mining.

The longshore partnership was and still is (when and wherever it survives) a total social institution. Partners not only move cargo together and communicate their moves, the casual nature of the industry demands that they seek job assignments together, an activity made easier if both live near one another. Counting the time spent traveling to the union hiring hall to obtain a job assignment, the waiting, the trip to the pier, work, lunchtime, coffee-time, and the trip back to the hiring hall to sign in for the next day's or night's work, longshore partners in large number were commonly within each other's reach for twelve hours a day. Longshore partnerships are in a way respected by longshoremen at least as much as marriage partnerships. Laugh, argue, "bruise and heal quick." Personality flaws are overlooked in order to retain the mergers because "there's no one any better than him when it comes to work." Having a steady partner builds at least one "known" into the work in an industry where the ships and piers being worked, like the cargoes and bosses, change daily.

"How long you two guys been working together now?" was (until the 1970s) an often-asked question. The pride contained in the answer was seldom feigned. There was no need for hardened artificiality. Also, the partners were free to separate at any time, and there was no physical property to be divided at the time of the split. In West Coast ports prior to the late 1960s when job opportunity was still equalized by union decree, there would never be an occasion for separated partners to compete against

one another for jobs. Separations were usually friendly. When the post-separation question came—"Hey, why did you split up with your partner?"—the answer almost always sustained old loyalties.

As break-bulk cargo has come to provide a minority of jobs, the partnerships that remain have changed radically in character. They are utilized whenever possible on days when the old style work is available, but the operation of the large pieces of capital equipment that move containers provides solitary jobs. Diminished work opportunity has demanded that many obtain a second job which places them away from the waterfront several days a week and out of easy communication with members of the "old" occupation.

The 1934 longshore strike in all West Coast and Hawaiian ports which peaked with the San Francisco General Strike provided participants with what William Pilcher calls a "social charter."<sup>1</sup> Just as the War of Independence remained for so long the common emotional linkage for American citizens, Pilcher explains, the 1934 victory became the social glue of the Pacific longshore community. During the following twenty-five years, these men would live the largest, longest, and most successful formal experiment in workers' control ever conducted in the United States. By defeating the employers, they won the right to control the process of job assignment in what (in name) was a "jointly operated employer-union dispatch hall" in each port. But the union longshoremen won the right to elect all job dispatchers in a democratic annual election. With that power they had de facto control over recruitment to the industry, in itself an institution that will warrant mention again here later. By 1939 every longshoreman in each port had to be ordered and dispatched from a single central dispatch hall. The stevedoring companies were thus denied the right to hire steady men or gangs. Favoritism, the most insidious of weapons and the practice creating the deepest resentment, became a minor, rather than a major problem. Many longshoremen hold that the elimination of steady men and "preferred longshore gangs" (gangs that did not have to participate in the work opportunity equalization process) was the biggest single victory obtained in the battles of the '30s.

"The 1934 Award" to longshoremen by the Franklin Roosevelt administration, which ended the strike, also provided the men of the West Coast longshoremen's union with a number of on-the-job controls. By both formal negotiation and direct on-the-job action, the union men established firm manning scales and definite gang sizes for all cargoes.<sup>2</sup> Protection against employer retaliation for on-the-job militancy was established by

eliminating the employers' right to fire members of a longshore gang as individuals. To fire a particular man, a walking boss had to fire the entire gang of which the man was a member. The fired gang was then regularly dispatched to another (or even the same) ship on the following day without penalty, unless or until the stevedoring company in question filed formal charges against the gang. In the latter event, the gang could continue to work for that company without penalty until found guilty. The gang then stood trial, first before a union grievance committee. Only if found guilty there did it have to stand trial before a joint employer-union labor relations committee.

Additionally, out of the 1934 award the union established a hatch seniority system on each ship while it was in port. If, for example, a gang was assigned to number three hatch as work began on a ship newly arrived in port, the work in that hatch belonged to that gang during the ship's entire stay in port. Thus, if the gang incurred the wrath of a walking boss, the boss was unable to victimize its members by moving them to another hatch containing less tonnage (less work opportunity), or dirtier or harder-to-work cargo than the hatch to which they were originally assigned.

The fourth and final major control obtained by the West Coast longshoremen as a result of the 1934 award was the 2,100-pound load limit. No more than that amount of break-bulk cargo was allowed to be hoisted in or out of a hold at any one time on any sling, board, bridle, or net. Beyond being a safety measure, it became a major restriction on the employer's ability to conduct speedups.

The on-the-job controls or union work rules listed above continued in force for twenty-seven years—until 1961. Together with the union controls over job dispatch, work opportunity equalization, and recruitment, they made possible a “new way of life” for West Coast longshoremen. At the same time, the ILA East and Gulf Coast dockers were still (until the late 1950s) victims of various forms of the shape-up or employer-controlled hiring and were protected by only minimal union work rules. In effect, the West Coast longshoremen had decasualized the industry on their coast, mainly on their own terms. They eliminated the *helot* and near-migrant worker status of longshore labor and became respected citizens of their communities, bought homes, and raised families. No more were so many of their members relegated to living as involuntary singles in skid row rooms and apartments.

With the new security and freedom, the longshore work community took on a personality characterized in large part by the individuality of

the dress, compartment, and avocations of its members. "Dress-up Danny" provides, for now, an example. His fame was based on the dress suits he wore while doing hold work, and on his ability to work well while remaining sartorially immaculate. There were, and are, many like him. Necktie Charlie, Books Cartwright, Bicycle Kovacs—all actual people, their work names more real than the ones appearing on their birth certificates. Wise men, clowns, shamans, and eccentrics—they and men like them were and are conduits of expression for those around them. They perform and hold court while moving freight, during the wait for jobs in the dispatch halls, and in the pier cafes. Not all have nicknames or are extroverted, but all are known on the waterfront and sometimes beyond. There is presently a nationally recognized small press book club operated by a lone San Pedro longshoreman. There are teachers, artists, realtors, and poets.

Eric Hoffer is another case in point. It is probable that his writing career would have been quite different without the gains won by longshoremen in the 1930s. Union control of hiring made it possible for him as a union member to work only two or three days a week and write during the remaining four or five, and still retain regular employee status with full hiring, pension, and health benefit rights. Whether the other San Francisco longshoremen were angered or liked what he wrote, he could do the work and was accepted. Then too, there was pride in the understanding that his publishing accomplishments, if not his ideas, were in significant part a product of workers' institutions.

In 1960–1961, ILWU president Harry Bridges negotiated the first of two five-year "automation" or mechanization and modernization (M&M) contracts with the Pacific Maritime Association (PMA). Despite the fact that the containerization process had only just begun and break-bulk cargo would still provide most of the jobs until 1969, the contract sold all the on-the-job controls or work rules back to the employers. Not even the load limit was retained.

In 1959, or at the beginning of the two-year period during which the top PMA-ILWU officials worked out the formula for the first M&M agreement, an appointed and select union-management committee was allowed to recruit Class B longshoremen in every port. They were registered full-time employees. They worked under the jurisdiction of the union, paid dues to the union, but were not allowed to join it or obtain its protection. Thus, for the first time since 1934, there were regular working non-union longshoremen. It was made mandatory that the B men work in the holds of the ships after the A, or union, men had taken their pick of the daily

jobs. Most of the A men, however, were older and worked on the deck or dock. When youth is gone it becomes more difficult to climb the long vertical ladders in and out of the holds or work on irregular cargo floors. In most ports this division of the production process by union status and age allowed the employers maximum insurance against an outbreak of job actions when the rank and file union longshoremen would begin to learn what it meant to move cargo without work rule protection. The ship's hold or point of production was always decisive to any job action and the area that traditionally produced militants. But the majority in the holds were now B men who were assured of being fired for the simplest infraction of employer rules. The A men on the decks and docks, manipulated to the position of an aristocracy by age and the lack of leadership, were disarmed.

The price to the employers for purchase of the union work rules was a \$7,900 bonus to be collected by every man who reached age 65 with 25 full years in the industry. It could also be collected in the form of early retirement benefits at age 62, again with the twenty-five-year stipulation. Relatively few collected. Death still comes to the average West Coast longshoreman between 58 and 60.

The contract containing the sale was ratified by a two-to-one vote of the longshoremen up and down the coast. The opposition was largely unorganized, isolated within each port, and without an alternative proposal. Many among those who voted for the contract had deep misgivings, but they still had trust in the Harry Bridges leadership. They were told that the oncoming automation had already stripped them of their power to resist the employers and that they had better sell their work rules while they could still "exact a good price." Lost in the confusion was the fact that the M&M agreement also took essential control of recruitment to the industry away from the local unions in each port and centralized it in the hands of the top PMA-ILWU officials.

Only in one port was there organized resistance to the top officialdom's "automation program." It came from longshoremen in the port of Los Angeles. Their opposition was crushed as the employers, with high-level union support, diverted ships bound for Los Angeles to other ports in California, and then trucked their cargoes overland to and from the Los Angeles area. Ignorant of the struggle going on in Los Angeles, ILWU longshoremen in San Diego, Port Hueneme, and San Francisco became party to the tactic.

The second M&M agreement (1966–1971) was ratified by a seven-to-five

vote. The majority was significantly narrower than the one obtained for the preceding contract, but the opposition remained fragmented, still forced to deal with the demoralization created by the first M&M contract, and still disoriented by the magnitude of the change facing them. The idea that automation is progress "and you can't fight it" is deeply ingrained in all American society. Then, too, the 1966 contract upped the retirement bonus to \$13,600 at a time when the average age of the A men in a major port like San Francisco was over fifty-five. In that advanced state of confusion, there was little debate over the contract's clause 9.43 that allowed the employers to return to the pre-1939 practice of hiring steady men. Union officials assured the workers that this would involve only a "few handfuls" of men in each port. Actually, another sale was being made. Clause 9.43 gave up the foundation of the longshoremen's control over daily hiring in the dispatch hall and its commitment to work opportunity equalization.

With the mass introduction of containerization in the last years of the second M&M agreement, the employers began quietly to hire steady men in large numbers. Soon, ever-larger numbers of men were daily going directly to jobs without having to wait their proper turn in the hiring hall. Disgust, then open anger, and finally resistance began to develop. Among the men who continued to get their jobs from the hall, it became a mark of honor to be able to say that a steady job had been offered, "but I turned it down."

The expiration of the second M&M contract was met with the longest longshore strike in U.S. history, occurring in two segments separated by a Taft-Hartley injunction, and lasting 134 days. The contract was ratified with great difficulty in 1972, only after the ranks were many times outmaneuvered and long without paychecks. It contained a significant wage increase of over seventy cents an hour (which the government's Wage Stabilization Board later cut almost by half). In San Francisco, the main drive behind the strike was created by the steady man issue. Buttons with "No 9.43" appeared by the hundreds, first in San Francisco, and then in the other ports from Seattle to Los Angeles. This constituted the first organized multi-port opposition to the top union officials in ILWU history. One of the first acts of the striking locals was to call all steady men back to the hall. Morale skyrocketed with the accomplishment. That the contract that was finally approved still contained 9.43 was a monument to the ability of bureaucracies to close ranks against the rank and file. A few years later, in 1975, it took three coastwide referendums to get ratification of the contract currently in effect. Modest but determined opposition



continues to mount, even though no alternatives to the ideas of incumbent officials have been formulated. The longshoremen now fight the knowledge that it is late, that not only their hard-won working conditions, but their occupation itself is in danger of extinction.

The Matson Navigation Company is the largest shipping line on the West Coast. It is owned by the "Big Five" family grouping that dominates Hawaii. Matson in turn dominates the Pacific Maritime Association. Prior to its assumption of leadership in the capital investment program that automated longshoring mainly in the ports of San Francisco and Los Angeles, it used the major ports of the Hawaiian Islands as testing areas. The results are well known to ILWU longshoremen. Displaced Hawaiians are to be found in all major West Coast ports. In February of this year I talked at length with a small group of "Kanakas" working a Terminal Island pier in San Pedro. The major spokesman for the group was a man from Hilo in his mid-fifties of Japanese-Hawaiian descent. I explained who I was and the purpose of my study. He talked willingly:

When we began to see the results of automation in about 1956, we raised so much sand that Harry [Bridges] flew over for one of our meetings. We told him: "Wherever the containers go, even if it's to a supermarket uptown, we want to follow it and do the unloading." He said, "Now wait a minute you Pineapples, it's not going to work like that." And it didn't. Man, I made a trip back home just last year. When we used to load sugar onto the ships in 125-pound sacks, each ship was a seven-day job. Now, with the bulk ships, they blow in a full load in eleven hours. There were 370 longshoremen in the port. Now there are thirty-five. That's how much air the balloon has lost. I was in the first bunch let go. That was 1958. They called us the "First Phase." They gave us all 850 dollars to get ourselves and our families to a West Coast port. I been here now seventeen years. Harry was a good man in his time, but look at us now. In this port it's the same bad joke.

There is no exaggeration in the statements of the man from Hilo—one of the battlegrounds of the 1934 strike. Matson and the giant Sea Land company very early in their preparations for the "container explosion" found that longshore productivity at their container terminals increased 13 to 18 times over what it was in break-bulk operations. As one study revealed, "20 to 25 tons of cargo were regularly loaded by container in 2 and a half minutes as against the 18 to 20 man-hours required for break-bulk handling."<sup>3</sup>

Automation on the waterfront is not limited to the use of computer-regulated containers or break-bulk carriers. Lighter Aboard Ship (LASH) operations provide equally startling results. In San Francisco, for example, entire lighters or barges are loaded with rice in the Stockton delta area and towed down the river. When they reach the Bay, they are hoisted onto ships and locked into place, becoming integral parts of the ship's hulls. In effect, LASH ships have mobile holds or hatches.

Roll on—Roll off or Ro-Ro ships offer shippers still another option. Instead of hatches, Ro-Ro ships have large openings in their sides just higher than average pier height. These ships pull alongside a dock, open the side ports, and drop ramps from the side ports to the dock. Containers on wheels or unitized loads are then driven on, parked, and locked in place on one of the many deck levels until they reach the port of their destination—where they are driven off into giant marshaling yards. The insides of these ships resemble a multilevel parking lot, but the traffic, fumes, and speed of movement is far greater. These ships are able to enter a port, discharge up to sixteen thousand tons of cargo, and then load and leave in eighteen hours. It was not unusual for traditionally designed ships of this tonnage to remain in a port for seven days working two shifts with five times the number of men.

The new ships that bring autos from Japan and Europe also use the basic Ro-Ro design. The Datsun ships, for example, regularly discharge a thousand cars in Los Angeles in eight hours, then move on to Northwest ports where they load bulk wheat in the holds and logs on deck. The productivity improvement over the older ships is better than 200 percent.

None of the above-listed changes in cargo handling methods could have been accomplished without radical change in ship design. The new construction not only cut down drastically on the number of men needed for the loading of cargo in and out of holds, the new container, auto, and Ro-Ro ships generally have no masts, booms, or hoisting machinery on their decks. Shoreside cranes move the containers. Autos and trucks move on and off auto and Ro-Ro ships by ramp. Moreover, these ships, like all others built in the last decade, have steel hatch coverings that open and close electronically with the push of a button. On ships of traditional design it was not unusual for the rigging of booms and guys, plus the handling of hatch boards, battens, strongbacks, and heavy canvas tarps to involve a longshore gang's time for as much as 15 percent of a shift.

At the present time, the longshoremen who work steady for the various container terminals perform the bulk of the work needed to load and

unload the container ships. Men are ordered from the dispatch halls to these ships mainly for the purpose of putting on or taking off the heavy cable lashings which hold down the containers that are loaded three and four high on deck. Ships are now under construction which have automatic lashing devices.

All this does not mean that ships of traditional construction are no longer conducting trade. They are, and will continue to perform a role for another decade or two. The average life expectancy of a ship is thirty years. Many of the traditional ships have gone into shipyards for design modification and cargo handling methods on them have been rationalized. While they may be unable to receive standard-size containers in their holds with ease, they easily accept unitized loads. It is not uncommon for entire ships to be loaded out with the cartons stacked on pallets forming eight-foot cubes weighing five tons each. The hatches are opened on a particular ship and two forklift trucks are hoisted into each of the holds being worked. The units (or cubes) hoisted in one at a time are landed in the square of the hatch and are then picked up and driven or hoisted to their place of stowage by the forklifts. Four men work in each hatch, including the lift drivers, as opposed to eight on a break-bulk operation, and the ship gets loaded in better than one-third the break-bulk time.

Automation began to significantly decrease longshore jobs in the early 1960s. The first total victims were of a category of longshoremen not yet discussed here and who are all but invisible in the literature on the industry. They are the casuals who have no formal ties to the employer or to the longshore section of the ILWU. They worked on the waterfront by the day, received the hourly wage, but none of the fringe benefits. During the 1950s, there were years during which the casuals of San Francisco performed as much as 10 percent of the longshore work. Some were able to average two days' work per week during peak shipping periods, and had become skilled in the occupation. For hundreds of the working poor, the work they got on the waterfront was their margin of economic survival. Few casuals are to be found on the West Coast waterfront today.

No regular or registered West Coast longshoremen have been put out of the industry as a result of automation. New recruitment ceased entirely in the latter 1960s, but the total of those registered began to shrink even earlier. The cutback was accomplished by attrition. As the men died, were killed, disabled on the job, or retired, they were not replaced. In New York, then the busiest port in the world, the number of employed longshoremen declined from over 50,000 in 1953 to 23,000 in 1967. Since then the

number has dropped to under 16,000. The cuts on the West Coast have been equally dramatic. There are now fewer than 10,000 regular longshoremen in all thirty-two ports of the West Coast. In the four major ports of Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland, and Seattle, the men who are not "steadies" are lucky if they average three days' work each week. The 1975 contract between the PMA-ILWU which was rejected by the ranks in two all-coast referendums before final acceptance contained a Paid Guarantee Plan (PGP). Registered longshoremen who are available in hall or gang for work five days each week are supposed to receive thirty-six hours straight-time pay. The amount is cut in half (eighteen) for B men. There has not been a week in which those amounts have been collected in full since the contract went into effect. The employers allotted ten and a half million dollars for payments during the first of the contract's three years and nine million dollars for each of the remaining years. By plan, they divide the amount to be paid out during each year by fifty-two (weeks) and pay out no more than that amount in any one week. The men are now receiving checks with as little as 58 percent of the amount guaranteed. So many are drawing on PGP that the payments threaten to go below 50 percent. A record is kept of the growing amounts the PMA owes each man, or the difference between the guarantee, which is just under \$250, and the amount actually received. It has been inferred that the PMA will pay its debts at the end of the year or on the expiration of the three-year contract. I have found no longshoremen who believe this will happen. Boston longshoremen negotiated a similar plan over a year ago called the GAI, or Guaranteed Annual Income. They have yet to receive their first payment. They now number only four hundred. In December of last year they struck the employer to force payment and failed.

The changing nature of longshore work and diminished work opportunity destroyed much of the basis on which traditional longshore partnerships were founded, but PGP has created a new basis for their formation and sustenance. Hundreds of Los Angeles longshoremen, for example, go each morning or evening to the dispatch hall in Wilmington. Few of their number get called up to the window to receive a job assignment. If by chance they were called unexpectedly and were absent, they would not be eligible for the PGP that payroll week. Many have paired off into partnerships. Each goes alone in turn to the hall for the dispatch. When their numbers are called, the partner at the hall picks up both jobs, and phones his partner at home, telling him the job's pier location, gang number, and the nature of the cargo to be worked. They then meet at the ship in time

for the shift start. The arrangement makes life easier, but it is not like the “old days” when a partner was chosen because of his work skill, temperament, and on-the-job social skills. PGP provides some income for which longshore work was not performed, but it is a symbol of their occupational crisis. It is a “dole” and is put upon them by a contract few wanted. The disgust and involuntary time off sets minds to the development of schemes by which to beat the PGP on an individual or partner basis. It’s like Las Vegas: a few can “beat the tables,” but “the house never loses.” Gambling, like the PGP, can be a pastime, but even for those who win there is no fundamental enrichment.

How and why have longshoremen allowed all this to happen to them and why hasn’t their resistance taken on greater form are questions that logically arise. First of all, like so many segments of the population who are in crisis, the longshoremen are handicapped by a lack of ideological and organizational alternatives. No union leadership has yet put forth the idea that “industrial progress” is reactionary when it contains no consideration for the bulk of humans in the industry wherein it occurs. Further, the longshoremen designed their union to fight employers, but they did not foresee the degree to which the institution of collective bargaining—by its very nature—would develop bureaucratic conservatism in their officialdom. They, for example, gained control over their hiring system and built few controls to keep union officials from corrupting the system so as to victimize rank and file dissidents. It has not been uncommon for serious critics of Harry Bridges in the ILWU headquarters port of San Francisco to experience temporary or even permanent losses of earning power. Thus, his opponents have had to work, in a way, on an “underground basis.”

### The Container Landbridge as Holocaust

In the last year, the ever-deepening problems of longshoremen have forced rank and file opponents of the ILWU leadership into the open. The bind of automation has shown no signs that it will ease. The introduction of what has come to be known as the “landbridge system” has created further unknowns, despair, and demoralization. Japanese shippers are now discontinuing use of the Panama Canal. Containers from Yokohama are put ashore in Oakland, California, railroaded to Newport News, Virginia, put on ships, and taken to European destinations. The time saved more than makes up for the additional handling costs. The landbridge works from Atlantic to Pacific and to and from the Gulf as well. Also, containers

loaded in or bound to any American city can be put aboard the bridge at any one of a number of freight stations. Reno-Sparks, Nevada, has now become the freight transport node for the eleven western states, and a major port. Envisioned for the near future is a refinement of the land-bridge system called "mini-bridge." Each coast is to have one or two super-ports. The remaining ports are to receive minor traffic or be made extinct. Boston is already an outport for New York, despite the fact that it is one day's sailing time closer to northern Europe.

### The Government's Role in Automation

Increasingly, the longshoremen who refused to be steady men express the feeling that they did "what was right and got shut out for it." Younger hiring hall men more and more look around not only for a second job, but for a job that could provide a total alternative to what they see as a "murdered occupation." Most will probably stay on in longshore, but they are not optimistic. They are aware that they are opposed by their employers, union officials, and the giant shoreside corporations recently attracted to container transport, but they know as well that the government too is deeply involved in the campaign. In fact, the government was and is the prime mover in the drive to automate cargo handling. For over half a century the government has subsidized the merchant marine. It pays 55 percent of all ships' operating and construction costs. Over 75 percent of that amount is represented by labor costs.<sup>4</sup> Operating on ever-greater deficits in the post-World War II period during the 1950s, the government began to order a number of maritime studies. The goal was to obtain qualitative cuts in cost. This established what Joseph P. Goldberg, of the U.S. Department of Labor, calls "the virtual inevitability of the central role of the federal government in the press for modernization making for crew reductions."<sup>5</sup>

In 1963, the U.S. Maritime Administration began to require that to be eligible for subsidy, all future ships would have to have simplified machinery and work area design, centralized engine room control, and generalized control from the navigation bridge. Put into practice, this cut crew sizes 30 percent and recouped the increased capital (ship construction) costs in a maximum of five years.<sup>6</sup> Studies had also shown that berthing plus longshore loading and discharging operations accounted "for almost half of the total sea carrier costs."<sup>7</sup> The result was that ships began to come up with designs that cut longshoring as well as crew costs. Hence, the rapid appearance of container ships, bulk carriers, Ro-Ro and LASH

ships, and the rapid takeover of the stevedoring industry by shipping companies. The stevedores, with few exceptions, did not have the funds to buy the capital equipment and waterfront land space necessary to handle the cargoes as transported intermodally by the new ships.

### Longshore Work Loses Its Boundaries

The increasing capital intensiveness of the industry stimulated by the government has stacked ever-greater burdensome problems on longshoremen. The machinery itself has become an enemy. This is not meant in the Luddist sense, although it would come as no surprise if the present crisis on the waterfront produced some twentieth-century form of that phenomenon. Rather, the machinery has caused the boundaries of the longshore industry to become fluid and without exact shape. The maintenance of longshore machinery no longer requires the skills of marine riggers so much as it does that of electricians and truck mechanics. The shoreside cranes are of the type normally run by members of the Operating Engineers Union. The enormous amount of rolling stock that moves containers in the marshaling yards requires the performance of labor that little resembles traditional longshore work. The Teamsters Union has already claimed a portion of this work with some success. It is Eric Hobsbawm's thesis that longshoremen were in the past able to organize strong independent unions around the world because of the very clear perimeters around their industry.<sup>8</sup> They put the cargoes brought to them by truck drivers onto the ships and seamen took it away. Seamen brought them ships from which they removed the cargo and truck drivers in turn hauled it away from the docks. The loading and discharge of ships now involves ever-fewer humans. The actual stowage and discharge of cargo, in and out of the containers, which is still labor intensive, now in most instances takes place far from the docks, at "uptown" factories, warehouses, stores, and hinterland distribution centers like Reno-Sparks, Nevada.

The Hobsbawm thesis has withstood another major testing. The blurring of longshore occupational fences makes it difficult for longshoremen to sustain their union organization. During the past ten years Harry Bridges has made several attempts to merge the ILWU with the ILA, and having failed, made even more attempts to dissolve it into the Teamsters. Each time the ranks have refused his proposals. They are increasingly aware that their union president has become willing to play mortician for both their union and their occupation. They fear that if they merged with

the Teamsters and then got lost in that far larger bureaucratic jungle, the struggle to save something of their way of life that is now taking form would have little public visibility.

Many younger longshoremen have already obtained second jobs or are looking for them. It is probable that some will move out of longshoring altogether, but most will stay as long as there is any hope at all for survival. Their investment in their jobs goes far beyond economic considerations. Working on the front has provided them with lifestyles that they like. It is common to hear factory workers say: "If my kid had tried to hire into this kind of place I'd have kicked his ass." Not so with longshoremen. Longshore recruitment has long been accomplished in large part through family associations. In port after port the majority are the sons, nephews, and brothers-in-law of longshoremen. In most ports the condition is a permanent part of the subculture, although established by informal processes. In the port of Los Angeles, however, the longshoremen have formalized one segment of the custom: if a longshoreman dies and leaves a son on whom responsibility for his family's support falls, the son gets his job by contractual right.<sup>9</sup>

Recruitment by family is not limited to this country or century. It has been documented, for example, that for the fifty-year period from 1814 to 1864, Marseilles longshoremen took control over their hiring, recruitment, and division of work. For most of that period 73 percent of their number were sons of longshoremen, let alone nephews and other relations.<sup>10</sup> It might be claimed that this phenomenon occurs because waterfront communities have often been geographically and socially isolated from their overall urban communities. The claim may have some validity, but does not withstand full test. Since 1934, concentrated longshore neighborhoods in West Coast ports have by and large dispersed. The men have for nearly half a century raised their families in a variety of areas in their port cities. This has been more the case since the "automobile explosion" and suburbanization, yet father-son continuity has persisted.

Longshoring today has at least four certainties: (1) Humans will continue to be needed to move the containers, lighters, unitized loads, trucks, and autos on and off the ships. They will as well be needed to move the equipment around the dock areas and to maintain it. (2) Fewer people will be involved in these tasks. Whether or not they will be steady men is not definite, but it is certain that these people will have far more economic power per person than longshoremen of the pre-automation era.



(3) The increase in value of the equipment they operate and the increase in tonnages they move in a day will enlarge job-related responsibilities and internal tensions. (4) Longshore work will increasingly decasualize and more resemble warehouse or factory work with its quite different forms of close quarter labor-management confrontation.

(c. 1983)

### III. Solidarity Networks

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## Unions with Leaders Who Stay on the Job

It was noon, an hour and twenty minutes before the scheduled sailing time of the freighter, September 28, 1943. I went to the crowded mess room and took the seat left vacant for me. My arrival meant that all eleven members of the Deck Gang were present. We did not order lunch. The on-ship delegates or representatives of both the Marine Firemen, Oilers, Watertenders and Wipers union (MFOW&W) and the Marine Cooks and Stewards union (MC&S) looked at me, the delegate of the Deck Gang and the Sailors' Union of the Pacific (SUP), and nodded.

I put on my white cap. With that signal, the Deck Gang got up, walked to the gangway and down off the ship. In doing so, we all made eye-to-eye contact with the men of the Black Gang (Engine Department), and with all the mess men and cooks of the Stewards' Department about to serve the crew members, who would for a time remain seated. The barely noticeable smile and nod from each of them, and from each of us in return, was a reaffirmation of the pledge we had all made, an unrehearsed and emotional admission of camaraderie.

Once on the dock, we walked to an imaginary line parallel with the ship's side and about fifty feet from it, just far enough away so that we wouldn't have to look up at too sharp an angle during the exchange we were about to have with the ship's officers. Facing the ship in a line, we waited, a bosun, a ship's carpenter, six able-bodied seamen (ABs), and three ordinary seamen.<sup>1</sup> Each of the three sea watches was made up of two ABs and an ordinary.

We were all a little jumpy with the exceptions of Blackie Soromengo, the bosun, and Chips Costello, the carpenter. They were at least twenty years older than the rest of us, and they were veterans of the 1934 "Big Strike" that had stopped West Coast marine cargo movement for eighty-three days and had won recognition for all maritime unions on the West Coast.<sup>2</sup> But the term "'34 man" meant much more than strike veteran; it

identified a member of what had been a very real movement that became clearly visible three years before the 1934 strike. These men did not wear buttons for identification, but a mark of honor was on them all. The instruction they gave to the younger men who entered the industry during the war revealed that they had learned the power and hilarity of overcoming long years of submission, and their terror of losing hold of that power. The strength and the anxiety of the '34 men were with us that day on the dock.

The bosun and carpenter understood well that we wanted to be able to tell others our own stories about direct action. We were anxious to establish our generation's reputation in the union and the industry. But they also knew the seriousness of what we were doing and the weaknesses as well as strengths of our eagerness. They gave us room and seldom used their authority to showcase themselves. We were forging an open alliance between the two generations standing there together on the dock.

### The Background

The war and the shortage of seamen had given us "young men" our first union jobs and full-time work. We had never before been able to stand up and fight back openly. Such terms were new to our vocabularies.

In the fall of 1943 the only unemployed were people between jobs or en route to military induction centers. Mobilization for total war production was increasingly a part of daily routine. Movie theaters, markets, and cafes in industrial areas were open around the clock. Workers in factories and shipyards were being pinned with "E for Efficiency" buttons after breaking all production records in competition with themselves. The young men in working-class families were the main source of both draft and volunteer recruitment for the armed forces. At the same time, employers receiving "costs plus ten percent profit" from government defense contracts were using advertising agency forms of patriotism to eliminate the protective work rules won by employees in the decade before the war.

Because of the unconditional no-strike pledge that union leaders had declared and inserted into union contracts, strikers were commonly dealt with as if their needs were unworthy of respect. The Roosevelt administration had early on hired scores of lawyers and professors to arbitrate all labor conflicts. Yet more workers would go on strike in 1943 than during any year in the 1930s.<sup>3</sup> A big contradiction in what has been called "the good war"—though never mentioned in the media—was that during the

so-called war for democracy neither employers nor union officials showed concern for the democratic rights of working people in the United States.

During the first year of the war there were still enough old-timers among West Coast seamen for them to pass on to new seamen the need to enforce both the formal and informal work rules won in the 1930s. In 1943, the number of U.S. merchant ships tripled. At the same time, the mortality rate among merchant seamen in the war was proportionately higher than in any of the armed services.<sup>4</sup> Veterans of the 1930s maritime strikes came to be vastly outnumbered by new shipmates not long parted from high school and part-time jobs. In an attempt to overcome that disadvantage, the older men sometimes sought to instruct by more formal methods than the usual bull sessions. Teaching their history of conflict with both the shipowners and official union leaders came easily; they had lived it. But most of all, the instructors sought to teach by involvement with their younger shipmates in job actions.

The appearance on deck of the chief mate interrupted my thoughts.<sup>5</sup> He stood above the main deck, where the men of the Engine Room, Stewards' Department, and Navy Armed Guard who manned the ship's guns were gathering. He was big, lean, and in his fifties. After a harrumph he yelled to the bosun, "Why is your gang on the dock?" He continued before the bosun could answer: "I want the appropriate helmsman from the 12 to 4 watch to come to the flying bridge at one o'clock sharp and stand by ready to take the wheel the moment the pilot comes aboard. And bosun, you and the men off watch must be standing by at the same time ready to haul up and make fast the gangway, then send three men to the bow and three to the stern to slack off, and then haul in the mooring lines when the longshore linesmen on the dock let them go. There will be steam in the windlasses."

"The appropriate helmsman?" "There will be steam?" Had they gotten this guy from central casting? We were all choking back laughter, yet none of us moved. The bosun broke the silence: "You've got it wrong, Mate. You've been going to sea long enough to know better. When you see us out here like this you have to deal with our elected delegate, Red, who is standing right here. Until you do that, anything you want to discuss must wait."

A delegate performs the same function that a shop steward does in union workplaces ashore. But because all ships have stewards' departments (whose members prepare and serve three meals and a light lunch a day, in addition to making the officers' beds and cleaning their rooms), a second use of the term would create confusion.

I took two steps toward the ship ready to speak. At the same time the mate turned and walked quickly into the midship house. The captain came out onto the wing of the bridge moments later. He glared down at us from beneath a navy officer's hat with all the trimmings, "scrambled eggs" included, on the bill. "As master of this ship I order you to come aboard immediately and go to your assigned stations ready to work as directed."

I heard grunts of anger behind me. Louder noises came from other members of the crew standing two decks below the captain, just out of his line of vision. His head jerked with the realization that almost the entire crew was witness. The audience had given me what I needed. "No, Captain, there are questions of health that have to be taken care of here and now."

"Do you think you are running this ship?"

"Captain, do I have to explain to you what our roles are supposed to be as Deck delegate and captain? Your regular authority established for the operation of this ship is one thing. During any bargaining process it is suspended, and we are equals. If you are asking me to go over the history since crews like this one began to revive the unions ten years ago, then you will soon see the Black Gang out here on the dock, too. If there is any trouble after that, the room steward who makes your bed and the cooks and mess men who feed us will follow."

The captain went white in the face, then recovered to ask, "All right, Weir, why aren't you at your assigned duties instead of out here on this dock?"

He had quit stammering when using my name and so had taken a step toward admission that each of us was a representative. "A reminder, Captain. The delegates from all three departments came to you with complaints almost two weeks ago. You put us off then and three times more. The responsibility for the problem you now have is not ours. And, we are all on lunch hour."

"Is this the bedbug thing again?"

"Only in part. Bedbugs have been found in several of the mattresses of the unlicensed personnel and the Navy Armed Guard. All of the mattresses are very old, soiled, and lumpy. Remember that we live three men to a fo'c'sle in a space half the size of your room. Remember, too, that unlike those used by you who live topside, the mattresses were two feet wide, six feet long and two inches thick when they came aboard many trips ago. Now they are longer and thinner. They have to be replaced."

“Have you appointed yourself delegate for all three departments and the navy men?”

“I can get two other delegates out here right now if you like.”

“But we’re about to sail.”

“You have a telephone that’s strung from the dock to your room. There are ships’ chandlers in the East Bay just like there are in San Francisco along the Embarcadero. You can get all the items we need from any one of them in less than an hour.”

With head tilted to one side and sugary voice, the captain went for what he probably thought was his biggest weapon: “There’s a war on, you know.”

A “fuck yooahoo” delivered slowly in a near-singing voice wafted aloft from the main deck gallery. Then, short, hard, and square-built Chips, who had been on two ships sunk by U-boats in the Caribbean, broke in, “The ship you are standing on is your first since you took an office job with this company when the war started.” The blows to the captain’s credibility showed on his face. But even if I had wanted to, I couldn’t afford to let his cheap shot go with only two responses. A document citing the articles of war was attached to the ship’s articles we had signed two days earlier. We had discussed what to do if this came up.

“Yes, Captain, we know, and because of the war there is the War Shipping Administration [WSA] which pays this company and others for all costs connected with operating ships for the war effort. Your company has one of the many ‘costs plus ten percent profit’ contracts. You know, having worked in the office, that for every dollar your outfit spends on food and the other needs of the crew it gets back at least a dollar and a dime. If you have outfitted this ship as it should be, and have reported to the WSA as required, why is it that we lack so many needed food and sanitation items?”

The captain took too long to respond. Laughter exploded from the gathering on the main deck and ceased momentarily only when the identifiable, rough voice of Matt, the lanky and multi-tattooed deck engineer from Gulfport, Mississippi, drawled, “Okaaay, it’s time for all of us y’alls to go out on the dock!”

“No, tell him that won’t be necessary, uh, will it Red?”

Red? Was he giving in, using my nickname to bait me, or just out of control? Could it be that our ship’s accounts at some supply house would show we had full stores of good grade food aboard? The fink probably had a deal going to supplement his salary. “No, it won’t be necessary as long as you get the things I’m ready to list.”

“You want more than mattresses?”



“Yes. Get fresh milk and good coffee aboard. Fresh vegetables besides cabbage.” The purser had appeared at the captain’s side and was making a list. “Add plenty of citrus fruit and fresh meat besides mutton to the list.”

He looked at the captain, got a nod, and went back to writing.

“Good, is that it?”

“No. You are aware that the showers need simple repairs. It is hard to get more than a trickle out of them. A lizard could piss a bigger stream than they put out now. This means we have to stand in line in the passage ways waiting turns. Get four new shower heads, some good bar soap, a strong lye soap, five cases of Clorox in gallons, and two five-gallon cans of kerosene.”

“What’s the kerosene for?”

There was a chorus of guffaws from the main deck. “Is he going to tell us he’s never had a dose of crabs?”

I said, “If you haven’t got them up on your deck yet, you will during the trip if we don’t get kerosene aboard. We bought some kerosene with our own money the first thing when we came aboard. We washed down all the toilets. There’s no guarantee we got all the eggs. They may make a comeback just in case, order six dozen of the small jars of McKesson’s A200 Pyrinat, at least one for every man. The chandlers will have it. It comes in jars, just like Vicks.”

“Is that it?”

“Yes, except for a matter that can’t be fixed by a purchase. It has to do only with the Deck Gang. We would have taken it up with the chief mate directly, but he didn’t stay long enough for me to mention it. He is to stop watching us like some kind of gumshoe when we’re working on deck. We think you will understand that it can slow down the work.”

“I understand. I will take the matter up with the chief mate, and the purser will order the items you have listed. And so, while he’s doing that, you can all come back aboard and go to work.”

I hadn’t expected that he would again try to get us to refuse a direct order to go to work, even though it was lunch time. I was out of patience, afraid my anger would show if I had to offer still another explanation for our refusal to go aboard. I moved back into the line of men behind me. Several of them began to talk to me out of the sides of their mouths at once. They wanted to bring it all to a halt, right then.

I looked at the bosun and Chips who hadn’t spoken. They smiled. We all turned as a group and walked toward the Dock Cafe just outside the pier shed on the Embarcadero. All its windows had a view of the dock road.

The captain was yelling. We continued on our way until we heard him wail, "Where are you going now?"

The bosun didn't turn his head but bumped my shoulder with his: "You mind if I take this one?" I deferred to him without any show of my touch of resentment. As bosun, he was officially in charge of all work assignments for the entire Deck Gang when the ship was in port. We all stopped. The bosun and I turned around together, and he yelled back at the still figure on the ship's bridge, "It still isn't one o'clock, Gilchrist, our lunch hour isn't over. We're going to the cafe for a decent cup of coffee. And remember, there's nothing to do until a ship chandler's truck arrives." The bosun and I did another turnaround and rejoined the gang. The open pier shed door just ahead drew us.

### At the Dock Cafe

Once inside, our attention turned to the problems ahead. The captain had suffered a defeat, but official power was still on his side.

The three ordinaries had volunteered to run ahead and grab the cafe's big table for us. As first trippers, they felt the isolation of the non-initiated and were dependent on each other for support. If we all got to make this trip together, they would in the process develop a new identity. Each of them would live in an eight-by-ten-foot room, which by tradition was still called a "fo'c'sle" (forecastle), with two ABs. Four hours on and eight hours off, eight to twelve, twelve to four, and four to eight, seven days a week, they would come to know the ship's routine. They would learn from us who to wake up for the next watch, when it was their turn to make coffee, and how to stand lookout and steer the ship. Days on deck, the bosun and Chips would lead the instruction about lines, knots, and splices, chipping rust, and red leading.

We already liked the ordinaries. Berto's father had come to Oakland from Portugal via the Hawaiian Islands, just as the bosun had. Anthony and Bruno were from San Francisco's Italian neighborhood in North Beach. They were physically bigger than their fathers who were commercial fishermen, but also were thickset from "helping out on the boat." Hard work didn't bother them.

By the time we arrived at the entrance of the cafe they had eleven chairs and cups of coffee at the table. We paused just inside the door. They were so involved in replay and laughter about what we had all just done together that they didn't notice our arrival.

"Did you see the look on the captain's face when someone sang, 'Fuck yoohoo'? He had a good voice, for god's sake."

“Yeah, but the best was when the captain went dirty. It was like he was singing it, ‘There’s a war on. . . .’”

“What shit!”

“But Jesus, we just walked off and left him, and he wails, ‘Where are you going?’ Just like he was a little kid.”

It was contagious. They were acting out what we felt. They went silent as soon as they heard our laughter. Together and still standing, we reached for our coffees and all drank at once.

The bosun did not sit down with the rest of us until he took a hard look all around the cafe. “Good job out there today. Good job. But remember, you didn’t do it, not alone you didn’t. We were the guys who got to do the grandstanding. What we did was a hell of a lot easier than what those men back aboard the ship are having to live through right now. Always keep in mind that in actions like this the Deck Gang gets the spotlight because our jobs are out on deck. At sailing time, we are the ones who have direct contact with the longshoremen, the tugboat men, and that special bunch of older longshoremen called linesmen. They let go the mooring lines of ships that are about to sail, take them off the bollards on the dock. Dockhands like us then haul the lines aboard using the power windlasses. They do the reverse operation when ships arrive at the dock, take ships’ lines from us deckhands and put the eye splices of the lines over the bollards.”

Blackie Soromengo was no longer speaking to us as bosun. All the detailed instruction on tying up and letting go of the lines was for the benefit of the ordinaries. The rest of us already knew what he had just gone over. He wanted to show them respect, to pull them into the group, show them they were needed, here and now, in this action. But then he leaned further over the table to signal that he was about to address us all.

“See the two old-timers at the bar? They happen to be the linesmen for our ship. They came onto the dock a little after eleven. I know the short one. When they saw us walk out onto the dock all in a line, they got out of sight. Here, they will not look at us. The same from us to them for the time being. They will go out on the dock and stand by the fore and aft only if they see us go aboard. But, when that rust bucket we just left gets out into the stream with us on it, we will take off our hats to them and the gentlemen on the tugs. And if you ever see any of them ashore, you pay for the drinks.

“You see, the men in the other departments of the crew don’t get to do these kinds of things very often. This is one of the commonest kinds of direct action. Their work can only be performed inside the ship. We

are all on deck at sailing times. To ask that the oilers, firemen, and water-tenders shut down the ship's engine, when they are down below with two engineer officers at sailing time, is asking a lot. And think what it's like to sail down below in hundred-degree heat spending a third of your life getting your air through a windscoop and not able to look out at the ocean.

"It's harder yet for the people in the Stewards' Department. They are the cooks, bakers, waiters, and janitors for the rest of us, the lowest paid and the takers of the most crap. In '34 they were some of the hardest fighters we had. Now it's headed back toward the way it was before. When the officers are around, too often it's shut up and make no eye contact. Or worse, make a smile. Notice anything different about them? See any people on the deck or in the engine room whose ancestors came from Africa or Asia? No, only in that part of a ship's crew that does what too many of us think of as menial labor."

Like many southerners, Chips had good timing. He interrupted the bosun without it being a discourtesy. "Okay, there are a couple of things we have to get out of the way right now. Okay? All of you on that side of the table can see a half-mile of dock road in either direction. About forty minutes to an hour from now a truck from a ship chandler's may come into sight. Talk all you want, but keep your eyes on that road, starting now! Whenever it comes, we want to stop it here before it gets down the dock in sight of the ship. Got it?"

"That brings up another thing." Chips' wiry frame was an advantage. You could tell what he had to say was serious by the veins pumping at the sides of his neck. "The first time you're in on something like this, your asshole can get awful goddamned tight. Relax just a little. They need to get that ship there away from the dock and out to sea, soon! To fire us now they'd have to hire a whole 'nother crew. The time for them to make their move against us will most probably be at the end of the trip. We'll get boarded by a couple of men dressed in U.S. Coast Guard uniforms, not regular military servicemen, more like the FBI in costume. They'll go to the captain and ask if he had any 'troublemakers' this trip. All he has to do is mention the names of the men he wants to hurt. Then the ship owner will hold all the money you made this trip, and the boys in blue will hold up your seaman's papers until you've gone to a military-style hearing up in some fucking federal building. If you screw up and give 'em the opportunity, they will really go after you, but if we are all real careful and look out for each other, they will cite only a couple of us that they think are leaders. Probably there won't be any charges mentioned.

It'll just be that a couple of gold braids will hint around for about half an hour that you are probably some kind of communist. Their favorite question is 'Do you ever let your union activity go beyond union activity?' They'll finally let you go. You can usually cut the visit short by demanding the charges, again and again. Remember, even if you ask the union to represent you, there won't be anyone to come. That means that those of us who are not cited stay in town to make sure nothing worse happens to the guys they think are the leaders. In fact, we'll reserve a table in the federal building cafeteria. Anyone who doesn't show is a fuckup or has shit in his blood."

Seeing Chips was finished, Blackie looked into each of our faces. "There will be plenty of time for us to go over this later. I agree with Chips that the captain probably won't make his move against us now. It seems we have the captain at some kind of disadvantage, like Chips and I suspected we could when we first came aboard and did our own private inspection.

"Not one of us can afford to make a mistake. No coming aboard drunk, ever, not this trip. Work hard, work good, and mind what you say when you're standing wheel watch at night with only the mate on your watch up there to talk with. If the captain can get something on only two or three of us, he will give them to the 'three letter boys.' With hostages they will seek revenge against all of us for what we did today.

"We are going to clean up this ship and its gear, make it truly ship-shape. We will lead careful lives for ourselves and for all those in it with us. Red here and his partner, Big John from the Bronx, sailed with Chips and me early last year. Young Finns Waino and Paavo, I knew your fathers, Finn Waino and Finn Walter from the Finnish Brotherhood Hall in Berkeley. There were two halls, yours was the one just a little up the hill east of San Pablo Avenue, the one that had the IWW and some Trotskys, right? They let me flop there several nights during the 1935 tanker strike. We were helping out up in Richmond. I sailed with both of them on the lumber schooners. Walter was in the Centralia strike, a man who read everything he could get his hands on."

Blackie spoke in the same way to Nils and Carl, who he said were "from stump ranches somewhere around Coos Bay," and to the three ordinaries. "Berto, from our talk on deck the other day I know your folks are Portuguese from the Cape Verde Islands, the same as me, and you know that we all came to the States about the same time. Anthony and Bruno, you were both altar boys at Peter and Paul Cathedral across from Washington Square in North Beach. The definition of sin when out at sea is

complicated. You may find some nonbelievers among us, yet I'm sure they try to live by what amounts to the Golden Rule. I know your dad and mom, Bruno, they have that fine old-style Italian grocery and deli with the Ensalada Tea on the window in big enameled letters. It's across from the bakery that's in the basement on Grant Avenue at Green Street. That reminds me, let's eat our sandwiches."

Someone at the bar said "amen," and the laughter returned.

Only days ago we had had our election for Deck Gang delegate, and the bosun was for the moment so caught up in what we were doing that he had lost sight of what we were trying to accomplish in the long run. Besides, there was a little matter of pride. I was elected Deck delegate, I felt sure, because the gang knew that by electing me they were getting two people, me plus Big John. We already had a modest reputation. On a ship where a chief mate had ordered the Deck Gang to break out the cargo booms in a rough sea just before coming into the San Francisco harbor, we shut off all the steam on deck, and no gear got rigged until the ship was tied up at the dock. When we signed off, the captain turned us in to the Coast Guard. The matter never came up at a union meeting, but word had gotten around. The bosun and Chips had to realize that while they were our mentors and the thirties established their identity, the war period was creating ours. Because we were doing the same work and represented each other's hopes, we had to treat each other as allies.

Nils raised his hand. "Blackie, only you and Chips have done any of the talking. This is a meeting. Everyone has to have a chance to speak."

Nils looked straight at me. I had become the chairman. The instant I nodded in his direction, he began to speak: "Suppose no truck shows, then what? We can't just play this by ear." Blackie opened his mouth to speak and would have done so, but I waved him off. Finn Waino took the floor.

"We need for one of us to keep an eye on the ship in case something goes wrong there. For instance, if something happens, we might need all hands again. Blackie, you said you knew one of these linesmen. Could you get him to scout the ship for us?"

All eyes moved to Blackie. He got up without a word, went to the bar, ordered a beer, and spoke to the linesman. The man listened to Blackie without looking at him, then got up and left the cafe.

Blackie returned to his table without his beer to announce, "It's a risk for him, but he'll do it carefully and be back in a few minutes."

I took the floor. "Let's assume that the captain gets one or two suits and ties down here. We can't go over the whole thing right now, but we have

to have the beginnings of a plan. If authority comes, in suits or uniforms, as delegate I have to talk to them. I need witnesses with me. I move that Big John, Blackie, and Chips be the ones. Again, if authority comes, they will probably drive right to the gangway and try to go directly to the captain. He should not get first crack at them. We should stop them here in the shed. The other seven of you go out the little door behind the bar and right down the apron of the dock. Once you're aboard, get all hands on deck. Then we . . ."

"Yeah, but Red, wait a minute. You, me, and Blackie and Chips should come aboard at the same time as the rest. Every time we make an appearance out there we should do everything to make them see us as a group." It was Big John. Somewhere in his New York upbringing he had developed a sixth sense about the powers of a crowd, even a small one.

All heads were nodding, and smiles were beginning to return.

"Okay, instead of talking, you want a full show of strength to be what speaks most for our case?"

"Right!" was sung in chorus.

"Good. Then let's go on. John, anything else?"

"Yeah. Remember, if a ship chandler's truck arrives, we stop it right here and see what it has aboard. That leaves one more thing to consider. What if it turns out that somehow they pull a power play, and it looks like it's going to be what Cade the Night Cook and Baker calls our 'natural asses'?"

We were under time pressure. I didn't wait for an answer. "It will then be up to all of you who can to round up as many men as you can from all three unions, Marine Cooks, Marine Firemen, and the Sailors' Union." I was looking at Blackie and Chips. "The more '34 men the better. Get them to the Alaska Fishermen's Building and march them through the offices of the officials of all three unions. Make them know that if they don't save whoever's arse is at stake, the news will spread to the memberships of every port on the coast."

"Red, that's a big job."

"That's right, and it can be done with you and Chips in action."

Blackie raised his hand to say, "We'll do everything we can, everything."

Paavo put up his hand. "We know you and Chips will do all you can, Blackie, but don't forget the ordinaries. Enough of this shit from the union that you have to be a full book member of the union before it can protect you."

Bert, Bruno, and Anthony were again laughing with this show of respect from what they felt were two older generations.

“Wait a minute, Red! In that case you don’t want Blackie and Chips with you out there. They should stay back in case they have to cop a sneak off the dock to organize a delegation that will pack our great leaders’ offices. And another thing. You’re right, there should be four men to speak for us, but it ought to be you and the delegates from the other two departments on the ship, not just the Deck Gang.”

Waino’s hand went up, and he spoke without knowing if Paavo had finished. “Hey partner, we are all forgetting about what John said. It would be a hell of a lot more effective if any suits or uniforms that come aboard get surrounded by the whole crew, then one by one, five or ten of us tell them, no rough stuff, how we feel.”

“The power of an intelligent crowd!”

I didn’t get to see who made the remark and did not recognize the voice.

“Red.” It was Carl, and he was laughing. “The crowd can handle it!”

Blackie was laughing quietly to himself. I looked around. No sign of anyone who wanted to speak. Carl had his arms wrapped around his head in mock submission. Several short guffaws broke the tension, and I took the opening. “Hey Carl, short haul, what you did just now is not easy for me to take. But you’re not only saving me some sweat down the line, you’re doing a favor for an idea that can make life easier for us all.”

There were no laughs. Every face in the house was straight, and still no one wanted the floor.

We all rose from our chairs. Carl came to the bar with John and me. We bought pre-assembled roast beef sandwiches. I took one and laid it by my place at the table, then headed for the restroom. Anthony came in while I was drying my hands and followed me back out into the cafe. “Red, wait up. Let’s stand over here for a minute. Listen, how come you guys didn’t even mention getting someone from the union out here to do something about all this?”

“That’s what we are forced to try to avoid, Anthony.”

“But you pay dues.”

“I know. But if we got a patrolman [business agent] out here from the union hall, he would have to tell us that if we took any kind of direct action we would be violating the contract, that we would have to hang on and make the best of it till we got to Honolulu or back here at the end of the trip. Keep in mind the bosun and Chips picked this ship in the first place because it’s in East Oakland at a seldom-used dock.”

“You mean you guys had this all . . . ?”



“Don’t say it. See you in a few minutes.”

“No, wait, who are these guys, the bosun and Chips?”

“Two of the men who actually rebuilt the Sailors’ Union in ’32 and ’33 before the Big Strike, two of them anyway. They were both organizing hit and run job actions whenever they could, particularly when guys who had been quiet for years began to dare to speak. Hey, we’ll be talking more about this. Right now we’re under the gun. Let me go eat my sandwich.”

“No, Red, one more thing, how could Chips know that the captain had taken an office job in the company office as soon as the war started?”

“Were you ever in one of those cheap waterfront hotel rooms where most of the old-timers stay between trips? When they were our ages, they never made enough to have a home and a marriage. Most of those rooms are lit by a single light bulb hanging down from the ceiling with no shade on it. The dinginess drives the renters down to the lobbies, where they exchange stories, particularly about the ships they just came off of. Now we eat.”

Anthony agreed. I got my sandwich and moved to one of the small tables. Others were doing the same. Paavo walked down the aisle behind me and stopped to press hard on my shoulder, then kept going. He came back a couple of minutes later and sat down across from me to say that Shorty the linesman had come back. The ship had looked peaceful. He couldn’t get too close, but half of the Black Gang were sitting out on Number 4 Hatch shooting the breeze with two messmen and the deck engineer.

It was ten minutes to one. A half hour to go before we were all supposed to be back aboard and working. Waino saw me look at my watch.

“Red, fuck it, don’t try to carry it all. We all got into this with our eyes open. Take it all too seriously and you lose your sense of humor.”

“I didn’t know it was showing on me that much. But yes, we’ve got a lot riding on this one. If we lose this one, the ordinaries may never get another ship.”

“We’ll find a way. Don’t try to take all the responsibility; it’s not good for any of us, them included.”

We both smiled and waved each other free. I was beginning to understand that my over-concern got in the way of full participation in our decision-making process.

“Hey, all hands out here, now!” It was Paavo, who had just come through the cafe door yelling. “Yeah, all of you, a chandler’s truck is coming, now. Arise and shine!”

## We Win a Battle

I went out the door with the others at a full run. The back doors of the truck were already open. The driver was reading to Bruno the list of items to be delivered. Nils and Carl had not been able to wait. They were opening cases and yelling out the contents to anyone who might be listening. "Good," came the announcement from Nils. "They got All-Bran and Wheaties instead of Grapenuts, and it's all here: milk, vegetables, coffee, the kerosene. A-hah! Azoo Pyrinate, tested on the inmates at San Quentin before release for public consumption. We owe those guys, and it's no laughing matter."

Then I noticed Big John. He was grabbing whomever he could get his hands on, then throwing them into the truck. It was the adrenaline of the small crowd. He was smiling, without trying to hide the legacy of a lifetime without going to a dentist. His excitement was catching, and his leadership was easy to accept. After he had thrown four or five of the gang aboard the truck, he made known his plan: "Don't ever turn down a free ride in a Trojan horse!"

The rest of us jumped in. John yelled, "Now!" The driver started his truck and took off. When he made the turn out of the shed onto the apron of the dock, we all fell over one another. Upon arrival at the gangway, he hit the brakes hard, and we were on the floor again. We came to a full stop, and we made no move to get out, just sat there looking straight ahead and cracking up.

The crew on the ship had seen us coming. About a dozen of them surrounded the truck. By the time they opened the doors, John had us jump down to the skin of the dock, all with bright new blue-and-white-striped mattresses over our heads, half hanging down our fronts and half down our backs. Cheers went up!

We didn't talk, not then. The members of our greeting committee each took a piece of the truck's cargo and ran up the gangway single file. The cargo was all aboard after two more trips down and up the gangway. The driver got the chief steward's signature, looked up to give us a quick wink, and drove away.

The tug's whistle blew. It was John's turn at the helm. The rest of us split up to go to the bow and stern. It was time for us to slack off the lines so that the linesmen on the dock could take our mooring lines off the bollards. Paavo stretched his arm out to show me his wristwatch; it was almost one-thirty.

I looked up at the inshore wing of the flying bridge from where I was standing on the stern. The captain caught my look, then smiled and waved as if returning a greeting initiated by me. I looked away, wondering what it must do to those among us who have jobs demanding that they wrong those they supervise or govern, all the while knowing that when they go home to their mates and children, they cannot let them see their full identities.

Paavo motioned me over to the rail. The linesmen had just dropped our lines into the water. We waved our appreciation to them with our hands close to our chests and our backs to the bridge. The third mate saw it all in a glance but looked the other way. We hauled in the lines by windlass and flaked them out neatly on deck by hand so that they would dry without “assholes” (tight kinks).

The tug men and their boat pulled us away from the dock. Once we were out into the estuary between Oakland and Alameda, the tug whistle blew. Anthony went to the offshore side and let go of the tugboat’s line. It was his first opportunity to display his new skill in action. He did not look at us, but he was smiling. I let the warmth of the moment register as I positioned myself beside him at the rail. Anthony yelled at the two men on the tug’s stern as it moved toward the open bay. When they looked up, we took off our white canvas “stetsons,” faking sweaty foreheads to deliver our respects. They made no eye contact as they hand-signaled that what they had done was nothing special.

An hour later we ducked under the Golden Gate Bridge and out into view of the Farallon (“Far and Alone”) Islands. Our connection with official life ashore was all but severed. We were no longer full citizens of the United States. By signing the ship’s articles when the man from the Shipping Commissioner’s office came aboard, we had lost much of the protection of the U.S. Constitution. We were now governed—and would be until we returned to the port of voyage termination in the States—by the nation’s special maritime laws as interpreted by the smiling man whose name was on the framed master’s license that hung in the wheelhouse. This was more than compensated for by our certainty that on this trip there was little likelihood of any friction among the unlicensed crew. In a matter of days we had begun to learn the need to respect each other across the long-established boundaries that divide seamen of each ship into three parts: those who prepare and serve the food and maintain the living quarters; those who keep the ship’s engine, electricity, and water supply running; and those who steer the ship, rig its gear, and keep its decks fit for sea.

## Classrooms aboard Ship

At no point during the entire trip to the Southwest Pacific and Australia did the captain or any other deck or engine room officer mention our "walk-off." We had demonstrated that we saw ourselves as an independent decision-making unit on all matters of safety and working and living conditions. None of the captain's pretended attempts at a conciliation with us met with success. We were polite to him in a way that kept the official reality of our relationship with him out in the open.

Unposted but almost regularly scheduled gatherings took place during the entire voyage. They entailed informal instruction in ship safety, seamanship, union history and organization (both official and unofficial), sometimes in the presence of two or three Navy Armed Guardsmen, all out on deck as weather permitted. At no time did the presence of an officer create an interruption. The enthusiasm, especially among the young first trippers, was noticeable. They had seen that we were introducing them to a kind of unionism that meant more than merely protecting themselves on the job. We were also passing along a lifestyle in which they could carry themselves with more dignity and power.

The sense of self-improvement was not limited to the new seamen. The interdependence of the three departments demonstrated during the walk-off brought different rewards to each of the age-based groups in the crew. Cade, the night cook and baker from one of the sea islands off the coast of Georgia, and Londos, the four-to-eight oiler who had come from Greece as a young man, were '34 strike men like the bosun and Chips. They all rediscovered each other and became one of the tightest social groups on the ship. It was a small-scale reenactment of the formation in 1934 of the Maritime Federation of the Pacific, when the MFOW&W, the MC&S, and the SUP led all the offshore maritime unions on the coast in the pre-formation of an industrial union.

The oiler, night cook and baker, bosun, and Chips the carpenter determined the subjects they thought would be most valuable to all crew members younger than they, but discussed their choices informally with the rest of us. Each of them then began meeting the men in his department two or three at a time for instruction and discussion.

John, Anthony, and I met with the bosun and Chips as a watch. We were in their room for a little over two hours. The bosun began by going over what he considered the three primary rules of conduct. "Learn your trade. Work good and work hard. Particularly when lifting or carrying at sea, give one hand to the ship but keep one for yourself.

“I’ve already told you the following things, I think, but I want to go through them now systematically. Never, but never, walk away from a beef. For example, do not pay off from a ship in the middle of a fight with an officer or captain. If you do, you leave it for the next crew that comes aboard. It will catch them off guard, as a surprise, and they will be at a double disadvantage because topside will know the history of the beef and they won’t.

“But worst of all, if you walk away, you contribute to the breakdown of solidarity where it counts most, among the people on the job. They see that you didn’t look out for them, and that makes it easier for them to do the same to others. The big breakdown in morale began when we let our leader Harry Lundeborg negotiate contracts that gave our port patrolmen or business agents control over grievance settlements. If this task gets left to people who don’t do the same work we do, it’s not going to get done right, if at all. If on each ship, each trip we solve our beefs by ourselves, solidarity, our primary weapon, remains within reach.

“The next and last reminder of standard rules for now is that when a trip begins to get old, and the night wheel watches up there on the bridge get long and lonely, keep a distance between yourself and the mate on watch. Be thrifty with your words, stories, and the content of the ideas that you express. You and that man are each witness to the other’s boredom and sense of aloneness. That is not the stuff of brotherhood or comradeship, even though you both belong to unions. No matter how decent or well-meaning or needy that other man may be, he will almost certainly do what he has to do to keep his job. Part of that job is to supervise or keep watch on you. It is not unusual to learn, often too late, that the biggest advantage the ruler of the ship has in getting at those he looks upon as troublemakers is from information obtained by officers who got it earlier from helmsmen on their watch who unburdened themselves of shipboard or personal problems. Those guilty of this stool-pigeonry are often reluctant betrayers.

“One more thing. You, too, have a responsibility in all this. Don’t go putting out on the open table any of the personal private things you were told in confidence by a ship’s officer. If you do, you lose your ability to be indignant at injustice. ’Nuff said.”

### Passing on the Lessons of the 1934 Strike

“The importance of the strikes of the 1930s, including the seamen’s strikes, has been exaggerated,” Blackie went on. “All through the 1920s we were held down. The lack of dignity we experienced on the job, plus the pitiful

wages that denied us homes or families, kept us from achieving what we were capable of. At first we blamed it on each other. We talked worse about those laboring alongside us than about anyone else.

“Later we recognized that it was the condition of our industry. In the early twenties the government was giving away or taking ships out of service. Our small merchant marine was shrinking and our jobs along with it. We lived with that idea for several years.

“Then came the 1929 crash of the stock market. We were already on the bottom when it hit. The thing about the Big Depression that followed was that no matter what direction you looked, there was a failure of leadership of all the nation’s institutions. That went for the people who headed our unions as well as those in political parties and the government. We began to notice that the main message from our union leaders was that nothing can be done, the entire government is on the employers’ side, all we can do is go along and hope that by causing no trouble some concessions will be thrown our way. Somehow we believed them.

“We’d had Wobblies with us in maritime since 1905. A few old ones are still around. They’re members of the Industrial Workers of the World. They were the only bold and independent idea bunch among us. There weren’t many Communists around in the late 1920s. They looked pretty good for a while. Yet neither group was enough to make a big difference. No noticeable change began to take place in us until the depression showed that none of the nation’s established political leaders had any ideas on how to stop the suffering.

“You went to coffee with the regular guys who had been close-mouthed for as long as anyone could remember, and they were complaining about why the leaders don’t do this and never do that. By 1932 we could feel just from the change in attitudes of our own people that something big was happening. Regular guys were becoming more radical than the radicals, talking about the need for a different kind of union. In the early spring of 1934 you didn’t need inside dopesters to know that there was going to be a big strike. It was only then that the radicals began to see the size of their audiences increase significantly. We gave them the chance to grow. And we made them listen, for a while.

“When the longshoremen went on strike that spring, they knew that it was going to be easier for them to pull off a strike than it was for us seamen, because they were ashore all the time and had better communication with each other. Still, they knew we were going to be out there with them, that it was as much our battle as theirs.

“A problem for us was that our seamen’s unions were affiliated with the International Seamen’s Union, or ISU. The main leader of the Sailors’ Union of the Pacific at that time, Andrew Furuseth, was also an official in the ISU. He had a good reputation, had lobbied in Washington, DC, for years, and had gotten new laws replacing those that made seamen an outright part of the ship’s property while you were signed on. It’s still partly that way, but believe me, it’s a lot better now than it was then. Anyway, the national union officials of the ISU refused to let us go on strike with the longshoremen, and Furuseth agreed with them. That meant we had to take things directly into our own hands.

“We formed ‘meet and greet committees’ without the union’s consent. Ships, mainly steam schooners from the lumber ports up north, would come into San Francisco and San Pedro and be boarded by committees. The crews would then pack up and go down their gangways with the members of their boarding parties. Let me tell you it was like some special holiday, even though times were tough. Some guys would hear about it and form a committee of their own.

“The union lost control and had no way of stopping us. Harry Lundberg is now head of our union, but around that time he sailed as an unlicensed or ‘waivered’ third mate on the steam schooner. I went to San Pedro for a couple of weeks, and the next thing I heard he was a leading meeter and greeter. Charlie Cates, who was an SUP patrolman in Frisco not so long ago, was on a committee, too.

“Within a couple of weeks the California ports were full of tied-up ships without crews. Ships stopped loading lumber up north and were paying off crews. We were all out on strike. It was one of the best times to be alive; we were getting back at them for all the insults we’d taken to our minds and our bodies through hard work, long hours, bad food, loss of sleep, and filthy fo’c’sles, in addition to spoken and sometimes physical abuse.”

At this point the bosun paused, as if he planned to stop for discussion. This is what we had wanted until he got onto the subject of the “meet and greet committees.” Now Big John broke our silence: “No, no, keep on going as long as you’re into describing this action, for god’s sake; discussion later.”

“Good, I understand. It was our strike. The entire power structure felt threatened, maybe not by revolution like the newspapers were saying, at least not at first. But then, in addition to the police and scabs, they brought out the National Guard, Legionnaires with tear gas guns, and armed vigilantes. Strikers were getting shot.

“You hear most about the two who were killed in San Francisco on ‘Bloody Thursday,’ July 5, 1934. Four days later there was a funeral procession up Market Street from the corner of Mission and Spear, where the guys were shot. I was affected more by that than by any other single day of the strike.

“The official strike leaders had little to do with organizing it. We were the ones who planned everything. Guys were doing things to make the march work right, and no one assigned them. I met a lot of people in the formation area who didn’t have jobs or union cards. During the entire procession none of the thousands of marchers said a word. I didn’t know whether to growl or cry. All the way up Market Street total silence pervaded a major American city.

“The waterfront strike in San Francisco became general five days after the funeral. Nobody really called it that I can remember. It was just that working people all over town were out joining us. There was a machine shop on the Embarcadero near Mission Street. An SUP sailor got shot out on the sidewalk in front of its door. He was saved because some machinist ran out and pulled him inside by his legs. I’ve always believed that the machinists in that shop were among the people who joined us.

“It was in those weeks that men and boys shining shoes and selling papers on the corner formed their own unions and stopped work. One of them is a good member of the SUP today. His name is Bill.

“When our strike in San Francisco became general, strange as it may hit you at first, in part it hurt us. By the wonderful act of joining us, the uptown working class of people unknowingly gave their union officials—and there was nothing bold about most of them—the chance to take control of the entire strike, including the maritime part of it. It never occurred to us that we needed to build an alternative organization to the city’s AFL Central Labor Council, in addition to all the other things we were doing.

“The general strike ended on July 19, and it was fast downhill from there. Harry Bridges, the longshoremen’s leader, began making speeches about how tired his rank and file was getting. We couldn’t see why he was doing this. There were some among the longshoremen we talked to every day who you could tell were ready to go back to work, but they were a minority. But who knows? The guys I was picketing with thought Bridges made the guys feel they’d lost their leader. Within days the longshoremen voted to go back to work and arbitrate all unsettled issues.



“We seamen didn’t like what the vote meant, but we went back to work with them. We didn’t want to see our unions go back to doing things separately again. The ISU officials had been against us striking from the start and we did it anyway. Then after Bridges’s speeches and the long-shore vote, they got a second wind, and Andrew Furuseth, who had done so many good things as a leader of the Sailors, was acting like a regular ISU stiff. Our strike ended on July 31.

“The longshoremen wound up getting joint fifty-fifty control over hiring along with the employers, union recognition, better wages, and more. By comparison we seamen wound up with no contract, but with direct action control over hiring.”

### After 1934

“Take it easy, I’ve only got one more part to finish, and you’ll have the whole 1934 to 1936 panorama before you. This is the vital piece of the failure we are a living part of today. It’s all but impossible to discuss this bit by bit. Indulge me. This is the first time I’ve ever presented it this way, the way Chips and I and others have had to live with it. I have to get it all out.”

I looked at Anthony and then at John. They looked like they felt as bad as Chips looked sitting there in his silence. I broke in on the bosun: “I have a suggestion. If either of you don’t feel right about it, let’s forget it and go on like we have. How would it be if Chips did the last part of the story?” Anthony and John nodded agreement. The bosun’s face fell, and he looked at his partner for the first time during the session. Chips cut him off before he got a chance to speak to my suggestion.

“No, no, it’s already arranged that I’ll cover this same history for the other two watches tomorrow. You’re just about finished, partner, and we have to get this hunk of it completed now. Okay you guys?”

I looked at John and Anthony again. They shrugged that it was all right with them, and the bosun continued.

“Forgive me, partner. Like I said, the longshoremen got an arbitration award from Franklin D. Roosevelt’s National Longshoremen’s Board. It gave them full recognition on the coast as the exclusive bargaining representative for all members of the longshoremen’s union, improved grievance and collective bargaining procedures, joint control of hiring. For this they gave up their fight against labor-saving devices like the jitney or power pulled, four-wheel carts. There was more to it, but that’s it in a nutshell for now.

“The problem for seamen was that compared to the longshoremen the seamen were getting only the salt that comes from sweat. There were no more fink books, and we had our own halls in the Alaska Fishermen’s Building between Clay and Commercial streets, 150 feet from the Embarcadero. We felt we could make it so that those halls were the only places the employers could get crews. If they tried anything else, we’d shut their halls and throw scab crews off any ship they boarded. And that’s what we did, even though it took us about two more years.

“The government and the shipowners were smart. By offering the longshoremen official recognition, they began to cause a split between us. By comparison, Harry Lundeberg looked great in that period. For us to get anything like the longshoremen got, we were going to have to continue our fight, and the only way we could do that was to go outside the channels created by the government bureaucrats and the law itself. Lundeberg accepted that reality and was willing to lead the way we wanted him to, until after we won. Then we went to living in the new channels the shipowners and government had dug for us.

“We seamen were different from longshoremen, even though there were many ex-seamen among them. Compared to them, few of us had homes and families to care for. More important, we weren’t involved in regular politics, but we were radical in the kind of politics that grows out of the job. We live where we work, on one ship at a time out at sea. We brought the kind of politics ashore that you learn in dealing with the people topside. Up to the time of the strike we’d been taking it without the power to fight back openly and under full steam. Somewhere along the line in the years before the Big Strike we decided we weren’t going to live like that anymore. Shit! We surprised a lot of people; some of them didn’t even know we could read.

“Yes, back then Lundeberg had the guts and ability to do what was necessary according to the time, no matter the risks. Just like us. Christ, he didn’t even get his citizen papers until ’34. Again, it was his willingness to lead the way we wanted him to lead that brought us the real excitement.

“As reports of the locations of ships with scab crews came in, guys taking their turns as dispatchers sent groups of us to the sites. We went up gangways with professional scabs waiting for us on the top landing. We weren’t tough guys. We were young, and we knew what we were doing was right.

“The ISU officials went crazy. They wanted to stop us as much as the shipowners did. Nothing we did was official until we won. We got rid of

the ISU piccards [paid union officials]. Old Furusetth got voted down and, with tears running down his checks, left the meeting and our hall forever. We were glad to see him go because we knew it was necessary. Lundeberg became holder of the SUP's top office, secretary treasurer.

"No presidents in our union. The two or three unions on the West Coast before ours had some radical ideas, and then came the Industrial Workers of the World. The two of us paid dues to them until 1936.

"During the almost two years that we were fighting for our own hiring halls by job actions, the Maritime Federation of the Pacific was being formed. Bridges and Lundeberg worked good together at first. It was going to be one big industrial union for us on this coast. But at the same time that we were throwing scabs off ships and stopping the ships, Bridges was beginning to discipline his guys if they did the same as us. In my opinion this is the main thing that brought bad blood between him and Lundeberg and broke up the federation.

"We got our 100 percent control over our own hiring halls put into writing in the contracts that ended the 1936 strike. At no time during the fight did the leadership of the longshoremen get in with us and go for 100 percent control of their hiring. They got that indirectly in '39, I think it was, when they won the right to elect their own job dispatchers. But still, you go into their hall right now and you'll see employer suits come in and look over the dispatchers' shoulders from time to time. Those Waterfront Employers' Association people wouldn't dare to come up the stairs in our hall. It's all ours.

"And I don't blame the regular working longshoremen. Study their situation long enough and you can understand the fix they're in. They have many of the same problems regular shoreside people have to contend with. They don't eat in cafes and live in cheap hotels. A lot of them sit down to meals with their families. Besides, the situation in our seamen's unions is just as bad, for a reason that is the same as in their unions and is the hardest to change—our unions are all led by bureaucrats.

"Now maybe you can see why we emphasize direct action. We know it's what you need in order to keep the new bureaucrats from taking the unions to their offices."

We'd listened all we could. At this point we didn't want to do anything but get off to ourselves and sort out for ourselves what the bosun had told us. We thanked him and Chips, set up a time for our next meeting, and left to go wash up for lunch, feeling somewhat guilty about Chips not getting to speak.

## Talking It Over

The next morning John and I were both awake early. He noticed that Anthony was hard asleep and motioned that we get up and out of the fo'c'sle without any talk. The eight-to-twelve watchman with last relief below had just done his duty and made a fresh urn of coffee. I drew two cups and handed one to John. He didn't want to sit in the messroom. I followed him out of the midship house. We sat, drank, and smoked. I waited for whatever it was that he obviously wanted to talk about.

"You know what the bosun said yesterday about the separation between us and officers?" He waited for my nod and went on. "I think that's why Joseph Conrad's books are usually centered on the life going on inside his characters. I've read only five of his books. But I didn't get the feeling that there were a couple or three dozen people present on his ships. As I recall, most all of them were officers, and they were loners."

"Why do you think that is?"

"I had never thought about it before last night. England being a country with colonies, the officers in British ships probably never got to sail in the fo'c'sle. They went to an officers' school, and then when they got assigned to a ship, the unlicensed crews were from their colonies. Maybe it's the separation. The bosun's right, but what limited lives are led by both sides! On our ships the officers are at least from where we're from in most cases, and they're some kind of company, even if we can't afford to get too familiar with them. There's a sadness to all this, Red. Do you think I'm right about Conrad?"

"I've only read three books by him, but yes, I don't remember anything about crew life. There was none of the life like on our ships, but maybe ours were more like theirs before real unions were organized. He was a genius in ways. I could feel the thick heat of the flat summer Red Sea in *Lord Jim*, and the feeling has stayed with me. He didn't pull me back to read much more of his writing, though."

"The same with me and also about his description of the Red Sea. To think of the labor of the ship's crew trying to cut its way through that hot salt soup almost brings a sweat. Do you think he was saying that the alienation of life aboard ship caused a strange unhappiness that carried over into all his experiences?"

"That could be. It didn't hit me then. I'd have to go back and read him again to say, and I'd probably read him differently now than I did on my first ship."

“Yeah, that’s right. But listen, do you think we’ve got a chance to accomplish what these ’34 men have set out for us?”

“I don’t know, but I like trying.”

“Me too, Red. Don’t get me wrong, life’s been more interesting since we sailed with Bosun and Chips last year. But listen to me better. No matter what we try to do, we can only do it if the opportunities that make it possible have already developed. There would have to be more opportunities than there are right now.”

“You’re probably right, but there may be some big changes at the end of the war.”

“But that’s only a hope.”

“Right, but should you and I be doing something else?”

“No, but still you’re not listening. I could do much, much more, if I thought our chances of winning were really good. I think what we’re doing is right, and I don’t think it’s dumb. I’m talking about something entirely different, like I told you. People like us right here on this ship and on all the others, for example, can do big things to make life better, but to get into doing it full ahead, they have to see with their own eyes and no one else’s, growing evidence that there is a chance to win.”

“But what if things just get worse and worse and all we can see ahead is still fewer chances?”

“Good point. But that means we have to find better ways to talk to the people around us. What can we say to people that will make them feel better about themselves? Every buck they make is an honest one, yet they don’t give themselves any credit.”

“But every time the strike men talk to us you can see that the experiences they had gave them more self-respect than the people they were before the strikes.”

“Yeah, but that’s just what I’m talking about. Look how long it took them. What are the chances that another period of change for the good will arrive when the war is over?”

“Are you asking me?”

“No.”

“Then we had better get something to eat before we go on watch. You and Anthony are on deck with the bosun, I’ve got first wheel?”

“Right.”

John and I didn’t talk anymore to each other about the bosun and Chips’ presentation for about five days. We were too busy talking with the men of the other two watches who had heard the same lecture we did.

Then there were the men of the Black Gang, including the deck engineer, who had had their class with Londos, the oiler, and the Stewards' Department had sat down with the baker for a couple of hours.

We were trying to learn how different or alike our responses were to the ideas put before us, regardless of the departments we worked in. We lived on one ship but in three departments, which we had till then looked upon as separate units. Now we had all gotten essentially the same history lesson on nearly the same day. All at once we involved ourselves in individual and group discussions that crossed departmental lines. We had broken into open discovery of ourselves as a group and as individuals.

Up to that time we had been so focused on the accomplishments of the older generation that we could not see ourselves in our new world of work; we were invisible in its history. Then that all changed. The older men had given us their history not only to use as weaponry but also to show us that the world we had recently entered belonged to both the generations represented on board.

By the time we began the run for home from Brisbane, our last Australian port, the normal routine of shipboard social life had reestablished itself. There was a change from the first part of the trip: the constant interchange of members in the self-selected social groups of the unlicensed crew members. This was visible in the combinations that went ashore while in Melbourne, Sydney, and Brisbane.

One night in Melbourne John, Anthony, and I from the twelve-to-four watch all returned to the ship separately but at about the same time. Anthony had bought himself a bottle of whiskey. He had it stuck in his belt still unopened. We shared it with him. Soon we were comparing impressions of the still-new mix of members of the deck, engine, and steward departments. We had each overheard conversations comparing the three departments, which was the best to sail in and the different relationships with officers in each.

The second meeting of what turned out to be a series of three classes led to leaving our student status behind. The instructors did a lot of listening. I talked with the bosun about it later when he had just come from a get-together with the baker and Londos, the oiler. They had been a little hurt when we briefly took the classes away from them after the first session. At first they had not understood, but then the baker had pulled them aside to talk about "the need for autonomy in us all." The bosun ended by saying, "I think the baker's been to college," and broke out laughing.

## Coming Home

Two days out of San Francisco, I was working on deck close to where Matt, the deck engineer, was repairing the cylinder of a steam winch.

“Red, the young guys in that Deck Gang of yours are suffering from the worst case of ‘channel fever’ I’ve ever seen.”

He was talking about the extremely painful need of every crew member to get ashore near the end of a voyage. We all had it, regardless of department or age. I already knew from talks with Anthony and then Bruno and Bert that they couldn’t wait to get back among their families and close friends to reveal what they felt were their new strengths and selves. They were expressing feelings shared by all of us, including the men who had spent lifetimes making sea voyages. Each homecoming to families or friends in some way provided another chance at a better life.

The Farallons were now at our stern. We went under the Golden Gate Bridge and just after lunch came into sight of one of the main landmarks for Bay navigation, the Campanile on the University of California in Berkeley. By three o’clock we were moored north of the Ferry Building on the south side of Embarcadero Pier 23. The longshore linesmen who had helped us tie up were walking down the pier away from us, still wondering why we had given them such a big greeting. As soon as the cargo gear was rigged, we all went ashore, cleaned up for eating at such places as Tadich’s Grill or the Tivoli, New Joe’s, and Big Ben’s Fish Grotto in nearby North Beach.

We were all back aboard two days later at two o’clock sharp. A strange silence came over us. It was more than just the knowledge that we would soon be visited by a Coast Guard team and then have to say our “so longs.” We were no longer interdependent on a ship at sea. Many of us would see each other again in the union hiring hall, and some of us might again sail together so we would have the witnesses that help preserve memory.

Yet we were breaking up a winning combination. In some ways it would have been better if we had all stayed with the ship and for a while longer remained a steady crew. But seamen’s jobs were plentiful during the war. Until the war, once seamen got jobs, many of them made homes aboard particular ships to obtain security. This often required demeaning concessions to shipboard authorities. The seamen who avoided this trap felt revulsion for the victims, although they understood why it occurred. In times of full employment, to “homestead” brought ridicule and isolation.

The opportunity to demonstrate our collective independence from the

shipowners and their officers was irresistible. It meant that they had to go to the trouble of getting another crew and developing working relationships with its members. It also meant that for a time we would be ashore free of their authority.

Two Coast Guard petty officers walked down the dock, and up our gangway an hour before payoff time. We were at the rail, expressionless, but stared at them until they disappeared into the officers' dining room. Their refusal to glance in our direction indicated their discomfort. Fifteen minutes later they went down the gangway and to their government car under the same tension. An hour later the Shipping Commissioner had us sign off the ship's articles. All hands were then paid off in full. For reasons we would never really know, the captain had not reported our work stoppage, and the chief mate had not disputed payment of a single hour of the overtime hours we had worked. The two of them stood side by side to say their goodbyes to us with toothy smiles.

Less than three minutes after we left the Officers' Dining Salon we made our "suitcase parade" down the gangway and along the dock to the Pier 23 Inn on the Embarcadero. There was no longer any reason to have a meeting of the group we had formed in case any of us were cited by the Coast Guard. There were no ships at the adjoining piers, and longshore gangs had not yet been assigned to the *Hanapepe*. The entire barroom was ours. We had decided beforehand that we would not order any drinks until after the three speeches we had decided upon were ended. The bosun went first.

"Remember that the job ahead is to make it possible for us union members who are working seamen to protect ourselves from both the shipowners and the union officials. We have to have unions, but not like we've got now. That can't be done if the only place where we can go to participate in the power life of the union is the local union meeting. The union halls are on their turf. Up on these ships is where we have the foundation for authority over them. If we establish that, then we can take our power to the meetings with us, even better if we choose the place to meet, like at a central pier. Our goal has to be to win respect. The goal of our officials has become to win respectability, uptown."

Londos was next. I introduced him as oiler of bearings on "three legged" engines.<sup>6</sup> "I was a seaman for the old country. We held a meeting of the crew. They accused us of mutiny. I had to leave my country and family."

I introduced the night cook and baker as Gabriel Cade, as he had requested.



“On this ship we have eliminated a corruption, at least for a time. I am proud to be part of that, but it is not enough. The kinds of contracts that are being signed have built a different kind of union that can’t be ours. By design it eliminates our control.”

It was time to wrap it all up. We all began drinking to one another, this time with fairly good whiskey instead of coffee from Oakland’s Dock Cafe. The thoughtful frowns after Cade’s speech were gone.

Minutes later I was standing between Bruno and Bert facing out into the large room. I could see Big John and the baker toasting three of the seven Navy Armed Guard sailors who had come in. They hadn’t felt free to talk with us since we had entered home port. Now they took the chance because we no longer had any official attachment to the *Hanapepe*. There was a group around Londos listening, at that point, to one of the wipers. It was beginning to get dark outside and booze was becoming a substitute for food as the discussion groups got smaller. The bosun and the baker had moved to one side, and the baker was calling the bosun “Hector.”

Someone noticed that the street lights had come on. The fast drinking ceased. Personal goodbyes were in progress. Big John was filling a third taxicab with our guys and their gear. The bosun was with him telling a group that no ship ever came into port cleaner or more shipshape. Minutes later, Chips got the bosun into a booth and pushed John and me in with him. Then Anthony arrived to reprimand us.

“Hey, you guys have been saying goodbyes with only a ‘so long’ and that’s it. How do you know if you’ll ever see any of us again?”

“It all stays with you longer when you don’t talk it out, Anthony.”

Anthony took about three steps back and with Bruno and Bert said “so long,” and they left.

Chips opened our discussion. “Blackie and I aren’t going to get another ship for a while, maybe three months or so. We have a woman friend who is a doctor in East Los Angeles. She runs a small clinic. We’re going to let her give us a 90,000-mile checkup. We’ll do some repairs on her place and use it as a ‘snug harbor’ for a while.”

“Chips, you know we have to get a ship within a month.”

“Yeah, John. So when you guys get back from your next trip, check the Toscani or the Galileo Hotel in North Beach.”

“When you talked us into taking that ship, you told us you were building something for the long term. We may not be able to get a couple of ’34 men to crew with us.”

“Then do by yourselves whatever way you can, but do it, long-term.”

“How much longer have we got?”

“Who can say, Red? There may come a time when the smart thing to do will be to lay low for a while to prepare for the next chance. You’ll know if it comes to that. For maybe another year it will be possible to pull off these kinds of actions, longer if the breaks come our way. You’ll do it differently than when we’re with you. Maybe you’ll find better ways. But listen, before we all pile out of here, there’s something else.”

“What?”

“Cape Verde Islands. I saw both of you go a little pop-eyed when I mentioned my home. It means that I’m Portuguese by culture, but by blood I’m part African. Ten years ago when we were building new unions on the waterfronts up and down this coast, the regular guys got more open-minded on a lot of things. Like so many others, I didn’t grab the opportunity of that time. I suppose many of the men I sailed and walked picket lines with figured I was a Mexican because of my straight hair. I let it slide. My name isn’t Soromengo, it’s Soromenho—Portuguese, not Spanish.

“That’s enough about that. Another thing: The piccards took the hiring hall away from us by putting goons like ‘Johnny Loudmouth’ in control of job dispatching. His specialty is to intimidate the guys up in age. It’s a way of destroying memory. We don’t write our history. Those guys are it.

“Notice that more and more the union leaves the job when the patrolman goes down the gangway, if indeed it came aboard with him. At union meetings our job is to sit and listen. But as long as we take control like we did on this one, even if only briefly on one ship in twenty, we keep them from having it all. The word’s out that Lundeberg is beginning to hang out with Republicans, for god’s sake. Enough, we have to get out of here. Be careful, Red, be careful, John.”

“Hold it, Chips, you too, Bosun. John and I are going to tell you a couple of things that have been on our minds. When John and I first came into the SUP, it was like getting a new look at what our lives could be. Before the war neither of us were ever able to talk back to a boss without getting fired. We both still carry this around with us. We can see the strength that comes from job action, but it’s hard to give up on Lundeberg completely. And it’s the same for some of the longshoremen who are critical of Bridges.”

“That’s right.” John was chuckling to cover his tension. “Me and Red didn’t ourselves live those times before the war. We’ve lived them through you. Since we first got into the union is the best job security we’ve ever

known. Maybe when the war is over, guys like Lundeberg will get better again.”

Chips was pulling on Blackie’s coat so hard that he slid him out of the booth and on to his feet. “All right, both of you, test what I’m saying goodbye to you with. Bureaucrats can never undo what’s happened to them. They can’t go back to being who they were. The reason bureaucracies get built is to avoid making the good fight. This changes everything about them. You don’t have the same job protection now as when you first joined, and you now have full membership books in the union, not trip cards or probationary books. What do you think it means that the union doesn’t provide representation when its members get called in by the Coast Guard? The Coast Guard’s supposed to protect us from subversives, saboteurs. Bullshit! Actually, they’re the government’s trial run at a labor police force. The National Maritime Union has given them an office right in the headquarters’ union hall in New York, and there’s no campaign against them by the leadership of our West Coast unions. Double bullshit!” Chips Costello and Hector Soromenho looked at us and saw that finally we were ready to break it up, too. They came toward John and me with good smiles. We all knew we couldn’t do any more by talking. We shook hands, and they were out the door. We waited long enough for them to get a cab and then went out to get one for ourselves.

John and I missed the support and ideas that were ever present when Chips and the bosun were close at hand. At the same time we were glad for our independence from them. Never again did we get so good a chance at winning as the one they found for us by preliminary exploration of several ships and then the discovery of the *Hanapepe*. Nevertheless, John and I helped to seed changes that improved the lives of crews, ourselves among them, on several more ships. These modest victories became harder to achieve as the war got older.

We never did get into more than what at the time seemed only a little trouble. Only when John and I were not sailing partners did I wind up appearing at Coast Guard tribunals. There was the time I was temporarily taken off my ship by Scotland Yard and British Naval Intelligence just before the ship went through the locks at Liverpool. Another time came when our crew on a coffee ship mustered to be silently stared at by twelve Americans in civilian clothes while at anchor on the Panama City side of the Panama Canal. But charges were never pressed against anyone in the crews. Nor were my seaman’s papers or the papers of any of my crew mates ever confiscated.

A little over a year after we left the *Hanapepe*, Chips wrote us that the bosun had died of cancer. He said our letters had given them big kicks, made them proud. Chips was at home in Azusa, California, and said his seagoing toolbox had gotten a lot heavier. He had a new '34 partner, Henry Woods, a Native American from Sutter's Mill. Chips did not write us again, and there were no return addresses on the two letters he sent us.

In late 1945, John and I began sailing up and down the coast on the steam schooners that brought lumber from the Northwest to build up the new cities that came with the Gold Rush. On our first trip to Coos Bay, Oregon, the Empire Mill quit sending out wood. We deckhands were the longshoremen. The mate ordered all hands to chip rust and paint the ship's side because there was no lumber. We all went to Empire's one bar and stayed there for three hours until the mate apologized and canceled his "request." John and I did not lead the action. We were greenhorns on the schooners.

It was the end of the schooners' long lives. War surplus LST boats with a single 300-foot open hatch forward of the superstructure on the stern allowed stowage by bundles instead of by the piece, the first step toward automation on the West Coast.

John went home after a schooner run to Central America for a load of rare wood. The talk we had before he left revealed we both wanted to quit going to sea for a while. The main reason? The restrictions that life at sea put on our social lives. We were each beginning our serious search for a wife.

I moved from an apartment in San Francisco's North Beach to a duplex near the Southern Pacific tracks in West Berkeley and got a job at the Chevrolet assembly plant in East Oakland. During my first months working there I used public transportation. A bus and a streetcar took me to downtown Oakland, where I would transfer to the Oakland bus that would drop me in front of the plant at 73rd Avenue and Foothill Boulevard.

Morale in this industrial area of the city was high during the strike wave in spring 1946. Then it became clear that Walter Reuther, vice president of the United Automobile Workers (UAW), had not been serious about his "GM Program," with its slogans of "wage increases and no price increases" and "open the corporation's books and prove you can't afford to pay us a decent wage." Life in the plant became boring as well as hard. I had become an assembly line spray painter and active in Local 76, UAW. We had to get to work at least half an hour before the line started at 7:12 a.m., earlier if we wanted to get the pushcart man with his donuts, and coffee.

One Monday morning I arrived downtown on the streetcar, and our motorman and conductor got off. They were standing in the still-dark street talking to other car men, local bus drivers, the drivers of big trucks, and San Francisco Bridge trainmen. I got down off the streetcar with several other passengers to figure out what was happening.

It was unbelievable. The Oakland police had been escorting scabs and merchandise into Oakland for delivery at Kahns and Hastings, the two department stores where retail clerks had been on strike for many weeks. The union drivers of streetcars, buses, and trucks refused to watch two strikes being broken. By stranding thousands of work-bound people in the heart of the city, they had called the Oakland general strike. It was December 2, 1946. No officials had announced or were leading it. It was just that we were all unable to get to work.

Our block began to organize within the next hour. The same was happening in other blocks we could see across Telegraph Avenue. Bars could stay open if they served only beer and turned up their jukeboxes. The prescription counters inside drugstores were open. Hamburger stands and coffee shops would remain open, but large restaurants were encouraged to close. Dancing in the streets started slowly because there were more men than women standing around. It was in full swing a short while later as women convinced the men that they knew how to dance.

By nine o'clock there were still no union leaders in sight. We were laughing about a comment from somewhere in the crowd on the sidewalk: "If some of you don't get serious, some of them are going to come and get us." I called Harry Lundeberg from a pay phone and told him what was happening. Within an hour a carload of Hawaiian SUP members found me, said "Hello Red Weir," and gave me a paper bag with several hundred large buttons that read "SIU-SUP Brotherhood of the Sea." They drove off laughing. I knew only one of them and never saw any of them again. The buttons were gone in minutes, used on hats as decorations and as badges of authority when downtown was cordoned off before noon. Anyone could leave town, but an active union card was needed to get in.

Later in the day I saw a Chevy worker called "Cousin Bill," an ex-SUP friend. He said he was going to sleep downtown and had already found a place. I told Bill I would go to work the next morning because our plant would probably be shut down, and a lot of us could then come back downtown. At 7:12 a.m. I was spray painting hoods and fenders again. No committeeman came near our department or, I later found out, any other.

Nor did our Local 76 president make contact with the plant. I was back in downtown Oakland by 5 p.m. Word was out that the officials of several unions planned to put out a strike call and that there might be a mass meeting that night at the Oakland Auditorium. Laughter spread with receipt of the news. No one had yet seen any of the official leaders. Their absence no longer created uneasiness. At the same time everyone was planning to attend the meeting.

Some of us ate tacos that we bought from a street vendor as we walked toward the meeting. We arrived to find the Oakland Auditorium surrounded by thousands of strikers. All the seats inside had been filled for over an hour. A public address system piped the speeches being made out to the crowd surrounding the auditorium.

All but one of the speakers had trouble addressing the audience. Harry Lundeberg alone spoke with the anger and boldness befitting a general strike. He called the city councilmen "super finks," who had ordered the use of the city police as "scab herders." In a heavy Norwegian accent he said they had been "taking lessons from Stalin and Hitler." Lundeberg ended by promising that the three ships at the army base would not get crews to sail them while the strike was on. (He didn't mention that longshoremen in the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union had walked off those ships the night before only to find that their union immediately sent new gangs to replace them.)

But none of the officials, including Lundeberg, had any plan of action that would use the power of the general strike to improve the conditions of employment of the people represented in the audience or to win the long strike of the women at the Kahns and Hastings department stores.

The mass meeting was adjourned, and the strikers left without instructions for protecting themselves and their occupation of Oakland's core area. The radio commentator Gabriel Heater had said twenty-four hours earlier, "Well, Oakland's a ghost town tonight." We knew that all official authority wanted us to quit the downtown area. If union officers had honestly offered to lead us, they would have lost their bit of sovereignty in their "working relationship with the employers." But they knew that if they did not lead us, they would lose our respect. Because of their dilemma, they did not tell us either to leave or to stay.

Ideas about what to do passed among us. The process was at work during the walk back to our midtown blocks. Some would spend the night and others would relieve them the following morning on Wednesday, the third day of the strike.

Puzzlement was the condition of the people downtown on Wednesday. The number of strikers was down. There was nothing real to do. The fun of Monday was gone. The 300 bus and streetcar men wearing their Eisenhower jackets as work uniforms who had marched on city hall in close order drill, demanding to speak with the mayor, were still present but as individuals.

Somewhere the union officials were meeting with the employers and city government. Representatives from several blocks regularly went to Kahns and Hastings department stores throughout the day to talk with the striking retail clerks. The clerks were still being told they had to be patient.

Late Thursday morning a sound truck hired by the AFL Central Labor Council of Oakland drove up and down our blocks telling everyone to go back to work. "The strike is officially over," it blared. We heard that Oakland's city council and mayor had agreed that there would be no more scab herding by the Oakland police. There was an agreement to arbitrate the differences in the retail clerks' long strike.

I got to Kahns early that evening. The picket line was still going. Demonstrators, many truck drivers among them, continued to march with the betrayed women. I was told that many of the women wept at the morning's announcement. I listened to one woman while she sat on a folding chair to put on clean sweat socks and air her white tennis shoes. She told a handful of us non-clerks that if the unions' leaders couldn't get a good contract for them with a general strike, then what they had gotten to end the strike wasn't any good either. There were almost a dozen clerks, standing nearby, who nodded their heads before she finished.

The woman with the white tennis shoes was right. She, her friends, and all the other retail clerks of Local 1265 had to stay out another five months, until May 13, 1947. Even then they did not win but went back out of exhaustion and demoralization. The contract negotiated for them had a grievance procedure so weak that it was useless. The AFL officials of Oakland, Alameda County, and the entire Bay Area were embarrassed by their failure in the retail clerks' strike.

Looking back, I must also note that at no point during the strike did any of us downtown Oakland strikers—political radicals included—climb up on a parked car and express the ideas that were already kicking around among us: "We can lead this strike ourselves." "Let's send out a dozen committees from one block to the other blocks to say this out in the open." "Our leadership will be the representative committees from every

central downtown block.” “Their meetings will be out in the open for all of us to see and hear, and clap or boo, as we agree or disagree in reaction to their ideas.”

Eighteen years later, students at the University of California at Berkeley embraced versions of these ideas adapted to their time and circumstances. Mario Savio, who became the best known of the student leaders, was part of the crowd that held captive a police car containing a student under arrest, Jack Weinberg. When Savio jumped up onto the car’s roof and called for a strike organization independent of absent student body officers, the free speech movement was born. It spread to campuses across the nation and remains an inspiration for initiatives from below.

The shame of the CIO unions was just as great. Not long after the general strike, I was elected delegate from UAW Local 76 to the state CIO convention in Santa Cruz. On the last day of the gathering, I took the floor and identified myself by name and local union, explaining that the Chevrolet Fisher Body units of my local represented the largest single group of industrial workers in the East Bay, over three thousand persons. There was also a Ford assembly plant in Richmond, an International Harvester plant in Emeryville, and many more, none of them over a half-hour drive from downtown Oakland. I asked, “Where were you during the Oakland general strike?” There was a quick silence. Chairperson Dick Linden recognized Paul Schlipf, secretary of the state CIO and director of its Political Action Committee. Schlipf, who was a delegate from the Fisher Body section of Local 76, answered, “It wasn’t a general strike. We weren’t in it.” Dave Jenkins, the majority whip, gave the signal, and there was applause. Linden hit the podium with his gavel to close discussion and go to the next matter on the agenda.

The union bureaucracies have put a good deal of effort into writing about the Oakland general strike. Time has been on their side. The rank and file of their unions do not often write books. Students and professors have difficulty finding rank-and-file participants in the strike and tend to rely on union officials and people to whom the officials direct them.

Paul Schlipf himself has written about the strike.<sup>7</sup> He stresses the Oakland Voters’ League formed by the AFL and CIO in the immediate post-strike period. He states correctly that four out of five labor candidates of the League were elected to the nine-member Oakland City Council. What he does not say is that the successful candidates were no more bold or effective in community politics than the union officials who selected them had been as strike leaders and collective bargainers.



Union officials seek to hide the evidence of the intelligence, organizational skills, and solidarity shown by regular hourly working people. The officials of business unions find it necessary to believe that their members are meek at heart and incapable of thinking through anything other than simple problems. This belief justifies union representatives when they lie to and manipulate members who pay their bills. One of the most bitter aspects of this mythmaking is to be found in the claim that the Oakland general strike began not on December 2, 1946, the Monday morning when all transportation halted without instruction from union officials, but on December 3. In 1991 the Labor Studies Program of Laney College in Oakland held a celebration of the 1946 Oakland general strike. A proclamation by Oakland's Mayor Elihu M. Harris on that occasion declared that the strike took place "from December 3 to 5, 1946" and was "called by the American Federation of Labor Central Labor Council," with support from other organizations, including the CIO.

I phoned Big John a few weeks after the Oakland general strike ended. He was thinking of moving to Florida for a job painting bridges. No one I ever knew was better working high in the air. I told him some of my thoughts about the strike, and the discussion that followed took us back to the SS *Hanapepe*. We recalled that the bosun, Chips, and the baker blamed union officials themselves for becoming bureaucrats. But now, because of what we were seeing on jobs ashore, John and I were starting to blame the vertical form of union structure that the AFL and CIO introduced. Rank-and-file workers like us were electing union officials who were then taken out of the workplace and put in offices where they had little contact with us. They were more often around employers, government bureaucrats, and lawyers. John told me it was the same or worse in the building trades.

Big John is now dead. I never got to tell him what I learned from the historian Lorin Lee Cary: that in 1936 General Motors rank and filers wanted to build a semi-autonomous stewards' council and then got pressured out of it by Adolph Germer, John L. Lewis's lieutenant in the UAW.<sup>8</sup> The papers Germer left to the Wisconsin State Historical Society show that the new CIO leaders fought all rank-and-file attempts to build new industrial unions on a horizontal rather than the old vertical model, in which local unions had to go to top officials for permission even on many routine matters.

John and I knew differently. We experienced it on the *Hanapepe* in 1943 and on several more ships during the next three years. I experienced it

again in the Oakland general strike; again in 1982, when I attended the Sixth Congress of the rebel European Harbor Workers in Aarhus, Denmark, and encountered the Spanish longshoremen's new union, La Coordinadora; and yet again in the formation of rank-and-file "coordinations" during the Air France strike of 1993 by union and nonunion workers acting together.<sup>9</sup> There can be unions run by regular working people on the job. There have to be.

There have to be unions with leaders who stay on the job because the scandal of the Oakland general strike has been repeated too many times. Union members use their power to develop a victory over employers, but union officials refuse to accept or act on the victory. Instead, they give away what was never theirs. Once in office full-time, officials are no longer a living part of the industry.

There have to be unions run by hourly paid people on the job because Hector Soromenho and Chips Costello were right in believing that union bureaucrats cannot go back. Top union officers build cliques among their members and keep themselves in office by means of favors. They give concessions to employers and get help from the corporations in return. They build first-name relationships with politicians. All bridges are thus burned. Any attempt at reform by the head of a bureaucratic union organization would be seen as a betrayal by his or her supporters inside and outside the union.

The isolated individuals at the top of union bureaucracies are attracted by the kind of personal peace to be bought by making deals. The deals are made in places where union members cannot go.

My own difficulty in accepting what the bosun said about union bureaucracy spotlights the problem. I and others had the advantage of a special education from older peers. Yet when I was stranded in downtown Oakland as the general strike began, my first thought was to get it an official leader. I phoned Harry Lundeberg and asked him to become involved. It may be that I was not the first one to call him, but excuses are beside the point. I made the call, risking possible injury to the strike, because I feared that "leaderless workers" downtown that early morning might be unable to handle the strike by themselves.

Experience proved otherwise. It is true that Lundeberg was the only leader with a ready rhetoric and the courage to use it standing before a crowd. But the result of his appearance was to leave the audience with the impression that at least there was someone among the officials capable of leading.

It was while watching the behavior of leaders of the California State CIO at the Santa Cruz convention shortly after the Oakland general strike that I found myself wanting to go to a phone and arrange a reunion of the crew of the *Hanapepe* at Pier 23 Inn. Blackie and Chips had explained why bureaucrats can't possibly clean up their bureaucracies. Unfortunately I had been unable to learn the lesson from them. A return to classrooms aboard ship would do no good. There was no point in hearing the instruction again. I had to learn this most important of the lessons Blackie and Chips taught us from my own experience.

(1996)

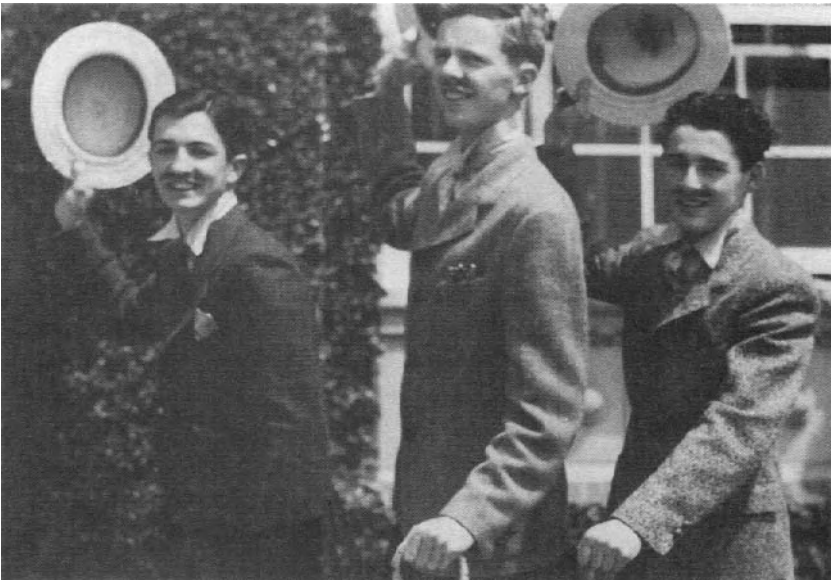
Stan Weir with his mother, Florence Weir, in February 1942 at Port Hueneme, California, as he is about to join the Apprentice Seamen's Program run by the Coast Guard and U.S. Merchant Marine Officer's Training Academy.



Stan Weir and Willie Gorman in Weir's 1946 war surplus Ford Jeep on Russian Hill in San Francisco.



Stan Weir with Irving Cohen, circa 1946.



Weir practicing for theatrical production at UCLA with friends Henry Garcia and Richard Garcia.

Weir on Southern Pacific railroad train *Morning Daylight*, returning to Los Angeles from Palo Alto, site of the UCLA–Stanford football game, fall 1940.



Weir at work on Pier 29, San Francisco, in lower hold of Japanese merchant ship, 1962. Photograph by Paul Hassel.

Mary Knox Weir and Connie Williams, 1966.





“B men” Bill Edwards and Bob Marshall, 1960.



San Francisco longshore workers “Honolulu John” and Pat Courtney, 1962. Photograph by Paul Hassel.

## The Need for Labor Networking

In these times, it is rare when one group of labor union members approaches another for mutual assistance. Yet that is what is happening right now as you read this open letter. For some time now, a score of workers from various local unions in public and private employment have been meeting once a month in local union halls throughout the country. They have been meeting, because like millions of other working men and women across the country and the world, we are faced with a serious challenge. As economic conditions continue to worsen around the world, public and private employers are attempting to recoup their losses (real or faked) by attacking workers' wages, benefits, and cutting back safety in the workplace. As for our own industry, employers have attacked by cutting back on manning of tank barges and towing vessels and other safety issues we are concerned with in the maritime trade.

The tremendous power of employers to impose concessions on employees means that working people must stand together to fight for improved contracts. In recent years, though, employers have each felt free to attack their employees in one workplace without fear that the national or international unions will organize effective solidarity actions in other workplaces owned by the same corporation.

The business as usual approach of most of our top union officials has proven unsuccessful in fighting concessions. The experience of unions within the airline industry illustrates the futility of this approach as air controllers, flight attendants, pilots, machinists, and others have each been forced to go on strike separately with little or no support from one another. The 1987 Crowley strike is a good example of trying to break from business as usual, but there were (and still are) forces working within our own union's bureaucratic channels that were beyond our control.

While leaders at the international union level have consistently tried to discourage local initiative, in the past few years a democratic rank and file



labor initiative has begun to emerge. Local unions in public and private sector bargaining units have bypassed top official leaders in building assistance networks such as the national support for the Hormel strike and the continuing boycott of Spam and other Hormel products.

With union membership at a post-World War II low, and the attack on working people's wages and benefits increasing, a new direction for labor unions is clearly needed. This new direction must begin to challenge both employers and union officials who won't lead. This can be done by developing independent rank and file networks of communication, assistance, and solidarity.

(1993)

## Rank and File Networks

### *A Way to Fight Concessions*

The presentation of *Labor Notes*' "viewpoint" on the concession crisis (October 1982) provides an opportunity for discussion of the many ideas it contains. I would like to focus on the problem of workplace closings and the fifth point listed under its proposals for "Resisting Locally" or the formation of communication networks.

There can be no effective opposition to concessions without a workable strategy against shutdowns. As long as a company can take steps to close one of its workplaces without fear of speedy reprisals from inside the others that it owns, it will get what it wants.

The various top union leaderships feel they must honor the no-strike arbitration clause contracts they have voluntarily negotiated and are afraid to organize multiple "shop-floor" resistances. Instead they fight those who want to resist. Thus, work forces in plant after office are abandoned to making a lone and too often losing battle in which primary jobs get killed and communities die.

To stop this process, the building of "spread the word" rank and file networks will be elevated from tactic to strategy.

Quietly, it is already beginning to happen. A local union takes an initiative without consulting its International. A worker in one location develops contact with a person in another of the same employer, and then another. Phone trees grow a number at a time.

The networkers are able to trade information. They compare news of the actions and rumor mills of each of their local managements, exchange stories on what the international union has or has not been doing, and tell each other about some of the wins as well as the losses that have recently occurred on the job. They learn that boldness must be laced with caution, but that the service they perform builds strength.

With this as a foundation they have the chance to put out a newsletter, hand to pocket, or right out in the open, depending on the circumstances.

Possibly they can do much more somewhere down the line as it becomes necessary—including the formation of additional networks composed of contacts in workplaces of the same local area, regardless of industry or occupation.

While developments of this kind are still in the formative stages in the United States, the crisis of depression, new technology, and employer offensives in Europe has caused groupings of workers there to go further.

An example is provided in the longshore industry. Last September, I spent time with dockers from eleven European nations at the Sixth Congress of the Dockworkers' International Organization of Solidarity (DIOS), in Aarhus, Denmark. DIOS is interested in far more than one-day showcase demonstrations of solidarity. The organization was formed in 1977 to restrict—by direct action—movement of ships that run away from a port after breaking established work rules.

DIOS is made up of representatives from official national shop stewards' councils, official national unions, port branch or local unions, and rank and file port committees. The Congress stimulated my trip to Spain where I visited the national union of semi-autonomous port locals, formed by the dockers of that country. It is called Coordinadora (Coordinating Committee) and has twelve thousand members, almost half again larger than the ILWU in U.S. West Coast ports. It has no paid or full-time officials. Instead, it has interlocking regional councils of delegates, all of whom must work full-time on the waterfront.

In one of its five regions, the Canary Islands, Coordinadora has grown beyond the docks to include four basic shoreside industries and participates in a grassroots political drive that includes university students and professional workers. Women in large numbers have involved themselves. One was killed in a docker support demonstration and is now a national martyr.

In all its ports, this new union was built on networks that began six years ago. At this point it lives under serious threat from the new government that took office last October. It refuses to switch from job-centered unionism or to affiliate with Spain's largest labor federation, the General Workers' Union (UGT).

None of the delegates or members that I talked to felt they had all the answers, but simply that they have found an improved way to seek solutions to problems. Thus far, they have stopped the employers' attempt to open new container ports at the expense of the older ports, have kept the right to strike over grievances, and have avoided concession fever.

## Introduction to Coordinadora

Hundreds of thousands of American families have now experienced the killing of the steady jobs that once sustained them. The resulting terror has been used to cut the wages and working conditions of millions more. This downgrading of our living standards is symbolized most dramatically by the homeless people wandering city streets. Labor unions remain the largest organizations in our society, but this employer attack has been accomplished without opposition from them, revealing the depths of the crisis within the unions.

Multi-nationalism and its enabler, automation, have put the kind of demands on business unions that they cannot meet. A union contract signed by a management representative is no longer a guarantee of anything. It has become too easy for them to pack up and move. As a result, employers no longer have great need for the services of the labor officials. Fear of job loss by regular working people is a sufficient disciplinary weapon to keep the peace. The men of the labor establishment show no sign that they are willing to do what is necessary, that is, return control of the unions to the job and develop international solidarity alliances at the rank and file level. They exist in a state of paralysis. The UAW leadership at Solidarity House in Detroit is not the only top officialdom to abandon its membership (by leaving the locals to fight it out among themselves when General Motors announced it would shut down at least ten of its plants). This condition is the rule.

Local union people are now faced with the need to move horizontally in order to make alliances between groups on the job; with the hourly people in nearby workplaces, whether unionized or not; with other locals of people working for the same employer; with those who transport what they make; and finally, with others producing a competitive commodity or service, regardless of geographic location.

American workers will not voluntarily return to vertical business union

structures developed by the AFL and CIO bureaucracies. In the 1930s and 1940s, autonomy was taken from locals by the “international” unions with the claim that this would aid the mobilization of all locals against a common corporate employer. The result has been the opposite. Today, unionized employers are each free to attack a particular local union without fear that the national leaders will mobilize the other locals or work locations in defense of the attacked. It is precisely at times like this when the long-term victims of what “has been” are most open to examination of new ideas and models from which to borrow.

Coordinadora provides us with more than just an alternative form of union structure, for among many other things it provides methods by which to attack bureaucracy before it forms. The following stories provide examples of its politics.

In 1982, I received an invitation to attend the Sixth Congress meeting of the International Harbor Workers to be held in Aarhus, Denmark’s largest port, September 23–25. I had never before heard mention of the Congress in either the daily press or publications of the longshore unions in the U.S. The primary purpose of the Congress was to build solidarity actions from port to port around the world. Dockers from nine countries gathered at Aarhus. The Dutch, Belgian, and West German delegations represented rebel groupings within their unions. The French and Danish represented entire ports but not their national unions. The delegates from Liverpool and Hull represented docker shop stewards in all British ports. The Norwegian, Swedish, and Finnish delegations were official representatives of their entire unions, as were the Spaniards and Canary Islanders representing Coordinadora.

During the previous Congress meetings, the delegates from England and Sweden had unsuccessfully proposed that the Congress establish an international secretariat. They had already isolated themselves, but had not given up the fight which climaxed at this meeting. The Coordinadora delegates again fought the proposal of the British, which was not easy for them to do. Over the years, Coordinadora had received substantial aid from the British (docker) stewards. After each major argument put forth by the British and Swedish delegates they calmly put the questions: “But why do we need such an office, staff, and publication? Right now you stop all the ships we phone you about, just as we stop the discharge or loading of ships as requested by you. Isn’t this the essential function of the Congress? True, if we elect international officials, get an office and a newspaper, it might bring us more publicity and increase the efficiency of our

function, but only for a time. As soon as power becomes centralized there would be competition among us. The price is too great; it would destroy whatever gains we made. As it is right now, we have nothing about which to compete. Why change this?" The forces for centralization lost. The next, seventh, Congress meeting was to be held in Hull, but did not materialize. The Spanish national elections of October 1982 were just days ahead. Spain's leading social democrat, Felipe González, was already certain of victory for his Socialist Workers Party of Spain (PSOE). A threat came that, once in office, he could enforce anti-docker laws.

It was assumed that this was a response to Coordinadora's refusal to join the PSOE's labor federation, the General Union of Workers (UGT). To this, the Coordinadora dockers restated their belief that political parties should not run unions, because they must represent all workers regardless of political affiliation. They added, however, that if anything was done against them by the PSOE, they would make it clear to the public that the word "worker" did not belong in that party's name. Finally, they let it be known that most of their members would probably vote for González, because out of all the parties, his was most susceptible to pressure from them.

We learned also that in the Canary Islands the dockers and their wives and children had extended the Coordinadora structure horizontally to include workers in other industries. On the island of Las Palmas they created an alliance with groups of students and intellectuals and ran independent candidates in political elections.

(1989)

## Strike in Spain Reveals Sickness and Cure

Over 95 percent of Spanish longshoremen and waterfront clerks have been conducting a defensive national waterfront strike since May 8, according to the international newsletter (English edition, Report 56, May 22) issued regularly by Coordinadora, the union that represents over 80 percent of the strikers. This union continues to be one of the main targets of an all-out attack by the government and employers.

The two other unions involved in the strike action are the Anarchist longshoremen's union affiliated with the National Confederation of Workers (CNT) and the Communist dockers union, which is affiliated with the Comisiones Obreras or Workers Commissions. These unions represent dockers in some of the smaller ports, but their participation is vital. In this time of hammer head cranes, it is not uncommon for large container operations to move from big to what were once tiny out-ports in order to escape educated dockers, thus raising even higher the necessity of solidarity.

The main purpose of the offensive against the dockers is to break the unity of the men, which is based in the democratic hiring system won by Coordinadora during its official formation in 1976. The local unions in each port established a single hiring hall since that time. Until the scabbing operation that sparked this strike, there was only one location in each port where a docker could get a job. Companies could not hire their own workers on either a daily or steady basis; they could obtain dockers only by placing an order with the hiring hall. These halls are located on government property and the job dispatchers are civil servants.

The hiring has been kept honest according to union reports and the rank and file Spanish dockers with whom I spoke. A highly developed stewards system keeps close watch on the dispatchers and calls stop dispatch meetings right in the hall the minute anything goes wrong.

The employers have now begun to hire core groups of steady men and

form their own hiring halls. They plan eventually to hire extra men for peak shipping season needs through the government's unemployment offices. It was this employer-government move that forced the strike. There is no way that a union can negotiate when all its contracts have been violated, and when the opponents, who once wanted "only an arm and a leg," now want everything. In effect and in fact the Spanish dockers have been locked out, and they have countered with the strike weapon.

The war on the dockers is being mobilized under a program of "privatization" in which the government allows private industry to take over services that it once provided, much like the Reagan administration has been doing in its deregulation and privatization programs.

In large part the maritime employers in Spain are multinational corporations. The kind of hiring halls they seek are in fact the sort of "fink halls" that existed in the ports of Seattle, Portland, and Los Angeles from the early 1920s until West Coast dockers and merchant seamen formed unions and took control of hiring with democratic "low man out" and rotation systems in the 1934 and 1936 strikes. The main burden for supporting the American fink halls was carried by the taxpayers. According to Coordinadora, their opposition has identical plans, should they win this battle.

Last April, a month before the lockout had been put into force, the unions were able to force a split in the employers' ranks. Several companies agreed not to join the lockout and agreed that they would continue getting dockers from the union-controlled (government-owned) hiring halls. But the Social Democratic government brought unity to the employers by a show of force. In the port of Bilbao, authorities refused to supply shoreside cranes to the companies who had been willing to go along with the unions. It was then that the employers began a united campaign to recruit scabs.

The dockers and their wives have fought back in a number of ways. Coordinadora's Report 56 relates that in the large Canary Island port of Tenerife, the SS *Ciudad Zaragoza* was being worked by scabs under the protection of police and a "compulsory service command" when "women burst in and the work was stopped." In the 1980 strike, Tenerife wives carrying baseball bats went past soldiers and drove the strikebreakers off the pier.

Ships loaded in a non-union port became subject to a blockade that could spread because Coordinadora has mutual solidarity pacts with dockers in other European countries. The employers agreed not to use the



port anymore, but the agreement was broken when three lumber ships were unloaded. "Thereafter the wood was burnt out but nobody knew the cause . . . and there are not any registered or union-affiliated dockers" in that city.

In Algeciras, because of the blockade of Maersk vessels, "the company moved 840 containers to Gibraltar," just outside Spain. Algeciras dockers went to Gibraltar to talk to the dockers there. So did "Mrs. Schuster, Maersk General Manager from Denmark . . . The Transport and General Workers' Union refused to load the containers and the containers continue to rest on land."

During the third week in May a roll-on/roll-off ship bound for the Balears Islands from Barcelona was stopped, but then was loaded a few days later under protection of "400 policemen and 150 civil guards." A similar loss for the union occurred in Valencia due to the presence of police armed with automatic guns held at the ready. The clerks and longshoremen occupied the offices of the government's Port Authority in order to make their fight visible to the public.

Two unionized ports have not joined the strike. The dockers in Pasajes and Coruna belong to the General Workers' Union (UGT), which is controlled by the Socialist Workers Party of Spain (PSOE). Coordinadora Report 55, dated May 19, states that "A demonstration was performed by dockers." The PSOE offices "were attacked and glass broken. Three container train wagons were burned out."

It cannot be claimed that Coordinadora is anti-political; rather, it is political in the best sense of the term. This is the union that informed the employers and government that it would work cargo to or from Nicaragua, wage free. In a related Barcelona incident, two gangs of dockers took army tanks bound for El Salvador off a ship and refused to put them back aboard. It is not surprising that Coordinadora supports the Solidarity union in Poland.

By its very nature, Coordinadora poses a threat to many top union officials in Spain and beyond. First of all, it does not have any full-time or salaried officials. It is run by an extensive stewards system. Every delegate (steward) must work on the waterfront at least three-quarter time. Twenty-five percent time off, with pay, is allowed them, providing there are complaints to handle.

Equally threatening is the type of national network that Coordinadora has constructed. Every local union in this twelve thousand member union is autonomous and self-ruling. It has no fortress-like national headquarters

that members find hard to enter. The practical translation of Coordinadora is the Coordinating Committee. The locals belong to it voluntarily on the basis of conviction and self-interest. If the dockers in one port support the workers in other ports as need arises, they can expect help as they, in turn, come under attack.

(1986)

## Longshoremen and Marine Clerks of Spain Building New Kind of Union

Spanish waterfront workers have in recent times created a labor union that is attracting attention around the world. It gets no press or media coverage. But ships move from port to port and people have their ways of spreading the word.

Working dockers and clerks designed this union. Their idea was to make an organization that from the bottom up depended upon built-in rank and file controls. They do not claim to have achieved perfection. They know they still have big problems to solve. But they have made progress and are rightly proud.

Coordinadora, as the union is called, has existed in its present form for ten years. It has no full-time officials. It pays no salaries to any of its representatives. There is no need for a big dues structure.

In late 1982, I visited for two weeks in two major Spanish ports, Barcelona (Catalonia) and Santa Cruz de Tenerife (Canary Islands). The sing-song complaint about how "it's all the fault of the regular membership, they've gone so soft that they won't even attend local union meetings," is never heard. In Spain it has become pointless. The special structuring of Coordinadora involves the ranks right on the job. It is not dependent upon the institution of the monthly business meeting whose main function is to have the membership sit and listen to officers' reports.

In practical translation, Coordinadora means "The Coordinating Committee." There is one national officer, a delegate. That person must depend on what he can get from jobs out of the hiring hall for the major portion of his wage. The one-year limit on term of office is a rule that applies to this national delegate as well as those at the local level.

During the thirty-nine years that they had to live and work under the dictatorship of General Francisco Franco, the longshoremen and clerks had two unions. The official union was run by bureaucrats who would not move without asking permission from on high. The other union was

based on informal on-the-job networks, and so existed in the place where officials found it difficult to operate.

Franco died in 1975. Even before that, regular unions had begun to form again and make some demands on employers. In most occupations the standard West European business union structure was used as a model. The longshoremen and clerks, however, decided to use their own model. They brought their underground delegate network to the surface, formalized it, and then went to the government and employers with demands.

Great risks were taken in that period to reestablish rank and file authority. For example, in Barcelona the dockers and clerks occupied and permanently took over a four-story waterfront building as their own. After Franco crushed the revolution in 1939, he confiscated all union property. In 1975, some of it was efficiently taken back. No red tape.

Today, in each port of the five regions of this thirteen-thousand-member union, the rank and file have elected a network of delegates who serve one-year terms. Seventy-five percent of each month they have to work on the waterfront like anyone else. They can take up to forty paid hours per month to represent the membership's grievances that come up on the job or in the hiring hall.

Every Coordinadora port has a self-governing, separate, and independent local union. Coordinadora is a national union because the port unions formed a free federation of locals that unites the harbor workers along Spain's four coasts and the Canary Islands.

In the 1970s, business union critics of Coordinadora predicted that the new union's time-consuming democratic practices would result in weakness. But it has worked out just the opposite. Because the number of delegates in each port is large, and because they must on most days get themselves to the hiring hall and the job, the membership is always able to get to the people they elect. They are able to deal with their representatives on their own turf.

I attended three delegate meetings during a single week in Barcelonetta, the waterfront neighborhood of Barcelona. Thirty attended each night. I was told that they didn't meet that often every week, but that the business of the union did demand a lot of meetings.

"Much discussion is needed to run the union on a sound and democratic basis," I was told. Yet extended discussions created a climate of "respect from co-workers." Delegate meetings in each port must take care of more than strictly local business. The national union is dependent upon the local unions and vice versa. Neither could exist without the other. Every

local union could be broken if each local union could not depend on support by direct action from all the others.

Last November, all ports in Spain had a one-hour general strike in support of the port of Las Palmas, Canary Islands. On July 24, 1980, students and intellectuals demonstrated on behalf of the waterfront strike there. Belen María, a seventeen-year-old university student, was run over on that day by a scab-driven truck. The driver came to trial last November 22. "Work was stopped all that day. Dockers attended the court, and made a demonstration from the harbor to the court, an eight kilometers walk by nearly fifteen hundred dockers" (Coordinadora Report from Spain Number 39, 1984.) The employers attempted to punish eighty Palma de Mallorca dockers (who had taken job action in support of their contract) by making them take time off. At the same time, the employers loaded some ships with non-registered workers. Coordinadora announced that the ships would not be unloaded in any Spanish port. The employers were aware that Coordinadora also had a working arrangement with dockers in eleven other European countries, both official and unofficial, which is kept alive by personal visits during vacations. The punishment was withdrawn.

The flexibility of the Spanish longshoremen's approach to their employers has allowed them to build a support system that can reach around the world while they remain at work. A recent newsletter (in English) from Coordinadora states: "Solidarity with Nicaragua People. Whereas people of Nicaragua are suffering Coordinadora has decided that any goods (cargo) going to or coming from Nicaragua—will be loaded or unloaded in any Spanish port free of charge."

The dockers and checkers have not taken these actions lightly. Soldiers with machine guns slung in front are still very much a presence on dock roads and downtown streets. The employers are hard-line. Among them are American corporations like Sealand.

Coordinadora applies its alternative ideas to the international as well as the domestic scene. In 1977, it was one of the main forces involved in the building of the International Harbour Workers' Congresses. Six congresses have been held to date. Their purpose is to create a way for dockers from all European countries to support one another in a direct way.

One of the big problems still facing Coordinadora is that the government through the Labor ministry still controls much of the hiring process. The dispatchers are government appointees, thus the need for the union to take direct action and hold meetings right in the hall from time to time. Neither does the union have control over record keeping. The members

show great interest in any discussion of the "low man out" system still being used by the hall men in the port of Los Angeles.

Coordinadora is doubly unique in the Canary Islands, because of the role that women played in building it. During one of the founding strikes in the '70s, there was a point when the men could not show on the docks. Scabs had been hired. There were guards and military—heavily armed and trigger-happy. Over a thousand women marched on the docks with bats and clubs which they used to drive the scabs into the water. Women are always present in the Canary Island delegations to the International Harbour Workers' Congress meetings.

There has not been a meeting of the Congress since 1982. Canary Islanders are among the major movers for a resumption of the international meetings. It is the main way they have not only for having some fun and relaxation, but also for exchanging information and spreading the word that makes survival of the union possible.

(1985)

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## IV. Workers, Politics, and Social Change



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## Eric Hoffer

### *Far-Right True Believer*

During a process that spanned sixteen years, author and longshoreman Eric Hoffer achieved national and international fame. The process began in 1951, with the publication of his first book, *The True Believer*. It peaked when Eric Sevareid interviewed him for a full hour on a national CBS telecast September 19, 1967. Between the two events, Hoffer had published numerous magazine articles and three more books, *The Passionate State of Mind*, *Ordeal of Change*, and *The Temper of Our Time*. He had been the focus of interviews in nationally circulated magazines in addition to twelve half-hour interviews for National Educational Television in 1964 and 1965. In the January 7, 1967, issue of the *New Yorker*, he was the subject of a lengthy “profile” by Calvin Tompkins which was later published in book form under the title *Eric Hoffer: An American Odyssey*. He also received a special appointment to the faculty of the University of California at Berkeley.

By any standard, Hoffer’s achievements deserved respect, but they inspired far more than that, for Hoffer had no formal education and was an industrial worker. Moreover, he had been blind between the ages of seven and fifteen, was a migrant farmworker, and “on the bum” during the 1930s. He became a San Francisco longshoreman during World War II, at which occupation he remained until he retired in 1967. For millions of Americans, Hoffer’s accomplishments were more important than what he wrote or said. Few things in our society are more impressive than the person who has achieved a form of personal fulfillment. Victory over the invisibility that most humans endure is rare, and to be witness to that victory brings a moment of sweet hope to counter disappointments we dare dwell on only rarely.

Eric Hoffer appeared before the nation as a potential folk hero at a time when our national sense of heroism was failing. Sevareid’s interview with Hoffer secured top viewer ratings. It could hardly have been otherwise.

The national publicity before the telecast was irresistible: "One of the Most Remarkable Minds in America. Yet he never went to school," said the large ad in the *New York Times*, accompanied by a brief biography of Hoffer and a picture of his rugged face. Yet during the telecast, a process began that would make Hoffer a symbol of controversy, a catalyst for political polarization—hero to some and anti-hero to others. CBS and Seavareid gave broad exposure to Hoffer at a time when the general public was becoming sick to death of the war in Vietnam and the lack of credibility of the president waging it. Defiantly, Hoffer utilized a significant portion of his "prime time" to praise that president. Hoffer explained that he had worked with "a number of Lyndon Johnsons on the waterfront," that "he is one of us" and not one of the intellectuals who "know nothing" about working people and "that is why we like him." Months earlier, he had told a *Life* reporter: "We have a dozen [Lyndon] Johnsons in the [longshore] Union. Johnson has more humanity in the dirt under one fingernail than all the intellectuals in history."<sup>1</sup>

Within weeks of the telecast, Johnson invited Hoffer to the White House for informal talks in front of television cameras. In June 1968, after the assassination of Robert Kennedy, Johnson made Hoffer a member of his appointed National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, chaired by Milton Eisenhower.

By the end of the year, Hoffer twice achieved press publicity because of his membership on the commission: first for a verbal attack upon ghetto blacks for allowing themselves the "luxury" of rage and for not having "raised one blade of grass" or "one brick" in the ghettos, and then again shortly after the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago when he supported the use of force against youthful demonstrators. However, neither of these incidents were mentioned some weeks later during Eric Seavareid's second telecast interview of Hoffer, titled "The Savage Heart."<sup>2</sup>

Hoffer's next appearance on national television was as a witness before a congressional subcommittee. On May 1, 1969, the U.S. Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Government Operations, chaired by John L. McClellan of Arkansas (which has "the duty to investigate organized crime" and "improper activities in the labor and management fields"), made the decision to enter a new field of inquiry. Their stated intention was to determine whether there are on American university campuses "groups or organizations or individuals who are fostering, or whose aims and objectives include the fostering of such riots

and civil and criminal disorders, *and to ascertain their key personnel, aims and objectives.*"<sup>3</sup>

On May 9, they held their first public hearing connected with their new pursuit. McClellan opened the session with an explanation of the inquiries. They were necessary, he said, because campus disorders are denying the government the contributions made by the ROTC and research programs on behalf of the Department of Defense and other agencies. He then introduced Eric Hoffer as the first and only witness of the day. (Doctors S. I. Hayakawa and Bruno Bettelheim would testify during the second session on May 13.)

Hoffer began by explaining that he was "not a qualified person," that he came to testify only because somebody "shanghaied" him, but that he was from the San Francisco Bay area where the student troubles started. He made it clear that, in his opinion, the student revolts were not caused by conspiracies and have nothing to do with grievances concerning civil rights, poverty, or war, but rather, they expressed a general rebellion of youth. Hoffer argued that authorities had been too permissive in dealing with this "contagious" condition. He then began what must have been the most outspoken appeals for the use of repressive violence against dissent ever witnessed by a mass audience in this country. That evening, millions of startled Americans saw, heard, or read portions of his testimony. Every major press service, television and radio network had been present. Below are quotations from Hoffer's testimony. Those portions which the news media concentrated on are in italics.

Take Grayson Kirk [president of Columbia University during the student uprising there in the spring of 1968]. Here they got into his room. They [deleted] on his carpet. They burglarized his files. They used his shaving kit. Grayson Kirk did not forget himself. Now I remember when the long-shoremen were talking about that. I think it would have been a wonderful thing, although it is not civilized, *I think it would have been a wonderful thing if Grayson Kirk got mad, grabbed a gun and gunned them down. I think maybe he would have gotten killed, maybe he would have killed two of them when they were jumping up, but I think he would have saved Columbia.* You have to get angry, you have to have courage enough to lay your life on the line.

I think what you need, Mr. Chairman, is not new strong laws. You need men of strong character. It is men who are going to solve your problems, not laws. You can make as many laws as you want. If you haven't strong

men, men of courage now on campus from what I have seen, the man who carries the load, the tragic figure, is the administrator, the chancellor, the president. He stands alone. The faculty are on one side, an inert majority of students on the other. He is all alone. The only thing to sustain him is his courage. *What you need are chancellors of universities and mayors of cities who have muscle, who love a fight, who when they get up in the morning, spit on their hands and ask "Whom do I kill today?"* These are the people who will save you. Maybe if you have such people you won't have to fight.<sup>4</sup>

The ability of Hoffer's statements to cause shock resulted not only from their content, but as well from the fact that this advice on how to deal with dissenting students came not from a spokesman for a totalitarian bund, but from a citizen widely acclaimed as a philosopher, from the man who wrote "A social order is stable so long as it can give scope to talent and youth. Youth itself is a talent—a perishable talent."<sup>5</sup>

Hoffer's immediate audience was not a mixture of lumpen beer hall jin-goists, but a committee of United States senators. They had entertained testimony that was an open polemic for the use of murder as a method of solving social problems. The testimony had evoked from them no open outrage or denunciations, and only one of the senators present, Abraham Ribicoff, took issue with Hoffer during his appearance. For most people—except, of course, for those whose alienation has been an established fact for generations—the American self-image had just received an unexpected blow, all the more so because it was obvious that the Senate committee members had previous knowledge of Hoffer's views on the subject under investigation. Four of the nine members of the subcommittee are liberals. They act as a check on the conservative majority. On the day of Hoffer's appearance, Ribicoff was the only liberal present and, except for him, the committee members found in Hoffer a kindred spirit. In fact, North Carolina Democratic Senator Sam J. Ervin, Jr. was so impressed after Hoffer's exposition on how to keep law and order on the campuses that he was moved to poetry.

SENATOR ERVIN: When I went to college, when students went to the dean's office, students were in trouble. Nowadays when students go to the dean's office, the dean is in trouble. You have, I think, put the finger on the trouble with America. I think you have made it clear just what the poet Josiah Gilbert Holland made clear:

God give us men! A time like this demands  
Strong minds, great hearts, true faith, and ready hands;  
Men whom the lust of office does not kill;  
Men whom the spoils of office cannot buy;  
Men who possess opinions and a will;  
Men who have honor; men who will not lie;  
Men who can stand before a demagogue  
And damn his treacherous flatteries without winking;  
Tall men, sun-crowned, who live above the fog  
In public duty and in private thinking.

I think that is the trouble with American colleges. I think that is the trouble with American government.<sup>6</sup>

Ervin's enthusiasm, however, did not suit Hoffer's immediate and impatient need to get all his ideas before the committee. When Ervin had finished, McClellan stepped in to amend the break in his witness's testimonial momentum:

THE CHAIRMAN: Is that the kind of men you were talking about?

MR. HOFFER: Well, not all the poetry. Anybody who really wants to go places in this country . . . I think that the university could be a jumping place now for any office. If you make good on the campus as chancellor, you can really go places. I think so. I am convinced of it.<sup>7</sup>

Since the news media reported only bits of Hoffer's testimony, it may be that some people could not fully believe what they had seen, heard, or read. The reporting, however, was accurate and in context. There was nothing momentary or mocking about Hoffer's rage at any point during his appearance. In fact, his rage grew with the testimony and climaxed with his graphically illustrated wish that dissenting university youth become victim to a very specific form of disfigurement:

I sound savage, and I ought to bite out my tongue for saying it. You know these people, many of them, are going to be pushing around and biting people on Wall Street by the time they are forty. But I would love them to do it with artificial teeth. I would love them really not to have their real teeth to do it with.<sup>8</sup>

Savagery and “true grit” in the most literal sense. It seems incongruous that such proposals could have been formulated by the man whose meditative walks to the sea through San Francisco’s Golden Gate Park are now famous. But then Hoffer has other sources of inspiration:

I love Westerns . . . I loathe that sophisticated crap we get from abroad. The Western is the key to our soul. I get some of my best ideas at the movies.<sup>9</sup>

What possible explanation could account for such a horror show? Not one senator gave indication that he felt part of an insane charade. All were dead serious. The task of their committee is considered a weighty one. The increase of rebelliousness in important segments of the population is to varying degrees viewed as a threat to the entire system. The main question before them at all times is how to best deal with the dissent. As always, when challenged from below, those in positions of power divide on the basis of two attitudes. The “hards” would deal with any form of revolt by rigid enforcement of harsh laws. The “softs” would seek to cheat rebellion of its momentum by making widely advertised but minor concessions to it; they fear that repression will increase the numbers of the alienated. They are answered with the claim that even the smallest concession only serves to whet appetites.

In the early stages of a hard–soft split the opponents are friendly. They vie for the support of those who are as yet not committed. Each side avoids all-out dogmatic attack upon the theories of the other. The crisis that caused the present split has not yet put the ideas of either side to full-scale test. Congressional hearings and investigations allow for a form of preliminary testing. Both sides put forth their views and test reactions from above and below. The conservatives or “hards,” because of Chairman McClellan, dominate the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. Given the nature of their task, there was nothing illogical in their choice of Hoffer as their lead and major witness. He became a public figure after writing a popular book on the nature of the human forces that seek to undermine and destroy American capitalism and how to recognize and deal with those humans. All that he has written since are expansions on the themes contained in *The True Believer*. The effort to maintain an objective stance that was present in that work, however, has disappeared in recent years. The Hoffer that appeared before the committee was, and is, an extreme “hard.” The conservative committee members were thus given

the opportunity to deliver an extreme version of their position before their constituents so that responses to it could be gauged. In this way they were able, by comparison with Hoffer, to appear as reasonable men.

The more controversial image that Eric Hoffer began to reveal to the public during his conversations with Eric Sevareid took full form with his appearance as star witness before the Senate committee. He has become a clearly partisan political figure, and a highly emotional participant in a growing national debate, quick to vilify and even wish death on many of those who disagree with him: a *true believer* in the full negative sense of the term as defined by himself, for his own brand of politics. More and more he is a folk hero only to those with whom he has political agreement. No longer does he have the semi-anonymity that men of philosophy often seek to retain. The basis for whatever immunity from criticism and attack he once enjoyed has been destroyed. Many who never read his works carefully or at all, but whose positive evaluation of him was determined by his great personal achievements, will in all probability now examine him more critically.

Admiration may many times be replaced by rejection.<sup>10</sup> Fewer people perhaps will read his aphorisms as isolated bits of wisdom. More attempts will be made to assess the fundamental identity of his ideas, the political conclusions that are implicit or that logically follow, and to deal with them as part of a total ideology.

It is probable that the process will first of all make clear Hoffer's principal weakness as a polemicist: the frequent use of generalizations based on historical citations made without regard for context or accuracy. Sections of the discussion period that followed Hoffer's main presentation before the Senate committee reveal the process and Hoffer's disadvantage:

MR. HOFFER: The university is not a political institution. The university is not an instrument for solving the problems of society. This is not what the university is for.

SENATOR RIBICOFF: If the university isn't for this, then is the university for the American Government to pour in millions of dollars for defense research?

MR. HOFFER: Maybe that is wrong. Maybe the research should be done outside the university. I want these universities for the beautiful young people, where they can really develop. The word "school" you know



comes from the Greek “*schole*.” You know what *schole* means in Greek? It means leisure. The university should be a place of leisure, a place where you can solve one problem and read and learn from your fellow students and get in touch with bright professors. I don’t think that the university should feel that it has to save society outside. It is not an instrument for salvation.

SENATOR RIBICOFF: But the university has changed.

MR. HOFFER: My opinion is that the university should be a place where a young man discovers what an idea is, where he can think, where he can learn to write, where he can develop in four years, the most crucial years in his life.

SENATOR RIBICOFF: But the professors don’t give this any more and neither do the administrators.

MR. HOFFER: Touché. I would make the professors teach. If anybody who can teach wants to do only research, “Get the hell out of here and do your research.”<sup>11</sup>

Unlike regular faculty professors in the contemporary university, Hoffer has found for himself a modern version of his idealized Greek academy. He is not required to publish or teach classes. The only assignment connected with his appointment at Berkeley is that he be available to students one day each week for three hours in a hideaway top-floor office—with full panoramic view of the San Francisco Bay. From that vantage point, he has been repulsed by some of the effects of the crisis in higher education institutions. He criticizes the inhabitants of those institutions as if they were more the creators than the victims of that crisis.

As can be seen in the testimony just quoted, Ribicoff tried to indicate to Hoffer that the university has necessarily changed in the last 2,500 years. Hoffer shrugged off the thrust by prescribing the disciplinary measures he would institute to rebuff change if he were a university president. Ribicoff then tried once more to make Hoffer speak to present realities in the academic world:

SENATOR RIBICOFF: Now the student comes to a university and it becomes a very impersonal thing. He never sees the big professors with the big

reputations. You can get on an airplane to Washington in any university town and you will find a dozen men on that plane coming in to Washington to be advisers to the Government. The rest of their time is spent advising big American corporations. Big universities with technical faculties advertise that their professors will be available to the business community to do research. So you are breaking up the concept of a university.

Now young men are in revolt. All of society is in revolt. We have a social revolution going on all over the world. It is not just in the United States. The pressures from the youngsters are being felt where they are, in the universities.

MR. HOFFER: But as I said, if you really gave them absolute freedom—look how the clinics are full at the university. Have you noticed the clinics are full of people? Come the riots, the clinics are empty. Nobody is sick the moment you get a riot. In other words, the atmosphere is not right. The milieu is not right. I really think that all the research, whether it is for the Defense Department, a university professor can moonlight—he can teach during the day—during his off time, but he has to teach, he has to lecture, he has to give seminars there.

As I say, he should have open house for three hours, every professor, three hours a week, where people can come to him, bring no credentials, no credits, come to you, talk with you, look at you, see what you are like. It is a tremendous thing. Because example plays a tremendous role in development, in history.

Here what do you get? You get a glorified high school. Pressure much more than high school. No wonder they are psychiatric cases.<sup>12</sup>

As demonstrated, Hoffer would not allow himself to be put in a position wherein he would have to discuss the role of Washington or corporate power in the creation of social crises. But to avoid meeting Ribicoff's analysis he was forced to openly execute a sidestep to a discussion of the psychological difficulties that universities create for students which appear to decrease during their "riots." The conclusions that might be drawn from that revelation, by a few moments of meditation, were not drawn.

Neither was the point made that the 1964–65 Free Speech Movement of the Berkeley students, under grave dangers, centered its attack on the industrial-military-political establishment because their (the students') direct experience proved it was that power coalition which was primarily

responsible for the condition of university education. The students were sick to death of that factory-like condition and its pressures. In the place of the multiversity, they wanted an institution wherein real education, relevant to modern living, becomes an attainable goal. They were frustrated in their immediate efforts. Avenues of negotiation and peaceful change were closed to them. It should be noted that they had no opponent more vociferous than Eric Hoffer, whose main attack during that period was to denounce Mario Savio as a “punk” and “juvenile totalitarian.”

Four years after the Free Speech rebellion at Berkeley, at the subcommittee hearings, star witness Hoffer was still making attacks on Savio. To this he added an onslaught against Mark Rudd for the “violent” language used by the Columbia University student leader. Senator Ribicoff countered by again confronting Hoffer with his failure to view student actions in comparative historical context. In so doing, he pushed Hoffer to the most revealing self-imposed indignity that occurred during his appearance:

SENATOR RIBICOFF: You remember the labor movement, you remember when the labor movement was pretty violent, too?

MR. HOFFER: Yes.

SENATOR RIBICOFF: When they were fighting for their rights but the labor movement is no longer violent.

MR. HOFFER: But we didn't want to destroy the establishment. We wanted a piece of our pie. We were compromising. We didn't have non-negotiable demands.

SENATOR RIBICOFF: I remember the labor union sit-ins in the 20s and 30s.

MR. HOFFER: But we got rid of our extremists . . .<sup>13</sup>

When Hoffer used the term “extremists” it is unlikely that he was referring to some leaders or members of the “Communist-led” unions that were bureaucratically ousted from the CIO in 1949. It is more probable that he had in mind the type of militant rank and file critic who is forever a source of irritation and danger to all bureaucracies. Hoffer was for many years a member of one of the most famous of those ousted unions, that is, the now-independent International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's

Union (ILWU), whose president is Harry Bridges. At no time during his membership in that union did Hoffer move to rid it of the Bridges leadership, and logically so, for that leadership is not extremist.

But there was truth in one area of Hoffer's testimony on labor unions. After the major battles of the 1930s ended, the official leadership of the unions sought consolidation and stability. Militants who wanted unions to maintain an uncompromising stance were ousted whenever possible. The process took place in the ILWU as well as in unions with more conservative reputations. From 1946 to the present, for example, Bridges has conducted a fight against a number of the militants in the ILWU, one of whom is veteran San Francisco longshoreman Seldon Osborne, pacifist and former socialist. Osborne, too, is now a public figure. Details of his family and personal life were held up to public scrutiny in the already mentioned *New Yorker* profile by Calvin Tompkins and were strewn across the pages of Hoffer's latest published work.<sup>14</sup> For most of Hoffer's life as a stevedore, Osborne was his best friend. Osborne is an idealist and "true believer" in the best sense of the term, an "extremist" of the sort that Hoffer claims "we got rid of." Osborne is opposed to tempering his demand that the United States withdraw immediately from Viet Nam and has served time in jail because of his participation in demonstrations for that goal. He supported and remains loyal to the non-negotiable demand of the West Coast longshoremen and merchant seamen in the 1930s—union control of the hiring process. He has opposed every compromise since World War II that has allowed maritime employers to regain a portion of the control over hiring they lost in the thirties.

Hoffer is not ignorant of labor history in the 1930s and particularly not the maritime segment of it. He was not a participant in the strikes of that period, but from 1942 on, he worked daily with articulate veterans of those struggles, veterans who made every effort to educate newcomers in recently learned lessons. The maritime workers' demand for a union hiring hall as opposed to the government-operated or "fink" hiring hall, was so completely non-negotiable that it was the primary cause behind the San Francisco General Strike in 1934, and "Bloody Thursday" (July 5, 1935), that day of pitched battle on San Francisco's Embarcadero which left many wounded and a longshoreman and a merchant seaman murdered.

If in 1934–37 the seamen and longshoremen had indicated a willingness to compromise their drive to obtain a hiring process that was not corrupted by bribery and favoritism, it is problematical whether or not Eric Hoffer would have become a successful writer. Once the West Coast

longshoremen won the right to control the hiring process, they instituted a democratic and therefore necessarily complex method of job dispatch called the "low man out system." In the hours before each work shift starts on the ships, elected union dispatchers issue job assignments to the men present in the hiring hall, according to and in order of the number of hours each has previously worked in the current quarter year. Those who elect not to work can do so, but in effect they must then move to a fair and systematically determined place further back in the job waiting line. They are not required to be available for work on every working day and can maintain full status as regular registered employees of the Pacific Maritime Association by working an average of two days a week per quarter year. Most longshoremen cannot afford to work less than five days a week, but Hoffer, an unmarried man of modest material needs, was for many years able to support himself by working a two- or three-day week and to devote the rest of his time to writing—knowing at all times that he could repeat the process during the following and every week of succeeding years. For this security and opportunity he is indebted to those rank and file longshoremen who were not and are not content to believe that the quality of life is unimprovable—the Osbornes and others without public identity, past and present, whom Hoffer appears to be so intent upon destroying.

There is hardly an aspect of Hoffer's life that seemingly does not present paradox. Although a blue-collar laborer from a section of the work force that has spawned militant unionism, he is a conservative. While without formal education, he is an accomplished writer, and a counselor to politicians like Lyndon Johnson and Ronald Reagan.<sup>15</sup> Having attained intellectualization, he is anti-intellectual. Since he became famous, he has not once used the public voice he now commands to speak out against the injustices to the voiceless with whom he spent most of his life. Where is one plea, for example, from this former California migrant farm and grape worker in support of the present California grape workers led by Cesar Chavez and their long strike or table-grape boycott campaign? More significantly, not once during his longshore career did he ever speak at a union meeting.<sup>16</sup>

It is precisely Hoffer's seemingly paradoxical qualities that have facilitated his fame, and in turn, the corruptive use of that fame by others, and finally by Hoffer himself. Workers do not often write books and intellectuals seldom work in heavy industry. Either occurrence is a rarity and is easily and understandably romanticized. A serious and talented

author who is also self-educated, intellectual, and a longshoreman provides a unique attraction and commodity. As an emerging author in the early 1950s, however, Hoffer had an even more special attractiveness to two specific and influential audiences. First, he supplied a live worker anti-hero to numbers of intellectuals who had once romantically viewed workers as a class of virtuous heroes. And, second, he provided a segment of the business community with vehement contemporary assertion for the kind of free enterprise economy that is generally associated with this country's frontier period. The corporate businessmen's Commonwealth Club of California did not present Hoffer with its Gold Medal for *The True Believer* in 1952 because of that book's literary qualities alone. Not only was the book a compilation of antidotes against basic social-economic change, but it had an additional and undoubtedly irresistible attribute—it was written by an employee of some of the club's leading members.

Conservative professional intellectuals of the liberal corporate variety were quick to co-opt Hoffer. Their entrancement with him led to his appointment as a political science research professor at Berkeley, and that is to their credit. No matter that he is degreless, his works have easily done as much to buttress corporate power as have theirs. That they willingly have used him in their struggle against their militant students, while he at the same time and in their presence conducts a running public polemic on the "ignorance" of intellectuals, discredits them. It reveals much about the guilt, insecurity, and anti-intellectualism in themselves. But Hoffer's presence reassures them. Their isolation from the blue-collar work world is total, yet they are under pressure from those they serve to provide accurate political analysis of it. Hoffer lumbers among them with calloused hands and a physical appearance that falls within the description Hollywood studios use when ordering a longshore type from central casting. With him it is not an affectation, but what his sponsors see in it is proof that he is representative of the men with whom he once worked. What they do not know is that most longshoremen dress like Hoffer does only when at work. It is his reactionary political attitude, however, that provides them with real reward. He fulfills for them a theory that began its popularity in academia in the unionized 1950s. It holds that unionized American industrial workers have won a share of affluence and have thus become opponents of any form of radical change. The theory has had widespread acceptance in places of power. For example, it provides the government with the feeling that it has support in the population when it fails to be responsive to the demands of blacks, the young, and the poor.

The reassurance that Hoffer brings to the idea that American workers are no longer a source of rebellion has been the basis also for his attractiveness to the Columbia Broadcasting System and Lyndon Baines Johnson. Their ability to utilize him is based on the almost complete isolation of industrial workers from their middle-class compatriots, one of the most ignored and pressing of the nation's crises. The middle-class public sees Hoffer on television screens and has no basis for knowing whether or not he is a "house" proletarian or a bona fide delegate from the blue-collar world; thus they have no way of testing how representative are his opinions.

From the time that Hoffer accepted the representative worker role, he has played it with ever-increasing enthusiasm. He must. He is the victim of the process described by Christopher Lasch, wherein the moment a public personality steps out of character, "His public is no longer interested."<sup>17</sup> So, in his conversations with Eric Sevareid, Lyndon Johnson was one of "us" (workers). When Hoffer was counseling the Senate subcommittee, he asserted that "we" got rid of "our" (labor's) extremists. Inserted in the section of his previously quoted testimony which proposed that Columbia president Grayson Kirk should have murdered a few students is the seemingly unrelated sentence: "Now I remember when the long-shoremen were talking about that."

The post-waterfront Hoffer seldom fails to imply that his opinions are indicative of what American workers are thinking. There may be times when this is true. AFL-CIO president George Meany's denunciation of "dirty-necked," "dirty-mouthed," anti-war demonstrators and support of police action against them during the 1968 Democratic Party Convention in Chicago is almost identical to that of Hoffer. But if the attitudes of some workers or labor leaders are similar to those of Hoffer, it does not follow that he represents workers at either their most enlightened or typical best. The best put aside, however, it is granted that there are uncultured, "backward," and insecure workers who would be quick to voice agreement with a number of Hoffer's opinions.

It is probable that there are few if any black workers among them, fewer still who have had the advantages available to Hoffer, and it is improbable that they have arrived at their opinions by thought processes similar to his. Then, too, there are questions that must be asked: Do those who have opinions—one, several, or many—similar to those of Hoffer draw the same overall ideological conclusions from them that he does? If they do, then will the pressures in their lives, which are quite different from those

in his, allow them to continue to do so? In the two or three years following the 1964 nationwide outbreak of student rebellions, for example, it was easy for an opponent of student demonstrations to find supporting opinions among industrial workers. In the last four years, however, with the widespread outbreak of rank and file worker rebellions against their official leaders, and with the incidence of wildcat strikes and labor contract rejections at *all-time* highs, the anti-student sentiment has begun to wane.<sup>18</sup> As an increasing number of workers take up picket signs and face armed police, there is an increase of incidents wherein student rebels join union demonstrators outside industrial workplaces—and to a warm welcome.<sup>19</sup> Hoffer as yet has made no public analysis of either the new rebellion in labor's ranks or the student-labor alliances. To do so would damage not only the credentials he presents, but the disparity of interests between him and those he claims to represent.

The Hoffer who was an active longshoreman would have been the last to claim that his ideas, lifestyle, or values were representative of waterfront workers. His uniqueness was a point of pride with him. It won him respect, particularly because he didn't try to hide it. He was known to be a hard and efficient worker, but other than that he was always looked upon as different, an accepted alien. But then there are a number of stevedores who do not fit typical definitions. They are valued by their fellows because variety is a stimulant that can provide a break in the daily boredom of work. If some of them have special talent and obtain public recognition, it also brings prestige to their colleagues. I have known a score of San Francisco longshoremen who have read *The True Believer*. Most of them found it abstract, but they admired the personal accomplishment it represents. They saw a contradiction between his opinions and his longshore livelihood, but they also felt that the waterfront is big enough to allow the presence of non-conformists of all sorts. Almost to a man, however, they found inexcusable Hoffer's efforts to advise employers on the most effective methods of exploiting workers via incentive pay plans.<sup>20</sup>

The decisive factor in Hoffer's atypicality which so greatly set him apart from his co-workers was his attitude toward work itself. To him, it was "freedom, exercise, leisure and income," escape from long, physically sedentary hours with legs under a desk, pen in hand.<sup>21</sup> He approached work with a zest that few could comprehend. The vast majority of longshoremen have to set work paces they can maintain five and six days a week. Few are escaping from three or four days of intellectual creativity. They see only that their work life for this week and the weeks for decades to



come will be the same. Work is what they must endure, and the escape they seek is *from* it. It is difficult to even imagine a worker migrating to San Francisco as Hoffer did, seeking "the hardest work available."<sup>22</sup> Such an attitude expressed by a callow youth in the 1890s might have caused the San Francisco longshoremen of that time to wink tolerantly at one another, but half a century later such a statement—especially if made by an experienced worker—would cause his peers to question either his integrity or his soundness of mind.

It is probable that the overwhelming majority of American workers, if asked, would state that they are supporters of the capitalist system, particularly if the question was put to them when away from their places of work. Unlike Hoffer, however, they are not constant or consistent supporters of the present social-economic system. They feel under no pressure to make all their ideas or attitudes logically consistent with the welfare of the system. One of the most common causes of internal union crisis occurs because of this apparent inconsistency. Working union members many times seek improvements in their conditions of work and employment that could undermine their employer's ability to compete and survive. Arguments from their union leaders that claim such improvements are too radical do not carry force because those improvements are what the workers must win if they are to survive daily on the job. The attitude is not always conscious, but workers view capitalism as a system they hold to, in common with their employers, only after work hours. While at work, the employer and his system of pushing and disciplining them are enemies with whom they must regularly clash in a form of guerrilla warfare.

To win a demand or counter a thrust from their immediate supervisors, workers are often forced to withdraw efficiency and restrict output. American industry is constantly plagued by slowdowns and minor acts of sabotage. For longshoremen, minor cargo pilferage is a legitimate form of conduct in a perennial war. When some among their number find it possible to participate in the consumption of choice fare from a broken container, it is considered part of the wages they feel they should be getting; it therefore becomes a small victory, revenge. Unlike Hoffer, they have not put themselves in a position to condemn the practice.

During Hoffer's last fifteen years on the waterfront, he increasingly lost touch with the majority of younger longshoremen involved in the mainstream of the work process. He became part of that somewhat privileged group of senior men who work on the dock or ship's deck rather than at the main point of production in the holds of the ships. Hold men work

in groups of six and eight (a condition now rapidly changing due to the containerization of cargo). Dock “hook-on” men, like Hoffer, work in groups of two. After 1959, when a new and second class or “B” category of longshoremen was created simultaneously with the negotiations for Harry Bridges’s first six-year “automation contract,” the communication gap between the old and young widened further. The B men were not allowed to join the union, though they fought for the right to do so. They worked under the union’s jurisdiction, but were not allowed to participate in it, even indirectly. In order to attend San Francisco local ILWU meetings they were forced to sit in a segregated section of the union hall’s balcony. Neither were they allowed union protection on the job. Their still-continuing plight goes unmentioned by Hoffer. Ten years after the creation of the B category he wrote:

Who has power in America: on the San Francisco waterfront, the ship-owners can neither hire nor fire me, nor can they direct me how to do my job. All they can do is tell me what they want done and I am supposed to surprise them by my ingenuity.<sup>23</sup>

Not a word to indicate that this freedom exists for an aristocracy only. B men and casually hired irregulars move more than half the cargo that crosses San Francisco’s piers. To this day, none of them enjoys the “power” Hoffer describes. They get the choice of the dirtiest and most difficult jobs that are left over after the A men have taken their pick. The A men (union members) were handed a monopoly over the cleaner and lighter jobs on the dockside and the decks of the ships by Bridges’s contract. This is not to say that the A men do not work hard and are regularly able to avoid the more onerous jobs. They cannot. I have never seen a longshoreman who did not have to work hard to earn his wages, and Hoffer is the only longshoreman I have ever known or heard of who has claimed that “since automation there are no hard jobs on the waterfront.”<sup>24</sup>

The hold is the place of work in the stevedoring process that has traditionally developed the largest number of union militants. Since 1959, the non-union B men have been the core of the hold work force. Both the nature of their work and the artificially depressed conditions under which they must perform it have created attitudes among them that are quite different from the older or A men. Thus, for a decade, the West Coast waterfront has contained its own very clearly defined version of the “generational” struggle that has erupted both nationally and internationally in

the last six years. Unfortunately, and through little fault of his own, Hoffer experienced it only from the vantage point of the "old" who had least to gain by change. The artificial A and B division in the longshore work force kept him from direct exposure to the attitudes of the mostly black, involuntarily non-union (and therefore disenfranchised) younger workers. Hoffer's failure lies in the fact that at no time did his sensitivities stimulate him to overcome the alienation and project himself into the younger workers' situation in order to understand their desires and the actual causes of their antagonism. At best, Hoffer's view of life on the waterfront is a limited one, unrepresentative, and uninformed as to the forces of change now operating in the longshore work world, and because the source of so many of his ideas is based in his work experience, the limitation has affected his perception of society as a whole.

(c. 1970)

## The Artificial Isolation between Radicals and Workers

Hourly paid workers in the United States have never joined radical parties in large numbers. In fact, the modest successes of socialist, Communist, and anarchist groups in recruitment of industrial workers from the 1880s through the 1930s were mainly among European immigrants who were already politicized at the time of their arrival in the “new world.” But, in the more than half century since the end of the second worldwide war, the number of joiners and “close sympathizers” combined among workers with roots in only one class has steadily dwindled to imperceptibility.

The working class is stated to be the central force in the politics of almost the entire American left, making this isolation tragic at many levels, including the personal. It is a contributor to the constant crisis atmosphere in the life of every organization on the American left—which extends to every independent radical.

A number of public explanations for this estrangement from workers are offered by the various radical intellectual groups. They complain about “unfriendly conditions in the objective situation,” and note “a deep residue of the fear left by the McCarthy Period.” They console themselves that “these things take time.”

Some explanations involve forms of self-blame. “There is a breakdown of self-discipline and activism because of consumerism,” they say, or “the revisionism of the growing minority in our group preoccupies our membership and obstructs our work.” But something else is in play. In most radical sects, the people who set up the meetings will always remain in full control. They will always have read a thousand times more on their chosen subjects than the industrial recruits, even if those recruits began reading voraciously from the night of induction.

With few exceptions, radical political sects are elitist, that is, vanguardist. Their methodology is symptomatic of this fact. They believe that they

have something to bring to workers, but not the other way around. From time to time there are meetings which might be addressed by a worker-leader, but they are not set up so that the vast knowledge available from “regular” workers without higher formal education, or their equivalent, can be gained by the radicals.

There is a possibility that organized political efforts that made life-on-the-job a primary object of discussion would attract and retain the active participation of working people. This would require the creation of a worker-intellectual alliance as a top priority. The intellectuals could report the existence and anatomy of Taylorism and then have the workers in the group each tell the others the degree to which the ideas of Scientific Management were utilized by their employer.

For the intellectuals, one of the many rewards from this more democratic approach would be that they would learn of forms of resistance which are not visible to those without direct access to factories or large offices, hospitals, or fields of mechanized farming. These discussions could pose the key questions: Is there evidence that while there is no open resistance, there is a subculture indicating rejection or silent ridicule of what is? How widespread is it? Does it ever get open expression? In what form? Has it ever developed into an action? In what form?

A formulation inspired by absorbing the ideas of socialist scholar George Rawick offers a relevant rule: none can offer aid in the form of new ideas until they have fully heard and understood the ideas, mistaken or otherwise, upon which their potential new allies are operating. For it is those beliefs which are determining the present forms of resistance.

(1988)

# Workers

## *Second-Class Citizens*

Labor law comprises a unique segment within the total body of law in the U.S. It is a substitute for the body of common law based in the Constitution and Bill of Rights.

The moment that any of us goes on employer time, whether or not we are physically present on company property, supervisors do not have to deal with us on the basis of the rights concepts contained within the Constitution. We become an extension of the employers' private property, and so in large part, have left the jurisdiction of the regular law. From this view, it can be seen that every place of employment is a separate domain that has its own private government.

This condition exists for the employees of government agencies at all levels, as well as those in private industry and business. No matter that the managers of government installations are themselves employees who own nothing in relation to the service produced, the federal, state, city, and county laws have been written so as to give managers essentially the same rights afforded to owners. The seriousness of this situation comes into clear relief when we bring to mind a fact so obvious that it is mainly ignored: most of the waking hours of the work force are spent on the job.

By labor law, 65 percent of all working people in the land can be fired "at will." Approximately 15 percent have recourse to due process when discharged because they are covered by civil service codes and their appeal procedures. About 20 percent are allowed due process in the form of contractualized grievance procedures in collective bargaining agreements.

No statistics are publicly available on the yearly number of firings that occur within each of these three groupings. Conservatively, it must reach hundreds of thousands. This does not include the numbers in the "at will" category who have no due process protection and so quit "voluntarily" rather than undergo the indignity of a discharge.

Talk to public employees who have experienced discipline or discharge either as witnesses or victims and they point to the primary flaw in civil service due process protection: the judges who make the rulings and pronounce the sentences are selected from management.

The employees who have the best form of codified protection against discharge without just cause are those covered by union contracts. But this protection falls short of that conceived in the American Constitution. Most union contracts allow supervisors to fire an employee, but before the victim is forced to leave the premises, he or she is provided an important bit of the privilege of habeas corpus, that is, the fired person gets to confer with a union representative who can file a grievance on his or her behalf. The targeted worker under these circumstances doesn't just disappear. Someone, some agency at least, knows where the victim (corpus) is.

It is after the grievant takes the long walk into what may be permanent exile from his or her work community that we can clearly see the need for protection of the full habeas corpus right. Each year, thousands of discharge victims file their grievances and are then forced to take a hike and wait on the outside for the process to run its course, all the while guilty until proven innocent.

With full protection of the habeas corpus right, the accused would remain at work with pay and in the community with relative freedom of movement until a decision is reached. This would allow the grievant to participate in the development of his or her own defense and monitor the kind of representation involved.

Just this one reform of the judicial process would do much to provide working people citizenship on a twenty-four-hour-a-day basis. At present, it is not at all unusual for discharged workers to wait more than a year for their grievances to be processed. Their trials would no doubt be speedier if they remained on the payroll until final judgment.

Today, when an arbitrator upholds an unjust discharge, it is far too late for the victim's friends to mobilize any kind of support action. In most instances, the worker has lost all contact with former colleagues.

Solidarity actions that in any way affect production were possible in the 1930s as a last resort. Since World War II, over 90 percent of all union contracts have been negotiated to outlaw all forms of direct action during the term of the contract. Concerted actions taken at the moment of discharge now involve ever-greater risks. The alternative is to go the established grievance route, but when it does not provide democratic due process, it is usually too late for recourse of any kind.

If the language about discharges almost always becomes dramatic, it is because the worst thing that can happen to anyone on the job aside from a serious accident is to get fired. In the job world, it is capital punishment.

(1984)



## Bill Akagi and the Union

This is the story of Bill Akagi and his experience with the labor movement.

Bill was born in Berkeley, California, in 1916. He entered the army in October 1941 and served with the Sixth Corps Area and the Military Intelligence Service until he was discharged in December 1945. He married during his last year in the Army and today he and his wife Betty have a year-and-a-half-old son, Paul.

Before entering the Army, Bill worked as a truck driver and auto/diesel mechanic in charge of the maintenance and repair of all machinery on one of the mammoth San Joaquin Valley ranches. Upon discharge from the Army he worked as an auto mechanic in Minneapolis for several weeks before returning to Berkeley. Bill could find no job in his trade due to the discriminatory policy against Japanese Americans followed by the union having jurisdiction over mechanics' work.

He then sought employment in the auto assembly plants in the area and was hired at the Chevrolet East Oakland plant. At that time there were six Nisei workers at Chevy and six at Fisher Body in the same building. Bill was put to work on the trim line where the bodies of cars have the finer work done on them. Trim line workers equip cars with fenders, locks, dash panel instruments, and chrome strips. This is one of the most tedious and nerve-wracking places where one can work on the "line."

Although his previous experiences with labor unions had not been positive, the attitude of Akagi's union steward at Chevy seemed different and his talk sincere, so Bill joined the Auto, Aircraft, and Agricultural Implement Workers Union CIO. It was not long before he began to take an active interest in the union and to participate in its activities. He became known as a rank and file militant who attended and participated in the union meetings, and who was unafraid to sign a union grievance when he was treated unjustly by management in the plant.

It doesn't take very long laboring under these conditions to know that

assembly-line workers need a union. For the same reason, it doesn't take long to recognize real leadership. In December 1947, hardly more than a year after Bill Akagi walked into the factory, the men unanimously elected him shop steward of his section of the line.

In March 1948 Bill ran for the position of shop committeeman, of whom there are but three in the plant of one thousand workers. They make up the shop's collective bargaining committee. While Bill got the majority of votes in his own department, he fell short of election in the entire plant. In March 1949, however, he was elected as the alternate committeeman, and his reputation as a leader began to spread. This was particularly true when he replaced a committeeman who was on vacation for a brief period. During this time he carried the ball successfully on several major plant grievances in the collective bargaining meetings with the corporation. On a grievance, as at all other times, Bill seldom raises his voice, and says few words. But he seldom fails to put his point across and show his opponents the correctness of the argument he is representing.

It would be false to say that Bill has never been the subject of subtle bigotries by the men in the shop. For several months, some thought he was Chinese and were surprised to find a Japanese American in their midst. Today, it is clear to all that Bill is of Japanese ancestry, and it has been some time since even the subtlest anti-Nisei remark was heard in Chevy, Oakland. This is due primarily to Bill's activity in the union and to the fact that he is a good worker, but the credit is not Bill's alone. It goes as well to the other Nisei workers in the shop.

At no time, however, did Bill seek to first prove himself or his race. His first thought was always to make working and living conditions better for himself and all his fellow workers and union brothers.

"For a better life and future, we learn that petty differences are artificial barriers standing in the way of success in reaching the common goal. We learn this in the union more than in any other place," Bill says.

(1950)

# The First Recorded Strike in History

*1170 BC*

3,163 years ago a construction superintendent picked up a piece of papyrus (paper) and wrote a lengthy memo to his superiors. His purpose was to explain why the construction of Ramses III's Great Temple at Thebes (Medinet-Abou) was behind schedule. By the mid-1800s, the paper had been discovered and placed in a museum in Turin, Italy.

In 1951, William Edgerton, an Egyptologist of the University of Chicago, published an article in an archeology journal containing his translation of the paper.<sup>1</sup> It revealed that the construction workers in the Valley of the Kings had been acting quite differently than before. In the year of the superintendent's memo, 1170 BC, they had gone on strike five times for as much as eleven days at a time. They knew that all pharaohs believed they could become gods after death only by having great monuments erected for ceremonial use at the time of their deaths.

Ramses was unpopular after twenty-nine years as king, and had become seriously ill. Fear that he might die before his monuments were ready caused him to order that all transport be used to bring building materials into the valley. This caused scarcity and inflation. Grain and cooking oil prices went up 500 percent. The monument construction workers were themselves without food. Those with authority over them had forgotten that working people often talk among themselves about the problems facing society. Ramses' sickness and superstition had given them an advantage. The most effective action they could take to get the food and working conditions they needed was to show Ramses that he could die before the job was finished. Every day of lost production helped them. There was no time for supervision to train other workers to replace them. The likelihood of armed attack against them was not great. Just as important, they had developed a leadership from among their own numbers right on the job, a leadership that had to remain there with them, sharing not only the victories, but the risks that came beforehand. Finally, when

circumstances offered them a fighting chance, they instantly pushed aside years of submission, waged a counteroffensive, and won.

Given the tight on-the-job structure of this real union, without a written contract these pioneer building trades workers were able to put up the kind of resistance that leaves opponents with less room to maneuver. In order to gain even greater time advantages during the strikes, they sent some of their number back onto the job where they disassembled already completed portions of the construction and then made off with key parts. The strikers thus used methods approaching those used by English Luddites who fought the factory-ization of cottage industry from 1790 to 1830. The Ramses workers did not break any machines, but they did remove things that would make it even harder to find strikebreakers to come and do their work.

The only other publication to report this historical document was *Business Week*.<sup>2</sup> In those years, however, the magazine was not sold on news stands and so was hardly more available to the general public than the archeology journal. In the forty years since that publication, no other has taken place. The purpose of this publication is to finally bring knowledge of the Papyrus Strike to the largest portion of the public, those who are paid by the hour.

(1991)

## Early U.S. Labor Policy Revealed by Archives Find

Letter from U.S. Postmaster to Georgia Senator on Use of Black Postal Riders:  
American State Papers, 1802, U.S. Congress, Post Office Department

The letter reproduced on this page as written to Georgia Senator James Jackson by Postmaster General Gideon Granger in 1802, shortly after the black revolution against French rule in the Caribbean led by Toussaint L'Ouverture, is a unique historical document in the history of black Americans, postal workers, and our nation's work force as a whole. To the best of my knowledge, this publication in *Random Lengths* represents the first resurrection of the letter under its own identity in at least a half century and possibly since its origin.

I first learned of the possible survival of this letter from Ernest Rice McKinney, historian, mathematician, and labor organizer whose parents were slaves. It was 1967. He was past his eightieth year, and under pressure to finish his book. Its purpose was to examine the search of the pre-Civil War southern power elite for its own way to handle black resistance once the plantation economy was pushed aside by industrialization.

When McKinney died a few years ago, it became a duty to make sure he was credited with the find. By that time I had learned that the letter was almost certainly in the National Archives in Washington, DC, somewhere in the State Papers for the year 1802. This is like knowing that a hybrid cactus is growing somewhere in the Mohave Desert.

Last summer (1985), Laurence Reinhold, a deputy director of Field Services for the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees union, in Washington, took my clues and picked up the hunt. With the help of the Archives staff he made the find on October 22.

Probably the most important function of the Granger letter is that it stands as documentation of an attitude which often guides bureaucratic thinking: it is easier to break a potential opposition before it ever becomes aware of its strength than it is to wait.

General Post Office  
March 23, 1802

Sir:

An objection exists against employing negroes or people of color in transporting the public mails, of a nature too delicate to engraft into a report which may become public, yet too important to be omitted or passed over without full consideration. I therefore take the liberty of making to the committee, through you, a private representation on that subject. After the scenes which St. Domingo has exhibited to the world, we cannot be too cautious in attempting to prevent similar evils in the four Southern States, where there are, particularly in the eastern and old settled parts of them, so great a proportion of blacks as to hazard the tranquility and happiness of the free citizens. Indeed, in Virginia and South Carolina (as I have been informed) plans and conspiracies have already been concerted by them more than once, to rise in arms, and subjugate their masters.

Every thing which tends to increase their knowledge of natural rights, of men and things, or that affords them an opportunity of associating, acquiring, and communicating sentiments, and of establishing a chain or line of intelligence, must increase your hazard, because it increases their means of effecting their object.

The most active and intelligent are employed as post riders. These are the most ready to learn, and the most able to execute. By traveling from day to day, and hourly mixing with people, they must, they will acquire information. They will learn that a man's rights do not depend on his color. They will, in time, become teachers to their brethren. They become acquainted with each other on the line. Whenever the body, or a portion of them, wish to act, they are an organized corps, circulating our intelligence openly, their own privately.

Their traveling creates no suspicion; excites no alarm. One able man among them, perceiving the value of this machine, might lay a plan which would be communicated by your post riders from town to town, and produce a general and united operation against you. It is easier to prevent the evil than to cure it. The hazard may be small, and the prospect remote, but it does not follow that at some day the event would not be certain.

With respect and esteem,

GIDEON GRANGER

(1986)

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## V. The Vanguard Party and Worker Self-Activity



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## A Leninist Vanguard Party Dying in a Foreign Land

It was October 23, 1956. I was driving home from work on the East Shore Freeway along San Francisco Bay. The voice of a foreign correspondent came from my car radio with a report from Hungary via Paris. He announced that thousands of chanting high school and university students had taken over a radio station in Budapest. He told of how the head of the Hungarian Writers' Union had climbed atop a statue in a Budapest square to tell fifty thousand demonstrators that their revolution would fail without the full support of industrial workers.<sup>1</sup>

For a humorous closing, the correspondent chuckled as he told a human interest story phoned to him earlier by an Austrian correspondent. It seems that the workers at a Budapest bicycle factory had met during their lunch hour and voted to join the general strike that was just beginning. But they also voted not to cease working until every one of them had a bicycle on which to make the trip home.<sup>2</sup>

Laughter burst from me. As Slim Highspar, my friend from Maud, Oklahoma, and the East Oakland Chevrolet plant, would have said, if I'd have died right then it would have taken the undertaker three days to get the grin off my face. I settled back down only because I allowed my imagination to intrude with a vision of how the same event might have taken place in a factory where I knew all the faces:

I could see a bunch of us standing there in a line after we had completed that special day's production quota determined by our own headcount. Each of us was waiting his turn to be handed one of the bikes carefully wheeled up by a dozen or so of the people who worked at the end of the assembly line. The jobs on the Trim or Finish line were among the hardest in the plant, but on this day, the people there were all smiles, joking that we (meaning all of us who didn't work in trim) now had no excuse for not attending the shop meeting early the next morning. One of them yelled, "We're staying all night so come back early." When we got outside

our yelling made it hard for some of us to mount up. We cheered as others rode off whooping and bouncing like cowboys. Our hilarity was our triumph over the worst of human experiences, submission.

I could see how my own assembly-line partner and I might have stood there looking at one another in the parking lot, handlebars in hand. My imagination became cinematic: we look back at the plant, still hating it, but liking it too, for the first time.

I had to cut back to making an assessment of what I had learned from the newscast. It had to be that what was happening in Hungary was a revolution. The report of what happened at the bicycle factory could not have been an isolated incident. The so-called common people were breaking with the rules of what had until yesterday been seen as the guidelines of acceptable behavior for them, and back to their grandparents.

It had been that way on a smaller scale during the fifty-four-hour Oakland general strike that began on December 2, 1946. The first three hours of the strike were a time of carnival. We allowed bars to stay open only if they served nothing stronger than beer and moved their jukeboxes out onto the sidewalk, playing free at full volume.

To Texas swing, big band jazz, and the blues, we danced at a time of day when we were supposed to be punching in. That by itself was an ecstasy. I looked across the crowd and saw the first person I knew from where I worked. It was Bill Kuzyn of our receiving dock. He was doing the jitterbug waltz, dips and all, with a woman who was about a foot taller than he if you counted her hairdo. They were good. His head was on her shoulder, eyes half closed, but he wasn't missing a step. It was necessary for her to lead, and she did it with grace, returning the smiles of all the couples moving around them to the same beat.

Only after documenting our defiance with music and fun did we get to the business of sealing off the downtown area before the police began to make their move to take back the streets. The Oakland general strike lasted fifty-four hours. No big-time union officials showed themselves during the first day.

What we did during those twenty-four hours was of course a little radical. We who danced and were holding block meetings all over the heart of downtown Oakland were, for that time, the government-in-the-streets. You could get out of town without a union card, but not in. They had to be doing the same kinds of things right then in Hungary, and then much more.

My car had reached familiar streets and forced me back to making a

mental list of the practical things that now had to be done. The Communist Party people would be supporting the invasion of Hungary by the Soviet armored divisions. What I had just heard on the radio demanded that there be a quickly organized concentration of activity by the Independent Socialist League (ISL) and all the other non-Communist radicals in the Bay Area. Before I got home and began the task of coordinating some of that activity by phone, I stopped at a liquor store for a pack of Pall Malls and lit up my first cigarette in two years.

Three weeks later, Max Shachtman, the National Secretary and leading member of the ISL, was en route to the West Coast. He was scheduled to arrive at the Oakland airport near midnight to begin the last leg of his national tour protesting the military occupation of Hungary.

There were four of us in the car headed for the airport. Barney rode up front, a quiet man of genuine humility, the person in the branch most sensitive to the individual needs of others. He was highly respected, no matter that he didn't make his living as an industrial worker. Charles sat between us, one of several natural writers who in our generation became silent after joining the movement, and who remained a leader by making his energies available to others in need.

Arlene was stretched out in the back seat in order to get a nap before working the late shift in an all-night downtown eatery. She and I had both had some college but were among the few branch members who had only high school diplomas. For years she had been a union activist in an auto assembly plant, but was now a waitress who could swish among tables with four full plates on each arm.

Like her, I had recently been caught in a mass layoff from an auto plant. My new job painting freeway overpasses and bridges meant that, also like her, I was no longer a member of what had once been a special party elite composed of "rank and file militants" employed in the nation's largest industry.

But that was now long in the past. The capable people who had built the Workers Party's auto fraction in the industrial Midwest had become UAW staffers. They had lost their identity as radicals. It was all accomplished with the guidance of the Shachtmanite leadership that in the same process had helped the new career staffers hide their radical past from public view.

Most of the men and women who had recruited our generation to socialism from 1935 to 1945 had disappeared from sight. Probably the largest number of "ex's" had become part of the independent radical community

doing what they could as individuals. None had found an organization in which they could work for societal change on more than a single issue basis. Enough! The airport turn from East 14th Street was two blocks ahead.

We found Max in the baggage claim area. He seemed in good spirits despite the news that total defeat of the revolution was now held off only by the refusal of factory workers to end their general strike. His mood changed abruptly when he sensed a stiffness in us. We had already worked out an agreement among ourselves that we wouldn't let him tweak the cheek of any one of us. It was a thing he was apt to do compulsively when among party people who had disagreements with him, but for whom he still had affection. We all greeted him warmly, but at three-quarter arm length. He realized we were disciplining him before the fact and went quiet.

During the drive back to North Oakland he slouched into a sleeping position and conversation ceased among the members of our greeting committee. I dropped off Arlene, Nash, and then Barry with good nights and an exchange of reminders on the assignments for the next three days and nights.

The following day I got home from work to learn from my wife Mary that Max had not come out into the main part of the house since breakfast. Yet, at supper time he appeared at the table fresh from a shower, fully able to scare and then charm our two small daughters by reading to them from Dr. Seuss's *The Cat in the Hat* at a volume approaching a shout. We ate a light meal and left for the meeting as soon as the babysitter arrived.

There was already a capacity crowd in Stiles Hall just across the street from the university campus. Our choice of this location for Max's main public meeting in the Bay Area was made not only because he had requested it. Most of the industrial workers who had joined our ranks during the war had quit.

Barney was already in position just inside the front door of Stiles taking a running head count. He explained that over three hundred people were already seated. That was about four times the number we had been getting at our larger public meetings since 1950. "For just over half of them," he added, "this is their first attendance at one of our meetings." A closer look revealed that they were mainly students and people of young faculty age from the more permanent part of the university community.

I talked with other members and friends before going to the podium to greet the audience and introduce the subject and speaker. The people seated in the rows before us quieted without being asked. Shachtman felt their anticipation. He greeted them in that kind of personal and political

recognition of their presence that makes it possible for the people of an audience to identify with history and to feel their individual identities.

Beginning in measured low tones, he laid out the historical background of the current events in Hungary. A little over an hour later he went to his conclusions making statements like "Any attempt at the creation of a collectivized economy without a simultaneous widening of democracy has to generate radical opposition from the working and quiet middle classes, and especially from their young."

"The rejection of what the Communist bureaucracy has to offer if this revolution is victorious," he went on, "does not mean that the people making the revolution will seek capitalism as an alternative. History allows them but one option, and that is to democratize their entire society and along with it the form of collectivism they themselves have experienced. Win or lose in the immediate struggle, theirs is a major contribution to the eventual dismantling of Stalinist totalitarianism."

The analysis of the Hungarian revolution that Shachtman had provided during his speech and in responses to statements and questions from the floor was probably more comprehensive than any the audience had heard from media experts. Their applause and generosity during the collection (and when buying from our literature table) acknowledged their appreciation.

Still, I had the feeling that they were leaving with less than they had anticipated. I couldn't be sure. I may have fallen into that easy belief that their reactions were the same as mine. Nevertheless I remained uneasy.

We had waited for years. The 1953 uprising in East Berlin led by building trades and steelworkers created a crack in the Soviet empire. The Hungarian revolution had created a real break, and Shachtman had not put forth ideas about how the changes brought by it might become a creative stimulant in the lives of Americans in the present. I wasn't thinking of barricades, but rather an end to the deadening boredom of the political activities we had for too long been performing. A comprehension I didn't want began to break in on me. When Trotsky's predictions of the disintegration of Stalinism at the end of World War II and consequent revolutionary developments in Europe failed to come true, we were incapable of building a creatively radical way of life around what was for us the new reality. Actually, we were not geared for much less than a period directly preliminary to "the final conflict" we still sang about at party conventions.

At that moment, I couldn't allow myself to go any further with such thoughts. The hall had to be cleared or we'd have to pay an extra rental

fee. The chairs had to be stacked, the ashtrays emptied, and the floors swept. After cleanup a dozen of us took Max to a cafe with big booths and bad coffee. It was past midnight when Mary and I got him back to our house. She checked our children and went to bed. I took the babysitter home.

Max was waiting for me when I returned. Neither of us was ready to attempt sleep. We went to the kitchen and I pulled out the chilled vodka. He felt good and wanted to recap the successes of the evening. I did too. He complimented me on the collection speech I had made.

“Jesus, Red, it was nothing like the usual grinding appeals we have been making for so many years. You didn’t badger them, just cheerfully gave them an opportunity to help. It was your optimism. And I want to say something about that. I don’t want to dampen that in any way, Red, but you may be expecting too much from the Hungarian events. The revolution there is probably going to be put down. Who knows when another will come along? It probably won’t have great effect on our lives for years.”

“I think you may be right about the defeat, for now, in Hungary, Max. But this revolution right now, win or lose, eliminates the credibility of the kinds of things that Irving Howe and other doomsayers have been putting out since Communism came to power in Czechoslovakia in 1948. For them, because Russian Communism could come to power without the immediate assistance of the Soviet Army it meant that entire work forces in countries around the globe could be won to Stalinism on a popular basis even though they were aware of its totalitarian character.

“During the last three weeks we have learned that in addition to conducting the longest general strike in history, in every industrial city and town in Hungary workers with leaders developed from their own number have formed factory councils. This means that in revolutions or attempted revolutions against both capitalist and bureaucratic collectivist or state capitalist systems, by the very nature of their work lives people use the same organizational methods. This is important stuff, Max, reaffirmation of ideas that were once thought to apply only in revolutions against capitalism.

“Look at the example Hungary provides even in defeat. The general strike has again revealed that it automatically poses the necessity for the participants to create alternative economic and governmental forms or accept defeat. It’s not happening in America, but it is happening. Factory councils can become the foundation of those alternative forms. This

revolution has demonstrated that people rebelling against both existing systems can invent the same alternatives, whether in California or Central Europe. And, this again asserts the third camp idea we pushed for so well during the war.”

“Come on, Red,” he said drawling out my name, “let me up off the deck, will you?”

It was true. I had begun to get into the making of a full-blown speech. I was hitting home, but the lateness of the hour alone meant my timing was not the best. If I continued I would again in one way or another soon be calling Max a social democratic renegade. We had all eased up on one other during the last few years. People in a lifeboat and bailing don’t take time out to fight. There was a sense of camaraderie between us that might not have developed if times had been better.

“Okay Max, if you’ll help me down off this soap box, I’ll pour us another drink.” It was a postponement, but with a change in perception. What I was beginning to admit to myself was that Max and the majority were seeking a different kind of rescue from the Leninist and Trotskyist experiments than the rest of us. At the same time I would have found it hard to believe that he already had plans to dissolve the ISL.<sup>3</sup>

The vodka was cold on the throat but warm to the head. Max had changed the direction of the conversation and saw that I wasn’t going to stop him. He was about to tell an insider story about the early days of our movement.

“Jim, Marty, and I were the first members of the Communist Party to be expelled for Trotskyism. The charge: we had read a document written by Trotsky. Ready or not, this instantly made us Trotskyist leaders. Within a few years, we would recruit a membership of several thousands, mainly from the ranks of the Communist Party itself, and help develop a new international movement in twenty-three countries. But all that was still in the future. For a time, the three of us were the only known Trotskyists around, ‘three generals without an army’ was the tag someone hung on us and none of us had met or even laid eyes on Trotsky from a distance.

“Stalin had exiled Trotsky in 1927, and three years later, he and his wife, Natalia, were living in Prinkipo, Turkey, under partial house arrest. Because I spoke Russian and had translated some of his works, I was chosen to initiate a working relationship with the old man.

“First of all, I developed a formal correspondence with him. With that done, it was agreed that I would go to Prinkipo so that we could collaborate on plans for rebuilding an international and socialist movement.



“As I recall, the first steamer I got took me to Rotterdam. After a long layover I got another that landed in a central Mediterranean port. Then, again after a wait of several weeks, I got a berth on a Turkish ship that was homeward bound. Finally, after two months en route, I arrived in front of Trotsky’s house at two in the morning. I paid the cab driver and knocked on the door. The old man himself appeared in a white flannel nightgown and tasseled nightcap. Somehow I muttered my identity.

“‘Oh, Shachtman, yes, we have expected you. You sleep in there. We go fishing in the morning. Goodnight. Rest well.’

“With that, Trotsky returned to the bedroom he shared with Natalia. I dragged my bag down a short hallway to the small bedroom. There was a candle and matches. I undressed, relieved myself in a chamber pot as old as Constantine the Third, turned back the blankets, and crawled in.”

I laughed to myself as Max told the story. He was the most citified person I had ever met. I had joked that he had been born on the subway train with a copy of the *New York Times* as his first diaper.

“Four hours later Trotsky was pounding on my door. ‘Shachtman, fishing!’

“No need for him to yell, I was not asleep. There was no way out but to get back into my three-piece suit from Klein’s. Trotsky and the live-in guard the Turkish government had assigned to him were standing just outside the front door. They began to walk away from the house as soon as they saw I was up. No juice and no coffee. I figured that we must be going to eat breakfast after fishing. I found it impossible to run and catch up to them.

“The path down to the water was dark. I could only stumble along behind. They had their rowboat in the water by the time I got there. I sat in the rear, Trotsky was in the middle and the guard pushed off from the bow. The fishermen rowed together, each with his own oar, not saying a damned word.

“Half an hour later we arrived at a small island composed entirely of stones about the size of a human head. They filled the boat with the stones, the guard passing them to Trotsky, who piled them so that the weight was always equalized for the sake of stability. The loading continued until the boat was full. My legs were sticking straight out on top of the stones. The guard shoved us off again and jumped into the bow, where he stayed while Trotsky alone rowed us out into deep water with great care.

“The boat had only few inches of, yes, thank you, free-board. If it rocked only a few inches from side to side we would take in water. I sat there

motionless. Trotsky had all but stopped rowing. The guard began to play a large net out into the water. Trotsky kept the boat moving in a wide circle until the net surrounded us.

“Then they each took an end of the net and heaved. As the circle closed around us, I began to see that it was full of jumping fish.

“With the first breakthrough of morning light, suddenly, Trotsky stood straight up in the middle of the boat. And then, after a minute he began to hurtle stone after stone straight down on the fish. As the poor dead or stunned creatures floated to the surface the guard leaned over, pulled them out by their tails and put them in the spaces made empty by the stone thrower.

“Jesus, Red, I was sitting there in the back of the boat with the old man throwing and I guess I was almost in shock. The old man finally noticed. He didn’t stop with the stones, but looked straight at me and yelled, ‘Your President Hoover, he can catch fish like this, hah?’

“I thought to myself, ‘Yes, but at least he’s a god-damned sportsman, uses a pole, a line, and a hook.’”

The instant Shachtman finished, a sentence burst from me like a shot, “Max, look at the difference in cultures!”

(1992)

## Life in a Vanguard Party

Books by Alan Wald, Eric Chester, Irving Howe, Maurice Isserman, Russell Jacoby, and others in the last few years have focused considerable attention on the very small grouping of less than five hundred sometimes called “the Shachtmanites.” This attentiveness has little to do with the renegade period of “Shachtmanism” in the late 40s and 50s. No, it is because this tiny band at its birth developed two major alternative theories on the nature of the Russian state after the failure of the 1917 revolution. Inside the official Trotskyist Socialist Workers Party during the late 1930s, the people in the political factions around Shachtman and C. L. R. James became dissatisfied with Trotsky’s theory that Russia remained a degenerated workers’ state, even though it had invaded both Finland and Poland in full imperialist character. The people of both the Shachtman and James tendencies formed the Workers Party in 1940. Both tendencies believed that there was no longer any basis for even critical support of Russia as a workers’ state, although they differed over what it had become.

The former felt it was bureaucratic collectivist and the latter that it was state capitalist. Neither concluded that any form of capitalism had become worthy of critical support.<sup>1</sup> They were able to refine these theories only because each side contained highly skilled lay scholars and because they had the benefit of each others’ criticism.

The gigantic industrial growth that came with the opening of World War II allowed the highly intellectualized members of the WP to get industrial jobs and end their isolation. I joined in 1942 when the process was less than a year old.

I could have joined no other organization. The WP was a socialist organization that refused to give political support to the war. It held that there would be more totalitarianism in the world after the war and its destruction than before. Despite all the disadvantages, the WP was a growing organization, able to stimulate new ideas. If, for example, due to size, one of its branches around the country qualified for four delegates to the

highest body or convention, an ideological minority in that branch did not have to get 25 percent of the votes in order to send a delegate. The amount was 17 percent, set by constitutional mandate. The idea was that everyone gained through constantly feeling the pressure of new ideas, which almost always began with minority backing.

Similarly, a political tendency that had earned one seat on the national committee by convention vote was automatically given two seats. The difficulty a lone person has in effectively representing a point of view against multiple opponents was given some recognition.

The positive sense of purpose that existed in the WP during its early years had another major source. Many corporate employers were using the war effort as a cover for an offensive against the people in their hire who had recently built new industrial unions. Despite the war, the hourly wage workers were not submitting. In the years from 1942 through 1945, there were 16,426 strikes by 8,403,877 workers, resulting in 64,429,165 idle man and woman days. These figures substantially exceeded records set in the 1930s. In 1941, when all-time-high records were reached for all pre-war years, there were 4,288 strikes by 2,362,620 people or 8.4 percent of the total employed. In 1945, 12.2 percent of the employed, or 3,467,000 employees, conducted 4,750 strikes.<sup>2</sup>

The Workers Party was the only Marxist grouping with a national presence that was able to participate fully in this unusual resistance. It felt that the dominant class in each of the nations that constituted "the Allied war effort" would use the war to dominate its own and other populations.

The wartime resistance of American workers had a triple purpose. The first was to keep the employers from stealing back the working conditions won by their employees in the previous years; the second was to overcome the wage freeze; and the third was an attempt to retain the local union autonomy being stolen by labor's top brass.

The Workers Party was the only organization that could support these struggles without coming into conflict with any of its basic ideas. The Communist Party and the Socialist Party, for separate reasons, each found it impossible to participate in any way.

SWPers accused us of "adventurism" at a time when they were guided by a policy of caution in order to survive until stands could be taken with less risk. This was not due to any lack of courage, but from sincere caution contributed to by the need to play the role of left-wing opposition to the Communists and not totally abandon support of a war also being fought by a "degenerated workers' state."

The expansion of employment due to the war made it possible for women to be the major force among the couple of hundred WPers who got jobs in industry. On-the-job alliance between these radical intellectuals and indigenous workers went furthest in plants organized by the United Auto Workers (UAW).

WPers played a prominent role in the formation of the vitally important Rank and File Caucus. It was the only organized force that stood in the way of the official leadership, a coalition of conservative Philip Murray followers and pro-Communists called the Addes-Thomas caucus. In their zeal to please the employers they moved to bring back piecework and campaigned for National Labor Conscription—putting all workers in uniform at their work benches.

In 1945, the Rank and File Caucus, which didn't have one prominent official leader in it, got a vote against continuing the wartime no-strike pledge from over 40 percent of the membership. When the war in Europe ended, the carefully ambitious Reuther brothers, Walter and Victor, joined and took over the Caucus with the use of left rhetoric.

At the 1947 UAW convention the Addes-Thomas forces were on the defensive. They had recently ridden insensitively over all who had gotten in their way. R. J. Thomas had been defeated for president by Walter Reuther in 1946. Now, George Addes had been replaced as secretary-treasurer by Emil Mazey, and Reuther had gotten a majority on the executive board. Nevertheless, the Reuthers and Mazey gave back the leadership to their defeated opponents on one principal issue, the fight against the just enacted Taft-Hartley Act.

John L. Lewis of the miners' union had come out against compliance. Congress had been flooded by the largest amount of mail in opposition to a piece of legislation ever received to that time. It was possible to defeat the act despite passage, unless some major union created precedent by conforming to any of its requirements.

The Addes-Thomas caucus proposed that the union refuse to sign the non-Communist affidavits required by the as yet un-legitimated act. Willoughby Abner, Black leader and a leading Reutherite, took the floor of the convention. He held up for exposure the radical rhetoric used by the current Addes-Thomas proposal, as contrasted with the pro-employer character of their wartime policies. "Look who is talking militant now," he said, "the piecework boys." He moved support of the affidavits, the entire Reuther Caucus voted accordingly and won.

The UAW thus became the first major union to comply and was

immediately transformed into a different sort of vanguard than that intended by the Rank and File Caucus. An essential act in the opening of U.S. Cold War domestic policy was completed.

Workers Party members and Reutherites Irving Howe and B. J. Widick, in their book *The UAW and Walter Reuther*, support the compliance. They were representing the views of the Shachtman leadership.<sup>3</sup> No open discussion of the matter was ever held inside the ISL.

This story represents a transformation from idealism to cynicism that took place in less than six years. How is it that ends and means could be separated in so short a time?

Change seldom occurs for just one reason. It is my belief that the main cause was that when the third-camp idea showed no substantial signs of success, many suffered a stunning demoralization. It left them with little more than their resentment against Stalinism for destroying hope for socialism, probably for their lifetimes. SWPers still had belief in a piece of Russia. The WPers had gone with a political idea that was without a second chute if the first one failed to open.

The vast majority of the WP-ISL came into the movement in the belief that the Russian Revolution of 1917 was the opening of the new era for humanity and that its degeneration or failure was reversible. It was far easier to be one of those who came to the movement later than the majority, that is, in the first half of the 1940s (but before [Tim] Wohlforth's time in the 1950s).<sup>4</sup>

For example, I joined the Workers Party because its people were making available to me a methodology that would enable me to begin to make some sense out of what was happening in the world. My idealism was not primarily dependent upon expectations for the Russian Revolution. It was very different for those of us whose parents had not come out of political struggles in Eastern Europe. Being in "the movement" meant that I was beginning to understand why a depression broke out when I was eight years old, why a new unionism began when I was twelve, and why a revolution in Spain began three years later, its defeat leading logically to a total war.

Life in the Workers Party remained rewarding for me (and others of my movement generation) as long as we were learning, experiencing the benefits of an open and generous intellectual atmosphere. Boredom set in with the demoralization and consequent rapid growth of bureaucratism. Ideation, or the constant effort to develop a body of theory that helped make some sense out of political developments around the world, died as a collective process.

Wohlforth, Shane Mage, James Robertson, and all the others of their generation came upon us when we were no more than a holding operation. Mistakenly, we never talked about it in these terms, but we were living in hope that, just ahead, history would provide that opening which might reverse our slide.

I emphasize the negative only because it gets so little discussion. I must add that after more than a year in the SP there were still people who wanted to re-form a third-camp grouping. This position emerged publicly three years later, in 1963, as the Independent Socialist Club of Berkeley. Several years later it became the International Socialists.

It is not by accident that this reconstruction was led by Anne and Hal Draper, the major leaders of the ISL whose optimism and creative-intellectual drive survived. A short time earlier, Hal had written *The Two Souls of Socialism*. The existence and idealism of this lone piece of original theory to appear in a quarter-century was essential to us. Without such a tool organization is not possible.

Another essential was the optimism generated by the seminal student rebellion that was the Free Speech Movement in 1964. Hal Draper became one of its two leading "adult" participants, senior consultant, and a major influence in the formation of the New Left.

It is necessary to conclude by returning briefly to discussion of the ISL's last days in which pessimism had the lead. It is easy to discount things realized after the fact. Nonetheless, it is true that if a segment of us "Shachtmanites" had taken the initiative to act upon our own pain and analyzed its causes, we would have had the excitement that comes from increased understanding. But that would have required breaking fully from the group without waiting until those without optimism finally dissolved the organization.

Our continued captivity in the vanguard party idea, despite the partial modifications of its elitism made by the WP-ISL, helped make that option impossible. We thought that to go out on our own required the development of detailed analyses and programs. Yet we lived on in that wonderland where the liberty for ourselves, that was the first condition for original thinking, came last.

Hindsight is good sight when it prepares us for the future. We might have formed around the idea that we have no definitive program or viable body of theory in the sense that we once believed we had. What we do have is the commitment to examine all of our ideological heritage and attempt to replace through open discussion whatever has failed us.

Far out? Much less so than what we did, each and all burying our doubts till it was too late, always refusing to heed what is often called “one’s own best judgment.” Even in the worst of times, “in boldness there is genius.”

Wohlforth and others of his movement generation have explored many more of the islands at the rim of the Trotskyist archipelago than many who came before them. Rather than viewing their odysseys as somehow bizarre, it is possible to view them as part of a single large panoramic experiment for which we all must take responsibility. We do not yet have the kind of information that will make this possible.

(1988)



## After the War

I came back to the U.S. at the end of World War II as a crew member on a ship carrying returning soldiers to the port of New York. It felt good to be back and to be alone. Back on Sixth Avenue I had seen a good liquor store. I went back, bought a bottle of good scotch, then walked east again to University Place near Ninth Street and got a good room at the aging Hotel Albert. It was from time to time home for near-broke musicians, artists, and actors. After a long shower I realized I hadn't eaten breakfast.

I got into my good clothes. At Union Square newsstand I got a copy of the *New York Times*. A small cafe that served hot-water bagels with fresh cream cheese and lox was close at hand for feasting while reading the motion picture, stage, and jazz combo reviews. Luxury! My stepfather, Albert Nicolas, was playing at Eddie Condon's with Kid Ory's band. That's where I'd wind up after dinner at the Minetta Tavern on MacDougal. Right now I was going to walk west on 14th Street and check in at 114 West 14th, the national headquarters of the Workers Party.

The sunshine was warm on my back, a feeling made even better by a fresh cool breeze on my face and chest. Almost April, it was a perfect spring day, but I could already feel the change of identity taking place in me. Part of me didn't like making this visit. The party was important to me. Without it, I would never have been able to make any sense out of the political puzzles of national and world politics about which I had learned pitifully little during twelve years of public school in East Los Angeles and at UCLA the three semesters before the Pearl Harbor weekend in 1941. I carried a deep sense of obligation to the party, yet I knew they had no idea what it meant to grow up in southern California during the best years of the Big Band era, to spend every Easter week at Balboa Beach dancing the Balboa and the Lindy nightly to Stan Kenton's orchestra after a day of bodysurfing. My neighborhood didn't resemble New York's Lower East Side. When they became active in the radical socialist

movement, the fathers and mothers of most of them cheered. The children were following that admirable example set by their parents and even grandparents. When I joined, it caused great pain in every household of my family. I had been their hope and now was a symbol of their failure. There was no room for their aspirations as first-generation Americans in my "movement." Nothing in the Workers Party or any of the other socialist-communist groupings was directed to them and their need to understand what their offspring was now about. After three years in the party I was only just beginning to glimpse that I no longer spoke a language that had the same purpose, vocabulary, or structure that theirs had. They too wanted a better life for all, but what was all this talk about the bourgeoisie, the proletariat, the working and middle classes, and the "drive toward a dual power situation"? Not one person in any family I knew in my neighborhood saw any evidence that a revolution or revolutionary situation was developing. I didn't have any factual evidence either, but I was convinced it was going to happen. All the people in the movement could see it, me among them. The people I came from didn't have the equipment to see and so, in effect, I gave up on them—the people who had sacrificed to raise and educate me. I put them out there "beyond the pale" even though I continued to love them "despite their ignorance." At no time did it ever occur to me that with all the writing and talking we were doing in the party, it should help us to explain some of our ideas to them. Neither did I see that our inability to do so indicated greater fault in our politics than theirs. They at least didn't live most of their political hours in a make-believe world claiming to have found the needed answers for the period ahead.

(c. 1990)

## The Vanguard Party

### *An Institution Whose Time Has Expired*

It is impossible to develop, discuss, and communicate new ideas effectively without organizations and publications. Yet despite the increase in attacks upon human life, wildlife, water, air, and plants—and the resulting increase in the number of people driven to exasperation because big party politicians remain unmoved—socialist organizations continue to shrink in size and number. The process is not a new one. It is just that the problem is now more and more visible. More than half a century has passed since any grouping of American radicals was a source of imaginative ideas and dialogue among indigenous working-class intellectuals.

I do not believe this condition exists simply because some special ingredient is missing from the consciousness of the work force or intellectual populations, or because there is an effectively restrictive presence in the objective conditions burdening us all. Instead, the shrinkage of socialist groups to the point of near extinction is testament that we are handicapped by ideas and methodologies of the past which no longer relate to life as it is now being lived by most people, particularly since the end of World War II. In my experience, independents are now the majority of the radical political community in the U.S., and I find that most are willing to critically reexamine these ideas, especially those that are integral parts of the “Leninist vanguard party” concept.

I joined the Workers Party early in the Second World War in spite of the fact that the experience of my childhood and youth was quite different from the just-a-little-older people who had recently built the organization. Until I was nineteen, I lived in a town with a very small union membership. During those years I had listened to many adults talk about their work and the problems they had on jobs or as part of the unemployed. I never heard anyone in my family or on our block say the words “capitalist” or “communist.” But just from my own experiences I was in rebellion against authority, outraged by the people who designed the way

children and young people were governed and taught in the Los Angeles public school system. By the time I reached high school, it was clear to me that they did not see us as students or believe it when they said we were "the future of the society." We were the children of the people they saw as the enemy. When we got instruction on serious subjects, it was by accident, a result of the individual teacher's personal decision to take the trouble to instruct at a higher level. The school board sent representatives to our graduating classes to harangue us openly not to go to college, but "get a trade."

In my family, and all those we were close to, there were people who had been crippled, who lost the use of limbs and reaches of the mind because of the conditions under which they labored. Those who made basic policy for the school system cut off the only known route to most East Los Angeles parents by which their offspring might escape the kind of work that made drudgery of their own lives.

By choosing to become a merchant seaman, I was unexpectedly introduced to unionism. For the first time, I saw that it was possible to say no and not get fired. I identified with that instantly. Then, just as some of the limitations of unionism were becoming apparent, came the discovery that there were organized groups involved in serious discussion of how to change the way work gets done fundamentally and so change the entire society. I felt a deep sense of obligation to this vision.

The very young intellectuals who had built the membership of the Workers Party were truly irreverent. They were the products of two expulsions, from the SWP in 1940 and in 1928 from the Communist Party. It was precisely this irreverence that made the WP into what was probably as full and enthusiastic an expression of the vanguard party idea as could then be found.

When the war effort got under way fully late in 1942, it enabled WP members to become employed in industry with millions of other Americans. Recruitment to the group was highly selective. Prior to that time the size of the organization was limited by preference. Only those outsiders judged able to become competent full-time political activists were apprenticed. They were admitted to membership only after finishing assigned reading programs designed to provide higher education in the best of classical as well as new radical literature.

In this same period, members each gave 30 percent of their income to the party. This practice continued for the duration of the war. Only in this way could five hundred people subsidize publication of a weekly

newspaper, a monthly magazine, and a steady stream of discussion bulletins. Few of us made changes in employment or occupation without at least consulting the leadership at the branch level.

Like the others, a large portion of my time was spent reading the party's publications. To fail in this effort made it impossible to participate in stimulating discussions. For those of us who had come into the group during the war years, the discussions were our first chance at anything like a college education. A double standard of membership developed as various branches began to attract from five to ten workers from factories, mills, and shipyards.

The seamen were an exception among these workers for several reasons. They generally came to the WP with established reading habits. On a ship there is nowhere to go when work is done, and poker can be played only for a limited number of nights without becoming bored or going broke, or both. Then, too, a ship away from the dock is a moveable molecular state without a substantial middle class. Consciously or not, the lessons and resentments learned on shipboard are part of the gear that gets brought ashore. Some of the seamen were rather easily assimilated into the subculture of super-activism that developed in the WP in New York and Chicago. But industrial workers were not as easily absorbed. Concessions had to be made. They tended to be a little older and were seldom free and on leave or available to give full time to party activities. Many had families and couldn't give as much of their wages to the party as the other members. There was always more demanded from those members of the party who had set or adapted to the intellectual and disciplinary standards of the immediate pre-war period. By 1945, however, the influence of the regular workers on party life had begun to make the group closer to the norm in the majority of the population. Visible inroads were being made on sectarianism, but it was too late and the progress was short-lived.

Optimism and discipline began to break down rapidly in 1946. As the war ended, it became clear that Trotsky's predictions were wrong, that peace was not going to bring about revolutions in Europe. Cadre members were leaving in bunches to return to their hometowns and resume careers. The people who had been native industrial workers left too, never to return. One reason was that they could no longer stay when the people who had been their mentors were on their way out the door.

Dozens of original cadre people quit. One among many reasons for them was obvious. They felt deep resentment because their sacrifice seemed to

have been for nothing. If their lives had been more complete during the previous four or five years, if they had not postponed daily any gratification to some future time, more would have survived. For years, too many of them seldom took a moment for self needs. It was not unusual to hear women members complain (albeit in good humor) that they had been out distributing our paper at factory gates and going to union and party meetings without a single night off “even to shampoo my hair for weeks for almost a month.”

In 1948, Hal Draper proposed to convention delegates that our name be changed from Workers Party to the Independent Socialist League (ISL) in order to make clear to all that we did not consider big change to be close at hand or that we would play the leading role in it. Support of a majority was easily won for this stance. By definition, our main role now was to develop ideas. What we did not then do was attempt to educate ourselves in the lessons of our own immediate past. We had taken one step toward leaving the vanguard party idea behind, but because we did not systematically examine the concept in the light of our experience, it continued to instruct much of what we did.

We continued, for example, to operate on the basis of “democratic centralism.” We undoubtedly had a more democratic structure than many of the other Marxist groups. But in practice it turned out that the substance of democracy ended as the conventions adjourned, due to democratic centralism. Because of it, when members of political minorities spoke in public they were duty-bound to first explain the politics of the majority instead of their own. They became free to mention their own ideas only when specifically asked if there were other views than the ones they had been voicing. The democracy left to them after this indignity was that they were free to try to win a majority to their views in the privacy of the party by the time of the next convention.

I do not know of any member, including myself, who then drew the conclusion that our small organization (which was committed to change “from below”) was actually being run from the top by a small bureaucracy. The experts in oratory and resolution-writing automatically stayed in control. This practice limited vision, and continued to the end in 1958, despite the start made for change as articulated by Draper ten years earlier.

More and even worse ideas were retained because of our inability to make a critical evaluation of our past. As was the case with so many other radical political sects, our interpretation of the history of the Russian Revolution was that only one of the parties that participated had survived

the experience with its socialist integrity intact. I have heard many people who were socialists in the early years of the century say that before the formation of the Communist International, the relations between radical groups were many more times cooperative and united than after. To be sure, if only one party or group in a revolution is destined by the historical process itself to be the correct "party of the working class," and if the membership of each "Marxist" group feels it will be that correct party of the future (or why else would they belong to their particular organization?), then each feels that all but theirs are parties that are obstacles to progress. It is impossible for each of them not to then act as if the rest are actually opponents of the true destiny of an entire class.

These political attitudes not only impoverish relationships between vanguard parties but within them as well. Each group carries the burden of having to lead an entire society one day. Perfection in each member is a necessity. Unconsciously at first, the members begin to monitor one another for signs that might lead to defection. Any member who begins to develop new ideas without the company of many others becomes a threat. Friendships are seldom developed between members who have ideological differences. When differences develop between friends, the friendship seldom survives. This means that the vanguard party idea is not only a violation of the Hegelian "negation of the negation" concept of the need for constant ideological change, but it makes for loneliness. Most members live with the constant threat of isolation or loss of the ability to socialize with ease.

When one comes around a socialist organization it should provide at least a minor preview experience of the ideals of socialism. As it is, those ideals are rarely talked about except during the process of recruitment. To run across a vanguard socialist group with a happy membership is the rare exception.

(c. 1993)

## Contribution to a Discussion on Bert Cochran's *Labor and Communism*

As yet, only miniscule groupings of people within American society have had extensive discussions about Communism and overall matters of radicalism. Each grouping has held its discussions in relative isolation from all the others. Public debate of the sort wherein any relatively large segment of the population is allowed to develop generalizations on its views and feelings on this question is still to be held.

It may be that this is mainly because America's experience with Communism and developments rising out of the Russian Revolution, including the appearance of opposition to the Communists from the left, remains historically recent. Controversy continues without benefit of objectivity. Hence the great value of discussions like Bert Cochran's book *Labor and Communism*.

Even though the academic vocabulary and formulations used by Cochran narrow his book's audience as much as the high price tag put upon it by the publisher, the publication of this scholarly work is nonetheless a welcome addition to the discussion. One of the problems faced in writing a book about any aspect of the Communist Party (never an easy task) is that the contribution of other radical groupings tends to become neglected. The Socialist, Trotskyist, Anarcho-Syndicalist, and Anarchist groups, though tiny compared to the Communist Party (CP), have made independent contributions and more than any other set of political communities have developed alternative critiques by which the Communist experience can be evaluated. As a Trotskyist, Cochran was a participant observer in much of the period that he writes about. We learn little from him in this book, however, about the feelings that he and those around him had as they lived the period.

It is with this in mind as a former member of a Trotskyist grouping, although separate from those in which Cochran played a leading role, that I would like to contribute to an extension of the discussion.



When World War II ended, I got a job in a factory. There, the union organization was dominated by people that to varying degrees were sympathetic to Communist views. This was true of many workplaces organized by the CIO in California at that time, but it provided a new experience for me. Harry Bridges was still the head of the statewide CIO and it was run by people who for the most part shared some of his beliefs about the progressive nature of the Russian party-state society.

I was a delegate to the 1947 California State CIO Convention at Santa Cruz. The officials that ran it had prepared a well-organized machine to run it which included a large number of the delegates. They faced no organized opposition and it is doubtful that any was expected. The only criticism of their policies came from first-time delegates who could not have mustered 5 percent of the vote even if they all knew one another. All who were not part of the machine lived the experience in dismay, but this was a very strange time in labor movement history.

Earlier in 1947, the parent CIO body had held its convention. It had passed a resolution against Communist influence in the labor movement in language that was fairly restrained compared to what was to come not many months later in this preview of the anti-Communist hysteria that would soon become societal. The story later circulated that CIO president Philip Murray had made a deal with the top labor officials who were CP-oriented. He is said to have told them that he had been in a bloc with them during the entire war and would like to continue the relationship, but that public pressure was on him and that he needed a cover for public use. He then asked that they select a person who, along with two others (one a right-winger and one a centrist), would draw up an "anti-Communist" resolution that all three (and thus the entire convention) could support. Murray claimed that with such a resolution on public record he would be free "not to go after them" inside the organization. The story concluded by revealing that "the Communists went for it." It is probable that the story was basically accurate. There was no real opposition to the resolution and the party's influence among powerful officials in attendance was still formidable.

Moreover, the passage of the resolution (like any policy resolution) automatically called upon all lower CIO bodies to act upon it in turn, with the state organizations acting first. It came before us at Santa Cruz, was read out, and the floor was opened for discussion. Several delegates took the microphone and supported it. Then came an auto worker from a southern California local. He was the first and only speaker to oppose

the resolution. He said something to the effect that it was “red-baiting” and laid the groundwork for an even bigger red scare. The machine’s floor whip was recognized as the next speaker. He said things like, “these are the people who were against Roosevelt even during the war . . . and here they are again in their disruptive role.”

As he sat down, he openly pointed to a delegate at the table of the International Longshoremen’s and Warehousemen’s Union (ILWU), who became the next to speak. I cannot quote him exactly because none of this got into the printed proceedings that were published after the convention, but the selected delegate went to the microphone. He was a tall man of middle age and he spoke very solemnly, saying, “I am a longshoreman, I am a Communist, and the resolution is okay with me.” That was it. At the immediate signal from the whip, a large number of the delegates hooted and cheered as if a twenty-hour week had just been won. They clapped, then stomped, and then jumped to their feet demanding a vote. By decibel count, the “aye’s” won, overwhelmingly. The gavel went down and the motion passed.

Later in the convention, I attended a subcommittee meeting in which some small challenge to the machine was made by a steel worker. The lights went out and the committee never met again.

On the last day of the convention, I took the floor and asked for an explanation of why the Alameda County CIO officials had given no support to the fifty-six-hour Oakland General Strike in December 1946. Paul Schlipf, secretary treasurer of the state CIO and a member of my local, took the floor. “It wasn’t a general strike,” he said, “we weren’t in it.” That was all. He sat down to great applause and the chair moved the next order of business.

Incidents like these make it easy to develop deep resentment. It is hard to think of a time when so many acted with such cynicism. I have yet to hear of any union organization led by CP-oriented people that wasn’t arrogantly anti-democratic, much to the gratification of people like Sidney Hook during the McCarthy period. “Why” is a question that I have often probed since. Why did they not even show the small amount of discretion that would have aided their survival? I will not go into the matter here except to mention that the party had reached its largest membership. Russia was victorious in the war and consolidating its power rapidly in Central Europe. The Communist parties in almost every country were growing, were becoming real organizations in France and Italy despite Stalin’s policies. No crack had yet appeared in the monolith of the Russian

party-state. There had yet been no Tito split away, no 1953 East Berlin Uprising, no Hungarian Revolution, no Czechoslovakia or Poland, no repression at home, and no Khrushchev "revelations" about the crimes of Stalin.

Shortly after the Hungarian Revolution and Khrushchev's speech to the Twentieth Party Congress, the Communist Party of Alameda County (East San Francisco Bay Area) called an unusual meeting to discuss the Hungarian Revolution. They had lost a very large part of their membership overnight. The meeting was held in the Jenny Lind Hall in Oakland. Now a longtime member of the Independent Socialist League (formerly Workers Party), I arrived early in front of the hall with two other people for the purpose of selling our newspaper, *Labor Action*. While it was still early, one of the leading CPers in the East Bay walked down the street toward us. I knew him well. He was obviously there early in order to set up the physical arrangements for this meeting. Never in the many years I had known the man had he said my name. We had been political enemies at close quarter in a number of situations. I often got to him by sitting next to him at large meetings. It was as if he was sitting near some unspeakable evil, and so he would squirm and fume audibly, never making eye contact. As he walked closer I girded for at least a small confrontation. But when still feet away, he smiled big, reached out, took my hand, and in the warmest tone said my name and asked me how I was, adding, "God, we sure used to have a lot of fights in the old days didn't we?"

I was shocked. I had been away in another town for five years. But I wasn't thinking about that. I felt torn. I do not know what my facial expression was, but inside there was a part that felt joy and another part that could have wept. I felt simply mixed up as to the facts. In his eyes, I was no longer a "Trotskyite" enemy, so he must have quit the Communist Party. While I was trying to put that together, his wife drove up and double-parked. Maybe another confrontation or standoff, I thought, but no, she waved warm greetings. At the same time she reached across and opened the rear door of her car. On the back seat was a bundle of papers and pamphlets and all the things of use in setting up the meeting that would soon take place inside. Her husband went to the car and got the materials, closed the door, and she drove off to park. Before he went upstairs, he asked me to come to his house for a visit. I said I would. A few minutes later, I put aside selling any papers and went inside.

My new friend was chairing the meeting. There were not quite forty people in attendance. Their average age was high. There were three speakers. Each presented a different view. Blacklisted Hollywood screenwriter

John Howard Lawson argued that the Russian troops must stay in Hungary because the revolution was led by fascists. Playwright George Hitchcock argued the opposite, while the official speakers for the party held that it was still too soon to take a position because the evidence wasn't all in and no one among us speaks Hungarian. The meeting adjourned with little discussion. I later learned that the design of the meeting was chosen to try to re-attract the many members who had dropped away in the preceding weeks.

The next night, I went to see my new friend. No, he wasn't still in the party. Some weeks earlier he had presented a resolution calling for withdrawal of Russian troops from Hungary. It was voted down, and so he tendered his resignation with agreement that he would complete the party tasks that he had already agreed to do. The meeting of the previous night was his last act for the party. As he talked, his wife sat down with us. Her presence seemed to relax him and he began a long narrative.

He told of all the trouble I had caused him in the party. Ten years earlier, I had continually taken the lead from them, he said, in several public arena areas. He said it had embarrassed him in front of his people. He went on about how he had hated me. "We had to get you," he remembered. They had spent a period of eight to ten months planning before "that mass meeting where we denounced you publicly as a police spy." They made the plans at county-level central committee meetings. "I was against doing it," he insisted, "but that's no excuse. I went along with the majority."

When he finished, I thanked him. I told him that while he was talking, he was in a sense giving me back some of the self-respect I had lost, for in thinking so little of him and literally putting him beyond the pale, I had not only done injury to him, but to my own self-image as well. As I finished, his wife leaned forward to me and explained that in doing this her husband was getting his self-respect back too.

In the ensuing weeks, George Hitchcock provided an invaluable service to many in the Bay Area. He formed the Independent Socialist Forum so that people who had left the CP could have a place to talk out the questions bothering them. The Forum organized a section in the East Bay and my new friend attended all its meetings, all the while conducting himself as a respecter of democracy.

Several months later, the Forum disbanded and he dropped out of politics. A few years after that, I met him on the street. We talked. He couldn't bring himself to get into politics in any way. He had sacrificed everything

for the party for almost twenty years, even neglecting his children when they were small, he felt. This very able person and his family were just too wounded. He found other pursuits, and lost touch.

I have had experiences parallel to this with several other people, but none was as concentrated or as affecting. In one way or another, but often in almost the same words, they summed up the reason for their deepest hurts in the following way: "We thought our end goal was so good that we ignored the question of means."

In addition to being witness to the loss of valuable people from political activism, I came across one additional problem in these experiences. One old opponent sent me an unsigned note via a mutual friend which asked, "How does it feel to have history prove you correct?" Had it? Was that the important thing in relation to what had been happening to us? How many have lived long periods of their lives without attachment to ideas that prove to be incorrect? Isn't it a truth that incorrect actions flow from incorrect ideas rather than something innate and basically flawed in us? Most who have gone to the Communist Party have done so out of the best of human traits. It's the absence of institutional ideological alternatives that limits us. Without recognition of this fact, we will continue to be cheated of full participation and creativity.

(c. 1978)

## The Vanguard Party

### *An Obstruction to Worker-Intellectual Alliances*

It is difficult to find a city or region in any capitalist country where there are labor unions that are willing or able to take the fight for workers' rights beyond the limitations imposed by the system itself, via contract and law.

A parallel condition exists in the so-called socialist countries where the government bureaucracies have become the single employer in the land and have collectivized all the means of production for their use against the millions in their employ.

In both capitalist and "Communist" countries, any dissident movement can be assured that it will be attacked by the government and police, finally violently, as it becomes effective. No gathering of rebels can ever build its defenses with arms equal to those available to the government. Only in "armaments of another kind" can effective self-defense be developed. Workers have the power to control the production and distribution of vital goods and services. Without utilities, communications, and goods, no society functions.

In a three-week period during 1980, ten million Polish workers organized new unions on a horizontal structure. This form allowed them full freedom to use the solidarity weapon. They knocked the unions of the Communist government out of the box in days. For a year and a half they not only held the power of their government at bay, but kept out the massed divisions of the Russian armies lying in wait just outside the Polish borders.

The Polish working people did not accomplish this feat by themselves. Particularly in the first months of Polish Solidarity, they had an alliance with large numbers of the country's radical intellectuals, in what may have been an ideal form of alliance between workers and intellectuals. The intellectuals of the KOR (Committee for Workers' Defense) acted as if they were themselves in some way workers. They made themselves known to workers as intellectuals for whom the system had failed. They were

willing to sit down and talk with other groupings in society for whom the same was true. No matter that they had achieved high degrees of formal education or the equivalent, they needed change like many others.

In this way, the intellectuals of KOR in the early days of Solidarity eliminated two major obstacles to worker–intellectual alliances. First, they eliminated much of the suspicion that workers have of intellectuals who come to them in the vanguard party posture without any admission of the class origins and formal educations that workers recognize immediately. Second, in the process of developing the alliance they damage the roots of the myth that a formal education can guarantee some kind of utopia or even personal security.

Polish Solidarity was not joined by similar outbreaks in adjoining countries, and so the rank and file could not sustain it. That it was able to last for eighteen months under any circumstances is one of its many victories. That its leadership and the KOR joined together and bureaucratized under the burden of attacks they could not return should not come as a surprise. One of the beautiful ironies of the Solidarity–KOR successes is that they did the job in a major Communist country whose governing party is supposed to be a “Leninist vanguard party of the working class.” By the very nature of the Solidarity–KOR alliance, Polish workers and intellectuals exposed that myth at least in their own country and in that of the largest of the pretenders—the Soviet Union. At the same time, they pulled the shroud from the skeleton of the concept of Lenin’s vanguard party as developed in *What Is to Be Done?*

Trotsky read *What Is to Be Done?* shortly after it was written in 1902. He answered it with *Our Political Tasks*. Like Lenin, Trotsky was aware of Russia’s underdeveloped status—that only 2 percent of its labor force was made up of industrial workers and only 2 percent of its population lived in cities. Trotsky nevertheless attacked Lenin for a concept that “substituted a party for a class and possibly, a man for a class.” No matter that Russia’s lack of development made a Marxist liberation from Czarism difficult in the extreme, the substitute portended even greater danger.

When Trotsky returned to Russia in 1917, the revolution was already under way. In the exhilaration of the struggle, he severed identification with the Menshevik internationalists and joined the Bolsheviks of Lenin without any public misgivings. He never made mention of his anti-vanguard party ideas again, nor did he ever again draw attention to *Our Political Tasks*.

Neither the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) nor the Workers Party–Independent Socialist League (WP-ISL) ever made mention of *Our Political Tasks*. Among the WP-ISL, or the “Shachtmanites,” our ignorance of this little volume and its ideas was ended in the 1950s when Isaac Deutscher wrote and published the volume of Trotsky’s biography titled *The Prophet Armed*. For those of us who didn’t then catch the message, it was repeated with the publication in the late 1970s of Baruch Knei-Paz’s *The Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky*.

The most damaging part of the baggage that comes with the vanguard party idea is that the party you are a member of should and will itself become the state. Out of the dozens of radical political sects claiming the mantle of Marxism, there have been some who have stated specifically that they reject the party-state doctrine and believe in an independently structured state apparatus in which all parties will compete for the support of the population, thereby ensuring debate, a multi-party experience, and a non-monolithic state. Unfortunately, even these continue to function, at least in part, on the vanguard party model.

Any grouping of radical intellectuals who make the claim that they are Marxists have usually reached that point of insight wherein they have seen that to build a system of representation based on geography rather than production, that is, upon where people live rather than by councils of people working in the same industry, has common sense as well as superior logic. Local, regional, and then national networks of councils made up of people by occupation, pyramided together as the fundamental governmental power, make more sense.

Whether people are coal miners or computer operators, auto workers or office clerks, housewives or househusbands, poets or sculptors, all have a common subculture within their occupation or calling that makes it easier for them to communicate with each other than it is for neighbors living on the same block. People drawn together within the same workplace talk with each other far more than those in the same hundred block of the same avenue.

It should follow that a political tendency which believes in structuring a government on occupational councils rather than easily gerrymandered geographic districts would make work and the nature of life in the workplaces of their region and country one of their primary areas of interest. But that is not the case. The primary positive activity of most radical sects is to achieve a state in which there is at least a core group that has



become fully informed about the Russian Revolution and which is able to interpret that history so that it justifies the existence of that sect.

We found it difficult to keep the workers we recruited to the WP-ISL. It was not uncommon that our conduct on the job attracted other workers to us, despite the fact that we had in the process of all our reading come to sound like professors, unless we mimicked the way workers talked in Hollywood movies of the 1930s. We did not immediately introduce the workers in process of recruitment to the life in our weekly branch meetings. After bitter experiences we learned to keep them away until they had developed socialist educations which might allow them to overlook what they would find in the collective experience of the marathon Friday night meetings.

Few indigenous workers remained in the WP-ISL for very long. No matter how hard they read, there were too many others who would always have read more, and they were the ones who got recognition and respect. Then too, the items that had to be read were mostly about a European experience long past. Really, there was no function for these newly "politicized" workers to perform except distribution and sales of the small mass party newspaper that a handful of us in New York somehow published with regularity. They liked us for our ability to fight the employers, but it was embarrassing to regularly go sound asleep, heads back, mouths open, and snoring in our presence while we argued energetically. They dropped away, often feeling smaller for the experience.

All the workers that joined and left the WP-ISL were each experts in an area of knowledge about which all others who were present were ignorant. They knew how work was performed in relation to production. They knew the social relations of production in that place of work. Had we been truly interested in the workplace as a basic governmental unit, they would have had more to teach us than the other way around. As changes occurred in the places where they worked, we should have become acquainted with the process, step-by-step.

Those of us who were cadre members of the WP-ISL during my sixteen years of participation in the organization's life (ending with its dissolution in 1958) felt that we had something to teach the working class and that the street only went one way. True, we lived with many tensions in our lives. For example, when I was a plain and regular merchant seaman, prior to becoming shipmate to the party member who recruited me, I was an effective organizer. On each ship there were the men in the crew, and as we got to know each other, we could do much to affect the actions of

the employer and the union if we used our collective good sense to think things out. After joining “the party,” however, I had to also accept responsibility for the party in every action and think about its relationship to not only questions about the industry and the nation, but about the international scene as well.

There was also an additional source of stress beyond the above. Aside from the stress which comes from swimming against the official current of the society, the party I belonged to was one day going to be the government, was going to run the society. This is a large burden for one person to carry, even if a few hundred more are willing to share it in a country of two hundred million. No wonder that the act of joining and becoming a socialist had the effect of conservatizing us out of paralysis or caution and fear of criticism from the other branch members if we made a mistake. Some of us came to hate the culture of competition that prevailed at the weekly meetings.

“Democratic centralism” is a second major Leninist vanguard party concept which made it impossible to conduct ourselves as normal and rational members of the community. Democratic and centralism are terms that are contradictory. Once you learn to rationalize that there is compatibility, you are into a form of doublethink, even if you think of yourself as a “Trotskyist” opposing those who were defending the crimes of Stalin. Put aside the tragicomic aspects of living under the pressure of the contradiction, the concept inevitably means that a bureaucracy is at work.

(c. 1994)

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## VI. Primary Work Groups

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## The Informal Work Group

The whole early part of my life was dominated by the idea that solutions to all that's wrong lie in individual morality. But my life experience, like that of most people, sent me messages that constantly contradicted this idea. I came to have a different idea—that you had to have a cause that was bigger than you because that was the only real freedom—living at one with a total society rather than just for oneself. It's impossible to know precisely where one gets that idea, but I came to know that the corruption of individual humans is the result of corrupt and outdated institutions.

My grandmother was a scrubwoman in office buildings in downtown Los Angeles. My mother quit high school in the tenth grade and became an apprentice dressmaker at fifty cents a week. She met my father when he was working at the Post Office. A year later they married and I was born a year after that, in 1921, the year that women got the vote.

I didn't know my father. That marriage lasted five months after my birth. Both my great-grandfather and grandfather died in the early '20s. That left me with a family that was female dominated. My uncle was an important member of our household, but due to the Depression, his unemployment, and resulting alcoholism, he was constantly held up as an example of what not to be. My block in East Los Angeles was made up of close and long-time neighbors. They worked hard. They were poor, generous, warm, and at the same time petty and suspicious of anyone not like themselves; that is, not of English, Scotch, Irish, or German stock. Most of all, they wanted the happiness they felt would come from obtaining "a steady job." When two Armenian families moved in at the bottom of the block, there was a temporary but noticeable resistance. Real socialization and integration did not materialize. In 1944, a freeway cut through and made the separation of the lower part of the block permanent.

All through school, there were not more than three teachers who related to me on my own terms—really only one, a young Armenian substitute

teacher. I was to give one of the speeches at the graduation ceremony from junior high school. My speech was called "Our Flag, the Star Spangled Banner." In rehearsal, I walked up onto the stage to give the speech in a very sloppy manner. The teacher in charge of the ceremony had a fit of anger and in front of everybody told me off and said, "If ever I see you walk up there like that again, that's the end. You're not going to give the speech." One of the big tough ball players on the team that I played second base on came to me at noontime and said, "Mr. Dingilian was talking about you. He said you did that because you didn't want to lose touch with us regular guys."

In the first year of high school, I stopped attempting to participate in official school activities that were connected with the administrative establishment. I began to see that they were part of a system of favoritism, and that I was one of the beneficiaries of that system. I was opposing it individually, however, without organization, not effectively. I can remember I cut school one day, left the school grounds in my '29 Model A Ford with five others. We drove to the beach and spent a great day bodysurfing. The next morning I had to face up to the fact that I had been seen ditching. I walked in to get my demerits with everyone else and I was told by the registrar to report immediately to the vice principal's office. The vice principal explained to me that he couldn't give me, one of the leaders in the school, demerits like anyone else. That was impossible. "Just watch your step and don't get caught like that again. Get back in class." That had a great deal to do with opening my eyes.

Out of 323 seniors graduating in February 1940, the same man (who thought he was doing us a great favor) invited the five boys who were known to be going on to college to his house for dinner. He explained to us how to get a commission in the Armed Forces when the U.S. finally got into the war. He told how he had gotten a commission in the Army as a young man in World War I and how we could do the same, that we should not get caught being privates in the Army. He told us how to work the angles through Congressmen.

It was very oppressive for us to know that the war was going on in Europe. I think this is one of the reasons why we threw ourselves into the "swing era" so hard. That was a big part of my life. Dancing and listening to the swing bands, and the security of the group that was doing it, was a way of putting behind the thought of that oncoming war. We all knew one another and all the males wore suits that were at least slightly zoot.

I always thought in grammar school that it would be different in junior high, that we'd start learning the truth. In junior high, I thought it would be in high school. In high school, I thought it would be in college. I went to Los Angeles Junior College in February 1940, and it appeared to me that I was finally going to be taught the truth.

I had a professor of English named Richard Lillard. He was a liberal from the John Dewey tradition and he provided an analysis of society and the world around us that made sense to me. It was liberating, and I listened hard to every word he spoke. But toward the end of the semester I asked him, "This is all fine but where does one go to put into practice these ideas?"

The following semester I went to UCLA. I was in the Westgard Co-op. It was a cooperative eating group. I was introduced to it by a friend I had gone to high school with named John Slevin. He was a Molokan, a member of a fundamentalist Christian pacifist sect from the Ukraine near Armenia. His pacifism hadn't had a great effect on me until the war got very close. Then it became apparent that he was going to be a conscientious objector. He was in conscientious objector camps for four years and he led a strike as a CO. That made him a felon and for life. He has literally been blackballed out of any career because of it. He is a great person.

I didn't finish my third semester at college. I could see no point in it. I took a philosophy course in which the professor effectively tore down what he called the metaphysical temple and philosophically destroyed any basis for my belief in God. I went with Professor Piatt every step of the way, but he had nothing with which to replace religion. At this point I was developing a lot of cynicism about the world around me. I was despairing about ever finding a way to pursue a good life.

I seriously considered being a CO myself, and I went and talked to Richard Lillard about it. He said, "Well, there's just one thing about being a conscientious objector. With your particular bent, your personality, it seems to me that you would like to live the social experience of your generation. And if you become a CO you won't, not directly." I wanted to find a way to do that without at the same time becoming a victim of the discipline in the Armed Services. It appeared to me that while the risk to life was greater on merchant ships during the war, if I became a merchant seaman, I could then get the best of both worlds.

I became an apprentice seaman in the Merchant Marine. I was then accepted as a U.S. Merchant Marine cadet and midshipman in the Naval Reserve, went into training, and went out on a merchant ship as a deck



cadet. Living with the officers topside, I saw that this was an aristocracy. The contempt that the officers had for the men in the fo'c'sle (forecastle) was a fact of life. The first day on that ship I appeared on the boat deck with my midshipman's uniform on. The deckhands looked up at me and I saw in their faces that look of pity for the worthlessness of the contribution that anyone could make who would be wearing such an outfit. To them, that uniform symbolized useless activity.

They knew something about the ability they had to make that ship go from port to port with or possibly even without officers. They were a highly conscious group of men from the strikes of the '30s, an experience which was still fresh in their minds. They were involved, even on that ship, in job actions from time to time. Several among them were ex-members of the Industrial Workers of the World; they believed in direct action.

Within three months, I was working on deck with them as a seaman, wearing the same clothes they were wearing which I got out of the slop chest. They saw that I was interested. They went out of their way to teach me all of the skills, the wire and line (rope) splices, the knots and hitches, and to make a deck sailor out of me.

They wanted to win me away from the "topside" for good. So they started telling me the history of the strikes to win the hiring hall, the fights to destroy the "fink hall" and the "fink book," which had been parts of the government-employer controlled hiring system. Prior to 1934 on the West Coast, when you got off a ship, if the skipper wrote anything other than "VG," very good, in your continuous discharge or fink book, then you were marked and couldn't get another American ship. Carrying the continuous discharge book meant you carried your own blackball in your pocket.

So they pumped all this history into me. Then they would quiz me. "What happened on such-and-such a date?" "What's Bloody Thursday?" "What were the big demands?" "What was the 1934 award?" "Why were we able to win victories before getting a collective bargaining contract?" "Who's Lunchbox?" (That was Harry Lundeberg, the secretary-treasurer of the Sailors' Union of the Pacific.) "What's a Lunchbox Stetson?" (That was the sailors' name for the traditional white cap of the West Coast maritime workers.)

On that ship, I finally found a cause and a vehicle for pursuing it. These guys were involved, day-to-day, in establishing dignity for themselves and thousands of others, and policing all the things that they had done to obtain that dignity. I saw the boatswain tell the chief mate on that ship,

“Get off the deck while we’re working. Come and see me before 8:00 in the morning and tell me what to do. Come out here after we quit at 5:00 in the evening and find out what we didn’t do right, if you think so, and tell me what’s wrong. But don’t come and stand on this deck while we’re at work. Get off the deck and back on the bridge where you belong.” I was very impressed with that power. He got away with it. I was amazed he could do that. I knew I wanted to be able to do that too. And I did! The time came when I sailed boatswain and I told the mate, “Get off this deck. Don’t stand around us and watch us or else there’s going to be no work going on while you’re here. Hold everything, fellows!”

When I left that ship, I had learned the loophole in Naval Reserve law on how to resign as a midshipman without any penalty, just to get out. So I did that and I went immediately to San Pedro and reported to the port agent at the Sailors’ Union of the Pacific hall. (We didn’t have “presidents” in the Sailors’ Union—it was a syndicalist tradition—they were “agents.”) I went with a letter from the boatswain saying, “This here is to introduce Red Weir. He wants to come up through the forecabin like a regular and he knows the work. Give him a trip card.” So I was in the fo’c’sle as opposed to the “topside” where the officers bunked.

Within a year’s time I became a person who was usually elected the deck delegate on any ship that I would hire onto. I was extremely and youthfully militant against the officers on every ship, to protect the gains of 1934 to 1937, like I’d been taught on my first ship by that gang of strike men and ex-Wobblies. When the food was not good or the mattresses were bad, and the ship got ready to sail, several times I had the crew standing on the docks and saying, “Until those mattresses come aboard . . .”

We were being trampled on because of the no-strike pledge. We were losing the gains of the 1930s because of the war, and that in particular kept me in political opposition to the war throughout it. World War II was being used by employers to wipe out the gains made by labor a few years earlier and the democratic gains previously won by the general citizenry. When I finally became political it was through the only socialist organization that maintained political opposition to World War II. This was the Workers Party, later renamed the Independent Socialist League, whose leading personality was Max Shachtman.

One day, still early in the war, I came out on the deck of a Moore-McCormack ship on which I was deck delegate. I spotted a small broad man walking down the dock under a sea bag that almost hid him from view. We were short one skilled deckhand [AB] and I figured that had to

be him, the last man to fill out the crew so that we could sail. He came up the gangplank and I asked him, was he the AB from the hall? He said yes. I introduced myself, learned his name, showed him where to stow his gear, and took him forward and introduced him to the whole gang by name. That kind of impressed him, because he was a Jew and there weren't many Jews sailing on deck in particular, and he had expected a little harder time. We rapidly became close friends. Within two weeks after we left port, he was the authority on almost all subjects in arguments on almost any question.

This man, who introduced me to socialism, was a visionary and had created in his mind a vision of a better society. He was a developed intellectual. He knew music, art, literature, and a lot about natural sciences, and he was able to apply all those things to a vision of a better society. That was very attractive to me and to many of the men on that ship.

When we got to Australia, he visited one of the famous rank-and-file organizers of the Australian labor movement. From that old man, who was retired, he got a number of copies of socialist publications *The New International*, *The Militant*, and *Labor Action*. He told me to read them and see what I thought. So I read them. I wasn't tremendously impressed with any of them, but there were some good things in them, I thought. Trotsky was raising the whole question of democratic ideas which interested me a great deal but the Russian experiment did not seem important to me at that time.

It was in the Sailors' Union and while going to sea that society began to become understandable to me, at least in part. Marxism facilitated that. The term "cause," instead of just being an emotional and simplistic thing where you got an identifiable enemy figure in "the boss," became part of a whole worldview. I could see that the great contribution of Marx was that he was paying attention to what people were doing rather than trying to impose a utopia upon them. He had analyzed the French revolutions, the communes, and the forms that people themselves had produced and was trying to systematize it in some democratic way so that they would have some control of their own destiny. Being a militant delegate began to take on new meanings. I began to understand that the reason why merchant seamen were often in the forefront of militant labor activity or revolutionary activity throughout the world was because, as citizens of a ship after it left the dock, they were really citizens of a molecular state, a total state in which the captain is the dictator. There is the middle class—licensed officers—and then there's the "lower class," the unlicensed seamen.

It's a reflection of a class society. Once one can make an analysis of a small state like a ship, one can transmit that analysis to the larger state without even fully realizing it. There's a carryover. At first I thought that merchant seamen were militant because they traveled and read a lot. But later I came to see that the informal social groups that develop on a ship at sea are in the main created by the formal and official division of labor which operates the ship; that is, the informal and formal work groups are identical so that the social and technological powers of the seamen are merged, thus revealing to them the importance of their role and enlarging the consciousness of their strength.

One of my deepest concerns when I first met a Marxian socialist was the whole question of violence and terrorism, sabotage, all those things I'd read about that radicals are supposed to endorse. The answers given me were that there is nothing radical or revolutionary about terrorism or any kind of super-militancy. It's essentially a reformist activity in its attempt to change society without changing institutions, merely by removing a person or group of people or terrorizing people through violent methods. Someone who is revolutionary, in the literal sense of the term, is someone who is for changing society's institutions. Socialism, if it's good, is finally for everyone's benefit. A way of saving the souls (if I can use the term) of all, including those who are managers or owners of the forces of production, is to create a society in which no one ever has to make that terrible decision to exploit others.

The question then came up to me immediately, well then why aren't we pacifists? It was explained to me that we couldn't be pacifists because at a certain point that is irresponsibility. One has to be prepared, if attacked, to fight to defend oneself, and maintain the right to meet, to talk, to picket, whatever, and carry one's rights as a citizen to full conclusion. But if one ever has to do that, one should be as thrifty as possible, for not only do you want to not take a life but you want to create as few bitter enemies as possible. Those in power always have more arms than you. Those who work, who operate society, make it move, whether they dig coal or write poetry or keep books or file bills, have to be the answer to that brute force. Because that brute force can't stand up finally against the threat of the withdrawal of labor and economic and political power by those who operate the society and make it function from "below" so to speak. In late '43 or early '44, the Sailors' Union of the Pacific, in conjunction with the Seafarers International Union, decided to organize the tankers belonging to Standard Oil of California. The Seafarers International Union was an

industrial union founded by the Sailors' Union of the Pacific, which was a craft union. The SUP then became an affiliate of the SIU. The only men who could get hired by Standard with any ease were those that looked young enough not to have had union experience. I was easily hired and I went out to Point Richmond, to the dockside refinery, to get on a ship. The practice was to hire seamen and let them work on the dock, servicing incoming ships, until they were assigned to a crew. I became a member of the relief gang, and I was made assistant dock boatswain. That put me in a key position and I soon became head of the campaign on the job. I would assign rank-and-file SUP organizers so that they were not all concentrated on a few ships.

At a point midway in the campaign, SUP men began to appear at work who were giving Jim Crow messages to the seamen we were trying to win over. Our opponent was the National Maritime Union (NMU). Their organizers were preoccupied with winning the war, with Russia, and with maintaining labor's no-strike pledge into the postwar period, rather than improving conditions for seamen in the here and now. We had been doing a good job by openly comparing our contracts with those of the NMU. I could prove to anyone who was white that we had the best union because we had the best contract. I hadn't thought through the whole racial issue but I could see that I couldn't give uncritical support to either the SUP or the NMU, but neither side would abide criticism of any kind.

The men coming out now from the Sailors' Union were saying, "We got to get a white union in here." On that dock, the mess men in the cafeteria and the room stewards in the hotel were Filipinos who were bitterly anti-union because of the experience that they'd had in the original union organization campaigns years before when the union had rejected them as members. I grabbed one of the men who had made some Jim Crow statements and pulled him behind a shed and demanded to know, who sent him out? It turned out that he had been sent, not from the Sailors' Union hall but from the SIU tanker office in Richmond, headed by Hal Banks, a man who was later to get into the news as a strikebreaker in Canada, for the American SIU. He was open about his bigotry. Some among those he worked with closely said he boasted membership in the Ku Klux Klan and was often armed. I phoned the head of the SUP, Harry Lundeberg. He had been challenged about Banks before and he said to me what he had to the others, "Well, Red, the man's doing a good job for us over there and we have to overlook some of his faults, you know."

I got myself shipped out immediately on one of Standard's tankers. Two

months later the NLRB representation election took place. I piled off the ship the same day. Eighty-five percent voted for the SUP-SIU. Lundeberg signed a contract allowing Standard to hire 49 percent non-union seamen, but by that time I had been sent to Canada as a special representative to the British Columbia Seamen's Union to clear up a bad situation created by the man heading it up.

I hit all the ships as they came in and organized the ranks to take control. After several months I learned that Lundeberg had armed the British Columbia union's president with a telegram stating I was a "Trotskyite," with the idea in mind that this could be used to keep me from cleaning house too thoroughly. I had learned a lesson about how control is maintained by bureaucracies. I stayed on until I had maximum insurance that the ranks could sustain an opposition. I returned to the states and got the first ship available to the East Coast.

I would no longer be a staff organizer for the Sailors' Union. I could no longer see my official union as a viable instrument for qualitative social change. I was now a militant but without legitimization from the union. In 1945, when it appeared that the war was going to be over, the Coastwise Committee in the Sailors' Union of the Pacific held a meeting and came up with a postwar program in which they said that, "This union does not checkerboard ships." In other words, the union refused to ship blacks or accept blacks into the union "because checkerboarding causes racial friction. But we are still a democratic union because the day the membership wants blacks in we will allow it."

I took the floor of the meeting and pointed out that the report of the Coastwise Committee "solved nothing," that it was true that the unions that were in any way Communist-line did utilize blacks as political footballs by patronizing them and then using them, but that no member of the Sailors' Union could tell that to a black man and be heard because blacks were allowed some kind of citizenship in CIO unions and not in the AFL unions on the waterfront. They were totally barred from the Sailors' Union. Therefore the crisis continued for us as long as we were an all-white union. We had minority groups in the Sailors' Union with darker skins than many American blacks. To this day I believe the bar against American blacks is more political, in the small "p" sense of the word, than it is racial. Confrontation with guilt is feared.

I was interrupted by the chairman, who said, "What would you do, Brother Weir, if you were on the Coastwise Committee . . ." but he never finished his sentence, I believe because he realized it would be opening up

a discussion on the floor about the whole basis of racism to the ranks present. They had visibly shifted during even that brief exchange on the floor of the meeting.

I think most people were seriously pondering the problem in that key meeting, but bureaucratically the discussion was avoided. One did not pursue questions after the gavel had come down. In those days it meant having to face up to violence and unless you had a caucus or organized muscle going you couldn't stand up to it. I had no caucus. Like all the other dissenters in those war days, I was very much an individual, isolated and alone in that union at that time.

I decided after the war was over that I no longer wanted to go to sea. I no longer was able to do what seamen do when they first start going to sea and that is to "ball it up" in foreign ports, carousing in bars and whorehouses, because finally one sees that the women are only there because of their abject poverty. As a man of twenty-five and like most seamen I had become divorced from mainstream shoreside society and I wanted a broader social life. I remember one night I was in Port Avila on a tanker and the moon came up over those California foothills in the east. It was New Year's Eve and I realized how many guys my age were ashore having a good time and here I was with my ass on a cold tank top watching nothing but the moon come up. So I got a ship, a Grace Line run, and paid off in New York. That was the last time I ever shipped offshore.

I went to the national office of the Workers Party and Max Shachtman asked me, "What are you going to do now, Red?" I said, "Well, I'm going to go to San Pedro and I'm going to spend three months on the beach in the sun on the sand and in the surf, see my friends, get a job longshoring, work three days a week and do what I want to do."

Shachtman said, "Red, we don't want to miss the boat in auto. A lot of important things are happening. You could do a lot of good in auto." That wasn't what I wanted to do but I realized that I would no longer have legitimization in the Party if I didn't. So I went back to the Bay Area, got myself a little apartment in West Berkeley, went out to Point Richmond to the Ford plant, and got hired on the assembly line.

It was chaotic. In those early days after the war they couldn't keep anyone working there. People would hire in during the morning and quit by noon. Some of them never even got far enough down the line to report to the foreman when they saw what it was like. So every day you'd start off with almost the full complement of personnel and by noon you were already taking over half another man's job. The work was really oppressive.

Those who worked any length of time on the Ford line called the place "the prison." I would come home every night battered by the violence of the work.

Every day at quitting time, at the five-minute whistle for clean-up the men would all line up waiting for the second bell to ring, like at the line in a race. When the second bell would ring they would *run*, as fast as they could go, down the aisles to the time clocks. During the first few days I thought they were out of their minds. A week later, I was butting them out of line to get my place at the starting point too.

We were always in the hole on that line. One of my operations was to put two bronze screws into the frame of the car that would hold on the hydraulic brake linings or tubings that run to each wheel brake cylinder. One day I was so far in the hole (the man next to me couldn't complete his task because his partner on the other side had put him in the hole) I couldn't reach my electric wrench. And so, not wanting the inspector to spot loose screws, I hit them all the way in with a ball-peen hammer and learned that they would stay in. No one would suspect. I had found a shortcut in the work. Those brake linings would stay on the frame of that car probably for several thousand miles without loosening. But I quit looking at Fords after that when they drove down the street past me because of my guilt, and because I knew everyone in that plant was taking shortcuts in some way.

One day they transferred me to another job. A man working near me lifted the motors off the motor line on a hoist and then lowered them into the chassis of the car. He couldn't lift the motors high enough into the air to clear the other men's heads if he was going to make the drop into the car at the right time, so he had to move them horizontally over the men's heads at about a five-foot height.

He had to yell constantly, all day long, "Watch your head . . . Heads up, heads up." The man was a nervous wreck. He would say after work, talking to himself, "Well, I only hit three men today. Why don't the dummies get out of my way? They know I have to do it this way to make it on the job."

Then came the day when one of the pneumatic air wrenches hit me on the side of the jaw, because of a faulty clutch, and knocked off half a tooth. I walked out. That was my last day at Ford's.

There I was without a job in auto. The very next morning I went and got a job at Chevrolet in East Oakland where I stayed for two years. Most of the people in that local were Portuguese-Americans from East Oakland.



There was a great deal of Jim Crow amongst them because American society was constantly trying to put them in the position of the American blacks. Their way of avoiding that situation had been to say, "Look, we're not American blacks. We're American Portuguese. We have our own Latin culture and we're proud of that culture." So for both good and bad reasons, to express their own culture, they were Jim Crow. The East Oakland, California, plant and the Atlanta, Georgia, plant of Chevrolet were the last two all-white GM plants in the country.

I pushed a resolution on the floor of the union that we should go to management to bring blacks into the plant. There was opposition to it in the rank and file, and the leadership of the shop unit, which was mostly from the then dominant section of the left, went along with those Jim Crow sentiments in order to maintain their hold on the leadership. Then they were in the position of being in violation of the United Automobile Workers constitution. That couldn't go on for too long and I realized that it would come up again. When I was transferred to another department, everyone in that department was Jim Crow and they wanted me to be the shop steward. I had the choice of either rejecting them because they were Jim Crow or accepting them and dealing with a life situation as it came up. I chose the latter.

The second time the question of hiring blacks was going to come up, the men in my department said in effect, "We've got to forgive Red for his strange ideas," and "He needs help on this resolution." The speakers in favor of bringing blacks in were mainly Portuguese from my department and that won the rest of the Portuguese over: "If you don't want to do it on a moral basis—on the basis that everyone's got a right to eat and work—you damn sure better do it because if we have a strike they'll recruit scabs in West Oakland." It was only a matter of time after that before blacks were on the line and working everywhere in the plant.

I got married while I was working in auto. My wife came out of a West Virginia coal mining family and we had a lot of basic values in common from the first. In addition to developing a career and family, she found no insurmountable problems living a life whose routine was regularly broken by job crisis and economic insecurity.

In 1951, my wife and I lived again in East Los Angeles, right near the high school where I had gone. I was in the Teamsters union, freight handling. Some old friends that I'd gone to school with and were from my neighborhood were officials in those unions. I was making a pretty good living. Then I began to realize I was getting a lot of work because the dispatchers

were instructed by my friends to give me a lot of work. I went to them and I said, "Look I want to shake square like anybody else." I immediately started getting only two days' work a week. I quit and got a job driving a truck steady.

In that local, which was a local for industrial laundry wagon drivers, there was a terrible situation. The working conditions that had been built up by the membership of the local were slowly being sold each year, bit by bit, for nickel and dime wage increases.

A rebellion developed in that local, and I wound up leading it. I became chairman of the Negotiating Committee. The secretary of the local, it turned out, colluded with management and I was fired on a flimsy pretext that couldn't hold water.

While I was awaiting the arbitration, the men in the local, through collections each week, paid my full wages. What we didn't realize was that even the arbitration had been rigged. Instead of utilizing the American Arbitration Association, they got an arbitrator who was an employers' representative in the culinary industry and I went down the drain.

At first the men were going to strike to protect my job. I was part of the reason why they didn't strike, because I was agreeing to go through the mechanics of the grievance procedure. I really participated in my own undoing, and the undoing of the men, because I was simply a symbol by which to break the back of militancy in the union. It was an extremely bitter experience for me. I learned that one should not always use official procedures in circumstances like that if one is going to survive.

This rebellion took place early in 1954, when no spotlight was on the labor movement on this question. I have an honorable withdrawal card from that union, however, because twenty members of that union walked into the secretary-treasurer's office and demanded right then and there that an honorable withdrawal card be given me. Their instincts told them that I would need it in the future.

I had at least a dozen jobs within the next year. I'd get a job and two or three days later the management would come to me and say, "We didn't know you were in trouble with the Teamsters union. We have to let you go." I finally got a job as an apprentice grocery clerk for Safeway Stores. I made about \$1,800 that year. I had one child and my wife was pregnant. I needed and wanted a steady job.

I saw in the newspaper that they were hiring at the General Motors plant in all departments. They hired me immediately and I was spray-painting again, like I had been for a time at Chevrolet. This time, instead of going

into industry in part for political reasons, it was just for a job. The McCarthy period had disintegrated my political movement considerably. The people were not interested in doing anything much but surviving. So there was no movement telling me what to do. I was “just a worker.”

I began to discover the subculture in the factory and that I was working in an informal work group with a life of its own, its own informal leadership, discipline, and activity. A whole new world opened up to me. I began to see that to approach any situation like this with a whole set of preconceived slogans was way off the beam. One first had simply to learn what the subculture was so that one's actions were understandable to everyone else, and not to violate what had been created. Because if you couldn't understand the individuals and the groups that they formed, you certainly weren't going to understand anything else. Then it occurred to me that, by and large, the radicals' conception of the masses was a metaphysical one, an average, which didn't exist except in our minds. Really, the mass was a conglomerate of millions of workers in their subcultures, and rarely were there issues which were real mass issues. One had to try to find common denominators but, even more than that, had to speak to the reality of the people's lives as individuals and in their groups and in the subcultures, in each place of work.

I made friends with the people around me the way you normally do. Most of them were Chicanos from my side of town. We soon had a ride group going. We were on swing shift and one night we'd go to the black community where part of our work group lived and have ribs and the next night we'd go up and have tamales, enchiladas, tacos, or burritos, and the next night we'd go and have spaghetti—here and there to each one's house. One guy's mother'd make a big feed and my wife'd make a big feed and so on. We created our own social life, which you have to do on the swing shift when you work from four in the afternoon until midnight. And the politics that I injected into that group? I didn't even have to try. It came in the natural course of life.

One night when one guy stole something fairly big (from the plant) I told him off. By stealing he was risking his job and he risked us losing a valuable member of our group. That was irresponsible not only to his family, but to us who were his family at work. It was the most meaningful kind of politics that one could talk about and be involved in. Because we were into that kind of politics, we could very easily get into other kinds of politics. Just being me was being political. I was helping politicize those around me without trying to design anything special for a mass.

In 1955, our plant struck against the contract the minute its conditions were announced and before a meeting could be called to ratify that agreement. I'll never forget. I was in the men's locker room on my break. One of my friends up the line came in on his break; he was livid with rage. He had heard the conditions of the contract announced on a news broadcast and he was saying, "Man, he must have really got us something!" I said, "I don't understand. What do you mean?" What he meant was that the settlement must be damn good, for Walter Reuther had sacrificed an opportunity in which the ranks were willing to give their full energies to a fight for working conditions, just to get that improvement in the economic package.

In 1956 I got laid off in a cutback of 1,700 men because the boom in auto was over. By the time they called me back on the basis of seniority I was already back in the Bay Area. But it was in that period, 1955 and 1956, probably the biggest auto years in the postwar period, that some of the insights into the future began to occur to me. I knew from my experience in auto at this point that the next outbreak would be about the nature of the work, the oppressive nature of life in the plants, about the humanization of working conditions.

Rank-and-file revolts today remain isolated and localized. They'll begin to develop to a new plateau once it's discovered how to create an organizational vehicle whereby they can merge and no longer be isolated. But that means a new form of organization, and if the new organization doesn't change existing institutions, particularly unions and collective bargaining, it will re-bureaucratize rapidly. Rank-and-file movements are already having the experience of sending good rank and filers into the bureaucracy and losing them as fast as they send them in, because the institutions aren't being changed. And, if we don't find a way to avoid rapid bureaucratization, we'll merely create more cynicism.

The only organizational means that I know of that cannot be taken over by a union bureaucracy are the informal work groups in the workplaces. The greatest enemies the groups have are unemployment or any change in technology that destroys the group's life continuity, internal relationships, and group culture. Industries that don't have these groups, like the teamsters who drive alone on a truck, are at a natural disadvantage. But if informal work groups are the only form of organization that can't be taken over by a bureaucracy, then anti-bureaucratic organizational vehicles have to be based in them. The only way I have been able to think of it is to obtain a ratio of stewards or committeemen representation of about

1 to 15 or 1 to 25. That would mean that every steward would be a working steward, working within the vision of and in direct contact with, these informal work groups—something like the way it used to be in Chrysler before 1955 when Reuther allowed that corporation to adopt GM patterns. In effect, the work day is a full day of meeting within each one of these groups. If the representative gets out of line, he or she is on the job and can be disciplined by the threat of chill-treatment, ridicule, and worse. If stewards' committees at that representation level were to be pyramided into councils on an area level and finally into congresses on a national level, then the people involved in that pyramiding would still come under some kind of disciplinary hold of people on the job. If the American working class could get an appreciably shorter work week (which is technologically possible), then no matter how high an office a person went he or she would still be working representatives. The representation time it would take would come out of leisure time as well as work time.

The labor movement in this country has never done a thing with the whole primary work group concept. That's where the muscle of the workers is and where the union's strength should be. A workplace isn't a collection of individuals so much as a collection of informal groups. Until you recognize that, you're not really utilizing the power of people in the workplace.

At no time in our society has there ever been a serious discussion of work. The workplace is where most of a human's waking hours are spent. For the first time we have to examine the total oppressiveness of the individual's life. Workers in large numbers can have a fairly good life economically. But the total life experience is a very oppressive one and this goes for all levels of the working class in this country. People seek new solutions to that oppressiveness each day of their lives rather than just in terms of the next union contract or the next strike, and that is not being spoken to, whether it be in terms of heavy industrial, white collar, or professional work. I recently quoted a humorous Big Bill Haywood story to a carpenter with the remark, "Nothing's too good for the workers." He answered, "Yeah, until they get on the job."

The combination of a long period of relative full employment and automation has to a considerable extent destroyed the old values and work ethic at all levels of our labor force. In their desperation to lift morale, eliminate sabotage, and increase production, employers are doing dabbling experiments involving piddling amounts of worker control. The official labor leadership fails to grasp the opening this provides to win some real

controls. Their piecemeal approach looks to earlier retirements rather than humanizing the work. For the rank and file, life is supposed to begin with pension qualification in the autumn of existence. The view "from below" is quite different and that is the only place where real force generates to bring satisfaction, dignity, and creativity to the work process.

(1973)

## Just a Matter of Gloves

The local union officials told us that the regional director of the International Union had a fit when they told him we had a sit-down strike. He wanted to know all our names when he found out the issue was cotton gloves. The nature of the work in our department required that we wear them. Each of us wore out a pair every two days. Until we quit having to buy them ourselves it was our constant gripe.

After I was elected steward, I went to the foreman and asked him to get gloves for us. I had no official power to bargain with him; that was the committeeman's job. But I argued hard. He didn't take the opportunity that I offered him to do something for the men. "I'll tell you the same thing I told the last steward. The company's protective clothing program does not include gloves."

I knew this was a lie and that there were exceptions. I remembered that gloves were supplied to the utility men in the department I had transferred out of the year before. During my relief break that afternoon I returned there long enough to pocket a new pair of gloves that luckily lay unattended on the utility men's bench. They were worth far more than the cup of coffee I had sacrificed to obtain them. I told the story to my friend who worked next to me and gave him the gloves. He passed them to the next man and repeated the story. Soon the entire group knew about the foreman's lie.

Instructions were sent back to me: I should ask the committeeman and file a grievance; I would be backed all the way. The next time the foreman passed within hailing distance I made the formal request. He took his time, but finally made the necessary phone call to the department where the committeeman worked.

Two hours later the committeeman casually walked into our work area. After a chat with the foreman he got to me: "I hear you guys want gloves. Gloves have never been supplied to anyone who worked in this

department.” After some discussion he was still hesitant. Finally he agreed to file a grievance, but only if I wrote it up. He handed me his book full of forms, and I complied. While I was doing this the line stopped suddenly. At the same instant most of the men were gathered around us. The tall skinny kid who had just gotten back from the Army, but was always letting you know he was from Maud, Oklahoma, was the only one who spoke. “We don’t intend that this should take long to iron out.” The committeeman started to say something, but thought better of it. They had made their point. They dispersed. In a moment the line was moving again. I never learned who had hit the switch.

The next morning a Kentuckian with five years in the department came in with four dozen pairs of new gloves in all sizes which he offered for sale. Several of us gathered around him. There was mention of trouble in the parking lot “come quitting time,” but mainly we shamed him into withdrawing his wares.

The Shop Committee met with management every Thursday. On Friday the foreman issued gloves to us while we got into our coveralls. We were jubilant. The old Portuguese who the other old-timers said was one of the best stewards they ever had in the early days of the union came to me and confided, “You’re doing all right, Red. It’s a job for a young man. I’m going to retire soon. The men are all behind you. Now they’re saying it’s okay that you got up at the union meeting the other night and spoke in favor of bringing Negroes into the plant. A few even say you were right, there’s no other way.”

A week later, the company began to renege on the gloves. Word had gotten around. Other departments wanted them. Our foreman was replacing ours every third or fourth day instead of every other day. He said the company was having trouble with the supplier. I called the committeeman again and filed a grievance against the tardiness. This time he did the writing.

A few mornings later several men came to me just as I was returning from my relief. They held out their hands. The gloves on them, like mine, were almost palmless. “We’ve had enough. We’re walking out. We shut off the line.” I looked down the aisle in the direction of the time clock. The rest of our group was about to punch out. A runner was dispatched to retrieve them “on the double.” Three minutes later we held a meeting. The whole department gang was present. I opened the discussion: “Anyone who clocks out will at a minimum lose wages. Gloves are tools and if . . .” They were already far ahead of my speech. At least four of them finished it for me, “Can’t work without tools.”



“That’s right, but we’re available.”

“We’ll stay right here.”

“When they ask us, we’ll all say that we’re just waiting for tools.”

I was simply the first one in the group who had become objective.

It was agreed that we would all gather at the weakest spot in our line of unity—where Kentucky and his two partners worked. I left them there pitching pennies and laughing. The foreman wasn’t in his office. He had gone out of the department on an errand when he saw us gathering. The incident was only minutes old.

I picked up the foreman’s phone and got our committeeman. I explained our action. He answered that it couldn’t be done. I said that it had been done and that he should go direct to the plant manager and demand immediate satisfaction of our grievance. He said he would be right over to see us and hung up.

Our stoppage had to be spread to the other departments. It was our (and my) only protection. We couldn’t wait the thirty minutes we had calculated it would take for the shortage on the line that we were creating to shut down the assembly lines in other departments that were fed by ours. It had to be done sooner, before management could organize.

If we could just shut down the department that followed ours, the rest would go like dominoes. I told a forklift driver who was going in that direction to tell Luis Guido in the next department that I wanted to see him right away.

I knew this man; among us he was a star. He had led the 1936 “sit-in,” inviting the man who was plant superintendent in those days inside to negotiate and then holding him as hostage after ordering the plant gate welded shut. He had always refused to be local union president. He didn’t like high offices. He had many times been a steward and chairman of the Grievance Committee. But in or out of office he was our top leader.

I watched the forklift move down the aisle and finally turn in at the place where the old-timer worked. His short thick form appeared in the center of the aisle moments later. I made signs to tell him what had happened. From his long experience and my pantomime, he understood. I was sure of this five minutes later when he reappeared, swinging a large sledgehammer to signal me that they were shut down. They had somehow felt the shortage we had created in less than half the figured time.

I was free to return to the safety of the group. The penny pitching had stopped, the jokes were thin. Someone sighted the assistant plant manager with two men that none of us recognized. I walked partway out to meet

them and waited. The gambling had started again, immediately behind me. The three visitors in suits nodded to me courteously, but didn't stop. They passed me and the game, walked the full length of our line, and made their exit, chatting.

For the next hour and thirty-nine minutes we were entirely alone. Our isolation ended when the foreman returned for the first time. He carried a carton the size of an apple box, Christmas-wrapped, complete with ribbon and bow. Without looking at us he laid it on the concrete floor in the opening we made for him. He opened it carefully, removed a gross of new gloves bound in bundles of six, placed them in neat rows, and gestured for us to help ourselves.

No one moved. He didn't return our stares. We couldn't hear exactly what he said when he turned to leave, but it was something about our being children and deserving to be treated as such.

Each man took one pair from the pile and then we went together to the coke machine. After we all drank we returned and took our places; someone hit the switch, and the line moved for the first time in two hours and eleven minutes. At lunchtime in the cafeteria we all got kidded about needing so much rest. We told them that they had got the benefit of it too, and that we bet none of them had turned it down.

(c. 1985)

## West Coast Longshoremens and Informal Workers' Control

For almost twenty years, the employers' Pacific Maritime Association (PMA) has dropped the use of the term "hiring hall" and has used "dispatch hall." It is probable that they do this in order to remind longshoremens that they were hired by the PMA and not by union dispatchers and that the hall is in a location over which the employers legally exercise joint control.

In legal language the employers have enjoyed this right since the "1934 award," the award made by the National Longshoremens's Board which ended the 1934 maritime strike. However, because of the elections of job dispatchers by longshoremens, physical occupations of the halls, and job actions or "quickie" strikes to back their demands, the control powers of the union were far greater than those of the employers. This fact was acknowledged in an unpublished statement to the annual meeting of the Waterfront Employers Association (forerunner of the PMA) by its president of that time, T. G. Plant, on February 14, 1940, entitled "1934-39 West Coast Longshore History." Plant claimed that, "joint control of the hiring hall and hiring policies has been converted into 100 percent union control. The union likewise controls work distribution via the low-man-out system."

But this control eroded as the years passed. Due in part to the many reactionary pressures during the McCarthy period, like the expulsion of the International Longshoremens's and Warehousemens's Union from the CIO, union officials collaborated with management to remove workforce disciplinary and recruitment powers from the local unions. Those powers were then centralized in the hands of the Joint Coast Labor Relations Committee. Correspondingly, the local or rank-and-file union control over the hiring halls diminished. They no longer had full control over the selection of who would be hired and registered. Those who differed seriously with the international union's policies could be victimized by disciplinary measures including alleged misuses of hiring hall procedures.

Since 1959, control of the hall has indeed been a much more joint process. Due to the conflict between the international and locals, the employers have regained much of the lost power complained of by T. G. Plant. In effect, at least in the ILWU and PMA headquarters port of San Francisco, the hiring hall has become a "dispatch hall" for most longshoremen.

Attendance at local membership meetings has fallen to a point where in the last few years already considerably reduced quorums cannot be obtained too often. The large octagonal hall on Northpoint Street, a block from Fisherman's Wharf, was not designed for, nor subsequently adapted to, socializing by longshoremen. It is primarily a place where they get job dispatches, pay fines and assessments, check their time records, and sometimes consult union representatives about grievances. The real sense of belonging and control of the premises was far more pronounced when the local leased space from the old Alaska Fishermen's Union Building on Clay Street.

A look further back into history is needed to gain some understanding of the forces that demanded the transition from the shape-up or early methods of hiring casual longshoremen to the establishment of hiring halls and then the institution of union control within them. Almost two centuries after humans had begun to experience industrial civilization and along with it the establishment of the occupation of longshoring, longshoremen along the Pacific Coast of the United States (and Canada) brought a qualitative improvement to the industry. They took over a right that the employers had attempted to sanctify in the name of "management rights"—control over the hiring process. The motivation that drove them to the 1934 strike did not arise only out of economic need. They made a successful bid for dignity.

The 1934 strikers had the rare luck to be born in the early 1900s and to be wage earners in the accelerated social change period of the 1930s. Hundreds of thousands like them around the world had made the same bid and had been broken. Their success came not only out of their courage and intelligence. It came because history and technology had supplied them with the context and conditions for winning.

Regularized maritime shipping with concentrated docking facilities in the large ports had brought fundamental definition to their occupation. By the end of World War I, it had developed natural boundaries which clearly separated it from other related occupations like waterfront trucking and warehousing. It was possible for longshoremen to have jurisdiction over a definite area of work with minimum fear of conflict from unions

in other occupations. By the 1920s, the longshoremen could fully sense the credibility problem any other occupation would have if it claimed rights to "our work." Occupational divisions on and around the waterfront were so set that in 1921, the employers in Seattle were able to take an invention of the longshoremen and expand it to erect the nation's first central longshore hiring hall. From it, they filled their labor needs at all piers in the port. By itself, the act stands as evidence of uniformity and pattern within the occupation.

The use of the "shape-up" was found in San Francisco right up to 1934, but the longshoremen there were aware of the significance of the Seattle hiring hall and those built shortly after it in San Pedro (Los Angeles) and Portland. Many had seen them and even worked out of them. The function and technology of the halls was common knowledge. The halls enabled the formulation of a demand that became the "common denominator" among the men up and down the coast. The central hiring hall concept had become an undeniable material reality. It was now possible to try to take the halls from the employers in those ports where they existed, and build them where the shape-ups still existed. It was possible for them to agree on a common set of major demands from San Diego to the lumber ports at the Canadian border. A strike or job action in one port could no longer be so easily broken by the standard tactic of re-routing ships away from a "troubled" port to the nearest "quiet" one. In the common demands, there was coastwide mutual support or "solidarity." Out of it a union was born. As Eric Hobsbawm hypothesizes, the prerequisite for the formation of a national or multi-port longshoremen's union is occupational definition and common demands.<sup>1</sup>

By the 1930s there was a development of stevedoring technology and social consciousness that the longshoremen used to make a successful thrust for hiring and job controls. But what forces were at work upon them which made them perceive that the controls were a necessity of work life? What was it that caused the American longshoremen of the Pacific Coast to embark on this, the most radical, large-scale, and long-term experiment with workers' control ever conducted within the longshore industry anywhere in the world? Certainly, at the center of their motivation was the desire to escape further victimization with both the shape-up and employer controlled decasualization schemes, whether they involved simple registration systems or the more complex systems involving employer or "fink" hiring halls.

## The Shape-Up

“Shape-up” is the term used to describe the most common method of hiring on a casual basis. A ship comes to a pier and a boss is sent out to the pier entrance to hire from among whoever is present. To facilitate the bosses’ job, the men have been forced to form a “shape” or semi-circle. The tightly gathered shape of men also increased the competition for jobs. Hired in that atmosphere and condition, it was easier to conduct speedups among them. The fastest and most servile workers got picked again at the next shape-up. I have observed many of the twice daily shape-ups as they occurred in the port of New York before the establishment of city operated hiring halls in the early 1950s which eliminated 75 percent of hiring by the old shape-up.<sup>2</sup> The rank-and-file revolt in the International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA), which culminated in a 1951 strike, uncovered the corruption created in the union by the shape-up. Under pressure, the AFL threatened the ILA with expulsion unless it eliminated the shape-up. The threat was made good. The Port Authority of the City of New York grasped the opportunity. It set up hiring halls run by an appointed waterfront commission and staffed by civil servants.

I have been told by New York longshoremen that corruption persists inside the halls. The job dispatchers are not elected and not answerable to the longshoremen. Corruption comes easily. There is much disgust with the commission’s halls. Favoritism continues. Speak up on the job as a union militant and you suddenly have trouble getting other than “crap” jobs out of the hall.

It is obvious that the halls around the port of New York do not equalize the work opportunities on a port-wide basis. Many of those who could not get on any of the preferred registration lists in the halls continue to make the shape. Insecurity and suspicion abound.

I had the opportunity to see the old New York shape-up during the time that I sailed as a deckhand on merchant ships. I was able to watch the victims at work and talked to several of them at some length. By my observation and their angry admission, the forming of the shape meant they were expected to display great eagerness and physical readiness for work, proclaiming what good workers they were by posture and by facial expression. In short, it was a time for each to show that he was in the best shape both physically and attitudinally. Some would pay the boss money for having been hired, “kicking back” part of their wages. Others would

perform other favors of many kinds. There were stories of individuals who performed unthinkable services. All those chosen were expected to vote "right" in the next union election. The hiring bosses were union men and not direct employer agents.

Actually, I saw some of the consequences of the shape-up before I saw the process itself. In 1943, I was hired as a replacement on a ship that had just arrived from the West Coast. It was tied up in Brooklyn. At the time that I boarded it, the longshoremen were busy stowing cargo deep in the holds. But then came the time when the holds were filled and covered. That morning longshoremen were hired to give us a deck load. A variety of trucks, airplanes, and two small locomotives were brought aboard and landed in place. Dozens of men were assigned the task of shoring up and lashing objects to the deck. They were working in our (the deck crew's) work domain instead of down below. Most of them argued violently with each other the entire day. For a number of our crew it was the first time into New York as seamen. On the West Coast the longshoremen did a lot of yelling, but it was mainly about how to get the work done, never because of conflicts arising out of competition for jobs. We were stunned.

I remember some of those longshoremen to this day, especially a nearly hysterical middle-aged man threatening another with a hammer and yelling, "I'll be here when you're in a county home. Call *me* a kiss ass, shit! I came down here to work, not screw around. Who the fuck are you to act so goddamned holy. I've got pride too, but I keep it inside. You won't last down here." There were other "conversations" of the same sort, but I wrote that one down. In my naïveté, I spoke to another longshoreman standing nearby in about the following way: "For Christ sake, why do these guys want to fight among themselves? What they need is a union." He smiled at me tolerantly from his vantage point as an older man. My criticism was out of context with the reality of longshore life in New York. He answered, more ready to educate than to reject the intruder: "You're right, we do need a union. We got a union. But this isn't the West Coast. Some of us will be hired at lunch time to come back this afternoon and finish this ship up. Why don't you come out to the gate and see how it's done? And keep in mind that in this port there are about twenty thousand of us. At these piers we're all Italian. At others they're all Coloreds, or Irish, and so on." He smiled back at me as he walked forward up the deck to his work.

I went to the pier gate at noon. In accordance with regular practice, all those who had worked that morning had been laid off at noon and were beginning to shape with those who had not been chosen to work that

morning—and who had waited the morning for another chance at four hours of employment. What I saw at first filled me with irritation. Why didn't they refuse to submit to the treatment? When the hiring bosses appeared the focus of my anger switched to those who ran the system. The longshoreman who two hours earlier had momentarily been my mentor had humbled me, though. There were as many longshoremen in New York as on the entire Pacific Coast. The system was entrenched at all the piers, in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Staten Island, and New Jersey. Any rebellion against it would be crushed immediately unless it involved a large portion of those in the port. Split up as they were by urban geography, pier, race, ethnic groupings, and local unions, who was to risk being the first to dissent? The revolt would come one day and when it did, many would get hurt. The decisions and the timing would have to be theirs. In the meantime, onlookers with critical attitudes, even though basically sympathetic to the longshoremen, could easily bring further damage to their self-images, prolonging the coming of the time when the shape-up would be challenged.

My observation of the shape-up fascinated me. From that point on, when sailing off the East Coast I watched the process at every opportunity. At first my main purpose was simply to try to understand how humans could allow themselves to undergo such indignities. Only later did I become primarily concerned with understanding how the system came into existence, how it was maintained despite the disgust with it, and by what means it would one day be eliminated.

### Non-Union Hiring Halls

The Waterfront Commission of the City of New York operates hiring halls, but within them has the shape-up continued? That was the earlier experience in maritime when the halls were not under the control of the workers, but instead operated by the employers or a governmental agency like the U.S. Shipping Board. The longshoremen called the employer operated halls put into use in the ports of Los Angeles, Seattle, and Portland in the early 1920s "roofs over the shape-up" or "fink halls." It is also my belief that any hiring system not controlled directly by those hired will degenerate into a fink hall-type setup. Writing in 1915 about the shape-up in New York, Charles B. Barnes stated that the longshoremen in earlier years did not shape at the pier, but across the street. "It was a point greatly insisted upon by the men that they should force the foremen to come there, because thereby they gained a certain prestige in the hiring . . . Since 1887, the prestige so insisted upon has been lost."<sup>3</sup> In some period of



employment no doubt, first one and then a handful and then more crossed the street to the pier to gain advantage. Those longshoremen who sought to discipline them were thereafter overlooked by the hiring bosses. Finally, all had to cross the street in order to survive.

People who are selected for work like cattle cannot be happy. It will affect the entirety of their daily lives. Work is a decisive factor in self-image. Even those favorites in the "top six" of the hiring foremen will ache with indignity, at the very same time that they are supporting and "benefiting" economically from the system. Those who are seen to be "making it" in situations where total conformity is the only way to achieve and sustain a livelihood are people in crisis.

To know you are beating someone else out of something, even though you compete in order to survive, is to be torn. Institutions that build in competition for the right to eat create guilt in those who inhabit them. There is a feeling that the cry of "traitor" has been made and hangs high in the room.

The deepest and potentially most dangerous relationships to the employers are those created on the job. Two longshoremen who had banged against one another in the scramble to get hired would find themselves working as partners. There were those instances where each learned the other had a work personality that made him a good partner. One was well coordinated, the other worked safely and in established rhythm, one knew a lot of stories and the other liked them, one noticed the other picked up his end of the load and the other was able to return the silent compliment. When two men like this were able to work together from time to time while maintaining overall membership in one of the large cliques of the pier, some hardly verbalized but clearly understood bargains got struck and the company in question had lost some control in the shape-up process.

Due to the unique nature of longshore work during the movement of break-bulk cargoes, it is difficult for bosses to stop the creation of deep-seated work relationships. Work eight to ten hours alongside another human lifting 135 to 160 pound coffee sacks, even heavier crates, or building interlocking tiers of canned goods cases, and in that coordinated motion of the two people an emotional bond is made. There is the joint pride that they can "put out a day's work" with some style, and the sense of being jointly exploited. In periods when resistance has arisen based on these relationships, the employers have done whatever they could to break them up. This is the reason why there has been a propensity for shape-up hirings to cover shorter and shorter periods. They have often started out

with a procedure that allows those hired the day of the arrival of a ship to work that ship until it leaves the pier; then when conflict has ensued the time has been cut to a single day's work. (New York's twice a day shape-up represented an all-out fight of the employers against the informal organizations among the men.) In an industry where production is entirely dependent upon men working as partners in gangs, organization comes naturally. The New York employers decided that the expense of a second shape-up during each ship working day was a good investment if it could continually atomize the organization that had occurred in the waterfront during the previous four hours.

### The Low-Man-Out Job Dispatching System

The San Francisco central hiring hall opened for the dispatching of longshoremen to all jobs in the entire port on March 4, 1935, or almost five months after the issuance of the award. The original work-sharing, rotation, or "low-man-out" system underwent a number of changes during the first dozen years of its use. The system is described here as it has operated since World War II. The purpose of the low-man-out system is to equalize work opportunities. It would be unfair to attempt to equalize simply the work and resulting wages because it is improbable that even a small minority of workers would or could accept every work opportunity offered; that is the nature of the industry. Unlike the majority of work situations in which there is a standard five-day week, ships have to be worked on arrival if at all possible. Thus, the labor force, or portions of it, have to be available on a seven-day basis each and every week of the year. In the late 1950s, the San Francisco longshoremen averaged approximately four and one-half days a week on an annual basis. There were weeks in which some worked seven. Others, because of age, disabilities, and life style, chose to work less.

To maintain registered status, longshoremen must work eight hundred hours a year, spread over the year, or an average of approximately two days a week. To qualify for vacations, health and welfare benefits, and pensions they must work almost fourteen hundred hours annually, or average a little over three days a week. If they become sick or disabled they are given hours of credit toward qualification on a pro-rated basis, but of course receive no wages for those hours.

Longshoremen who have joined gangs are referred to as "gang men" and the men who have not were known as "plug men." The latter term remained in use for some years after the use of the plug board and plugs

was dropped, but sometime in the late 1950s the term fell out of the vocabulary and the non-gang men became known as those who "work out of the hall." Because I am writing mainly about waterfront life as it was in the 1950s, however, and because the label is simpler to use, I shall here refer to the men who are not gang members as plug men.

On any longshore morning or afternoon, right up to the present, the gangs or plug men who have made themselves available for work on their shift get assigned to jobs on the basis of the number of hours accredited to them. The gang or plug man with the lowest hours is assigned first, then those with the next lowest number of hours are assigned, and then the next, and so on. If the jobs run out before all those available have been assigned, the assignments start out the next day where assignments stopped on the previous day. Those who worked on that previous day and who return to the hall for assignment take their proper place behind those who were not called the day before. If the number of men available all take assignments and there are more jobs to be filled, casuals are obtained from outside sources.

I have stated above that longshoremen are assigned in rotation on the basis of the number of hours accredited to them. That is because few if any have worked all the hours accredited to them. If they have for any reason failed to make themselves available for dispatch less than five days in any week, or if they have failed to accept an assignment on any day they have committed themselves to work by signing in with the dispatchers as available for work, then by codified system they must add specified amounts of hours to those already worked or accredited to them. In a manner of speaking they have "moved toward the end of the line" of those available and waiting for work.

The system appears complex. It is, particularly to those who have not operated within it. There are few such democratic systems in use in our society, and thus little familiarity with them. So far, I have described the system only in barest outline. It cannot be understood fully or in context without the additional detail I am about to provide.

In 1958, San Francisco operated as a 206 gang port with 3,273 registered longshoremen. Approximately 35 percent of the work was done by night men and about that percentage of the total gangs and registered men were "on nights." One thousand seven hundred ninety-seven registered men were regular members of gangs; membership in day gangs averaged 7.5 men and 11.0 men in night gangs. Registered men worked 6,373,000 hours for an average of 1,950 per man and the 4,607 casuals worked 560,00 hours

or an average of 122 per man. Of the total hours worked by registered men, 3,249,000 were worked by gang men and 3,124,000 by plug men; the average number of hours worked by gang men as individuals was 1,808 hours; the average day gang was dispatched to work 1,875 hours during the year, and night gangs, 1,878 hours. All gangs got within 50 hours of the annual average work opportunity. As can be seen, despite the magnitude of the task, the system kept work opportunity amazingly equal. The single and apparent exception lies in the fact that gang men as individuals averaged 131 hours more than the plug men's average of 1,677.<sup>4</sup> However, broken down from hours into monetary terms, the average annual wage of the plug men was approximately \$5,300, compared to an approximate average of \$5,700 for gang men. It is highly improbable that this \$400 differential was great enough to pressure the plug men to give up the freedom of movement allowed by plug status for the more routine life of permanent membership in a gang.

The magnitude of the dispatching task and its complex technology is revealed as still greater when it is seen that the orders to be filled call for a number of different skill categories. Discharge gangs for break-bulk cargo jobs in San Francisco are composed of 12 men: 1 gang boss, 2 winch drivers, 1 jitney driver, 6 hold men, and 2 sling or "hook-on" men on the dock. Loading gangs have 14 men because 2 men are added to the 6 in the hold. It was common, but not always the case in the 1950s and early 1960s, for a gang to have a steady core composed of a gang boss, 2 winch drivers, 2 hook-on men, a jitney driver, and possibly a hold man. Among them and at different times, days off had to be taken when the rest of the gang was working, and so replacements had to be ordered from the hall. There were also the orders to be filled for extra dock men, line men, shovelers, sugar handlers, grain and lumber men.

Order is maintained in this massive system by an intricate record-keeping system in which every longshoreman must participate. The gang bosses keep records of the number of hours worked by their gang, but each man in the gang keeps an individual record so that he can go to the hall and get into his proper place with the plug men if he decides to work on days when his gang is not working. Each plug man must keep a record of his own hours so that he can operate in the system knowledgeably at all times. The dispatchers make assignments of gangs and plug men on the basis of hours as reported to them by the gang bosses and individual plug men. The cumulated records of all gangs and plug men are also recorded daily in the Records Office next to the hiring hall and retained for at least a year.

At the end of each quarter of a calendar year, all hours of work opportunity accredited to both gangs and plug men go back to zero. On the first day of each new quarter the gangs and men in the hail are assigned in the order in which they signed in. As the quarter passes, the hours accredited to each begin to pile up and variations begin to occur. Toward the end of the quarter the gang with the highest hours might have as many as fifty more than the lowest. A similar spread develops in the hours of the plug men. But the number of men (and gangs) at the extreme ends of the spread is few. Most are clustered in between with much smaller differences.

When a gang is assigned to a ship, it has the right to work its shift on each day that it takes to complete the cargo handling job required by the ship. The gang also has the right to replace itself and take time off before the ship finishes, but this is discouraged and is unusual. If the gang does not get a "call back" to the ship, then the gang boss must list the date when his gang intends to be available again for assignment. In addition, if the gang is not called back, but intends to be available for assignment the next day, the sheet must list how many men, of what skill categories, will be needed to bring the gang to full strength.

When a plug man is assigned to a gang, he has the right to stay with it for the duration of the job on the particular ship. When the job is earlier and he chooses to make himself available for work the following day, he must go to the hiring hall and sign a "sign-in sheet" for his skill category; on the sheet he writes his registration number and beside it his number of accumulated hours.

From the sign-in sheets the dispatchers make a "master sheet" for each skill category: "Extra Bosses," "Winch Drivers," "Jitney Drivers," "Dock Men," "Hold Men," "Shovelers," and other special skills, plus a "Dock Exemption" sheet for men who are partially disabled and can take only lighter types of work. The latter excludes hold jobs altogether.

On each Master Sheet the registration numbers appear under the hours as reported on the sign-in sheets, by the half hour. The lowest heading will be at the top of the sheet. If for example it is 220 (hours), the next will be 220½, the next 221, and so on down the sheet to the highest heading of hours. The hall opens every morning before dawn and the dispatchers are at work by six o'clock. The first half hour is spent handling special problems caused by mistakes in reporting by the working longshoremen, or by them (the dispatchers) in transcription. Then too, there is the need to sign in men who worked overtime to such a late hour on the previous evening that they could not get to the hall and sign in before 7 p.m. when the dispatchers collect the sheets.

## The Technology of Dispatching

At six-thirty the dispatching process begins. Each category is called to a different dispatch window. The accumulated hours are called over a public address system and flashed on a board in lights. The men with the number of hours called line up at the proper window and take their assignments. Another hour category is called as soon as they have been given jobs. When there are more men available and waiting, then as the last of the jobs are being assigned, the men are called individually by registration number rather than in gangs by hours. As the last job is assigned the dispatchers mark the point on the Master Sheet by the registration number called so that all will know at what hours the calls will begin on the following morning. Ideally, the dispatching process is done by half past seven. The day shift begins at eight and the piers are from one block to twenty-five miles away from the hall. By the time that the morning dispatch begins the dispatchers have already decided on a strategy that will best get all the jobs filled. They have the orders for gangs that were placed the previous afternoon by the stevedoring companies; they have the reports from the gang bosses which tell them how many gangs are available to go to new jobs and how many men of what skill category will be needed to fill out the gangs; and they have the lists of plug men who signed in the previous evening. If the number of orders is particularly large and the dispatchers see that they will probably "clean the hall out" before filling all orders, they will then make a judgment as to which orders demand experienced hands, and which gangs they will have to supply with cadre of skilled hands so that the casuals will have skilled direction.

The dispatchers are prepared each morning with master orders they have made out for each gang. As the plug men come to the dispatch window, each in turn gives his registration number and it is written on the master order by the dispatcher. When the order obtains the proper number of registration numbers it is marked "filled" and will be sent to the records office later in the day.

## The Accommodation of the Dispatch Process to Longshore Partnerships

As each longshoreman gets his turn at the window, he states his registration number and is given a dispatch ticket which lists that number, the name of the gang boss, and the pier location of the ship. He then goes to the pier and before eight o'clock seeks out the waiting gang boss and turns in his ticket. If he is a dock or hold man and has a partner who was

dispatched with him to the same job, he may turn in two tickets or one ticket listing numbers of both himself and his partner. If he is alone he may then try to learn who the other men are and at that point seek to make a partnership for that day or for the duration of that job.

The importance of the low-man-out system's accommodation to partnerships cannot be underestimated. It reveals one of the system's basic humanist features. If two men find qualities in each other's personalities, skills, and attitudes toward work complementary, the work life is immeasurably enriched. However, the work puts the men into pairs at such close contact that even the smallest personal idiosyncrasy can be disruptive. Partnerships are formed and broken, temporarily or permanently, every day along the waterfront.

The most common pattern among plug men is that they develop a circle of friends among whom they naturally rotate as partners. A man works regularly with a partner for a period and then one or both of them gets bored or irritated. Or one may have to take time off and the other continues to work. In either case, at a later date they may again take up the partnership. A low-man-out system problem then arises: how are they to get dispatched together if they have different hour totals? This is solved by having the man with the lower hours sign in with the same number of hours as the higher man. One man takes a penalty in order to preserve the partnership. The other will reciprocate at a later date, if not with this partner, then with another. The longshoremen see it as a minor problem which equals out over time.

When plug men arrive at their turn before the dispatch window, they will in most cases give the dispatchers in question some indication of preference. "Have you got anything in the East Bay?" is commonly asked by the men who live there and do not want to face fighting the Oakland Bay Bridge traffic after a day's work. Some men prefer to work particular piers because they live close enough to them to go home for lunch. Others indicate preference by cargo or when they see the rushed dispatcher about to assign them they ask "What is it?" The dispatcher knows the meaning of the question by the tone in which it was asked. The dispatcher will know if it's an objectionable cargo and whether or not he reveals the knowledge will depend upon how rushed he is and how difficult a time he is going to have filling the job. If the longshoreman finds or strongly suspects the assignment is for a gang working a cargo that is seriously objectionable to him and the dispatcher cannot or will not offer

him anything better, he has the right to turn the job down and walk away from the window without fear of disciplinary retaliation. This is called "flopping."

A man who has flopped is not required to give any excuse or explanation; he simply moves away from the window. He may in fact do this for any reason. It may be that he simply dislikes the gang boss or members of the gang he was about to be assigned to, for personal reasons, previous on-the-job conflicts, or because of that gang's work style. If, however, he accepts the assignment and fails to show up on the job, he is subject to be called before the union's grievance committee and then the Joint Port Labor Relations Committee. The penalties can range from a few days' loss of right to dispatch, to deregistration (termination) if the offense is repeated. The term "flop" also describes what has happened when a longshoreman has signed in as being available for the day and fails for any reason to come to the dispatch window when his hours are called, be it absence, tardiness, or inattentiveness.

#### "Take Six" or "Take Average"

The only penalty for taking a legitimate flop is that the flopped man must sign in again with a high probability that he will not get another chance at assignment on the day of the flop. After leaving the window, if he intends to try to get a job the following day, he signs in again. But, he cannot sign in again on the same hours at which he was just called to the dispatch window. On each day's Master Sheets, the dispatchers calculate and list the average hours of all the men on the sheet. If the flopped worker was below the average of that day he signs in on the average hours of the following day. If at the time of the flop, the man in question was above the average on the Master Sheet that day, he must sign in at his hours on that day plus six hours. In either case, whether he has "taken six" or "taken average" and signed in, his registration number will be on the Master Sheet of the following day under the proper hour's heading, provided neither he nor the dispatchers have made mistakes in calculation or transcription.

A man who flops has another chance at a job on the same day only if there is a lot of work and the hall is "cleaned" of all the men on the Master Sheet. In that eventuality, the man who has flopped can take any of the remaining jobs. The dispatchers have some autonomy here and if the flopped man is needed badly enough they may allow him to "wipe



out" his flop in return for accepting an assignment that sorely needs to be filled. A gang cannot work if a single vacancy exists. The chances of wiping out the flop are even better if the assignment involves a late start or work on onerous cargo.

### The Question of Availability

From "the beginning" (1934), the major objection of the employers to the low-man-out system, after objections based on fear of workers' control, was that with the amount of freedom provided by the system, longshoremen would not make themselves available for work in sufficient numbers to meet the needs of the port. For some years employers have attempted to impose a requirement which would demand that every registered longshoreman be available in the hall for work 70 percent of the days in each calendar month. It was unenforceable and caused few serious availability crises over the years.

The normal desire among longshoremen to fulfill their material and work career needs, plus the already described penalty incentives built into the low-man-out dispatching system, have been sufficient to keep longshoremen available in ample amounts to satisfy the port's needs.

The 1958 gang shortage which allegedly added 1 percent to total stevedoring costs was caused because the employers and the union had for a dozen years failed to register new men to replace labor force losses due to regular attrition. In 1959, the Joint Port Labor Relations Committee of San Francisco registered over 750 new longshoremen (B-men) in June and August, a precipitous addition of approximately 25 percent to the registered workforce.<sup>5</sup>

### Vacations as a Dispatching Problem

The variables that exist in the task of supplying skilled labor the year round are many and give further indication that dispatching is a skill in itself. In addition to the fact that the longshoremen can, within limits, choose the days they will take off during each week, and can choose to take time off for personal reasons or because of disabilities and illness, there is also the problem of vacations. Although the summer months are those in which shipping activity is greatest, vacations are scheduled by the Joint Port Labor Relations Committee by fairly even distribution among the total registered labor force between May and October. During each week of this six-month period in 1958, eight gangs and sixty plug men were scheduled to begin vacations that averaged three weeks' duration.

Thus, in each week during the May–October period, about twenty-four gangs were not available.<sup>6</sup>

Formal leaves of absence can be obtained by appearance before the local union executive board and the Joint Port Labor Relations Committee, providing good cause is shown. If they are for periods of several months they can cause failure to qualify for health and welfare, vacation, and pension benefits in the year of the leave.

Informal leaves of absence can be taken at any time without disciplinary penalties provided sufficient hours are worked in the year to maintain registration (eight hundred), or provided the hours worked are sufficient to sustain contractual “fringe benefits.” Informal leaves are taken simply by not signing in for work. Upon return, the man on leave obtains eligibility for assignment once again simply by signing in “on average.”

Once in each week a longshoreman is allowed to “square off,” or take a day off without having to add penalty hours, six on average, to his accredited account of hours. To obtain this right he must sign in on the regular “sign-in” sheet by listing his registration number and hours as usual, but then in addition he draws a “square” around those numbers. On the following day the Master Sheet will list his registration number and hours, again with a square drawn around them, and the next day the dispatchers automatically carry his registration number and some hours over onto the Master Sheet for that day without his having had to sign in again.

In periods of light labor demand, longshoremen who are signed in for Sunday work and who do not show to answer call for assignment are not flopped. They are carried over to the next day’s Master Sheet without penalty as if they were squared off. This gives added work opportunity to those who do show for work in the hall.

### Abuses of the System

The elaborate rules of the low-man-out system were necessary first of all in order to democratize job opportunity while at the same time getting skilled labor to the job when and as needed in an efficient manner. More rules were then needed to give the longshoremen the ability to keep the system under some collective scrutiny in order to avoid individual abuses of it. Finally, more rules still were necessary in order to give longshoremen, as individuals, freedom within it. At one level, just lack of knowledge of the system’s requirements can mean that a longshoreman fails for a time to qualify for pensions, vacations, or health plans. However, a longshoreman who violates the rules can lose his job.

## Chiseling

The various forms of cheating to get unfair advantage over others in the dispatching process are the one serious and conscious abuse of the low-man-out system by individual longshoremen. The most common methods of cheating are as follows:

1. Deliberately signing in on hours lower than those actually worked or accumulated so as to receive a dispatch before actually becoming the low man on the Master Sheet;
2. Knowingly going to the dispatch window for assignment before proper turn even though signed in correctly;
3. Bypassing the hiring hall and/or dispatch process by taking a job directly from a gang boss when the hall is open or when the gang boss deliberately failed to order men in order to accomplish an illegal hire (this violation is almost unheard of);
4. Signing in with lower than actual accumulated hours by mistake, learning of the mistake, and failing to correct it.

Chiseling is also committed for reasons other than to gain more than a fair share of job opportunity. Often it is committed to allow the violator to work with a partner without having to add hours, or to work in a gang, on a cargo, or at a pier of his personal preference. In those cases where the violator goes to the window for assignment with other longshoremen who have fewer hours than he has (as listed in number 2 above), it is often the case that the man gets no better job and no more than his fair share of job opportunities. He may have seen that there were more than enough jobs for the men available on that day and so went up out of turn in order to work with friends or to be closer to home. But if this were to be allowed it would make it difficult if not impossible to catch the violators who take early dispatches to make "an extra buck."

Chiselers are sometimes caught by vigilant dispatchers or longshoremen when still in the hall or when they get to the job on the same day. In the main, however, they are found out as a result of periodic spot checks of records by union or management records checkers.

## Unequal Application of the Rules and Frame-Ups

Because of the complexity of the rules and the detailed bookkeeping system in which the dispatchers and longshoremen are involved, it is easy

to victimize anyone who has antagonized those with high official union power. (Local union officials cannot hold office for more than two consecutive one-year terms. After serving two years, they must by constitutional order work again as longshoremen for at least a year before once again standing for office.) Mistakes are bound to be made in the massive transcription of hours that occurs daily. There is time to spot check the records of only a small percentage of the longshoremen. Those with top union offices are able, if they choose, to put the hours records of any who are considered "enemies" under constant surveillance. The methods of keeping dispatch records are such that changes in the records can be made by those officials with open access to them. If the accusation of chiseling is made more than a day or two after the alleged offense, the sign-in sheets on which the offense supposedly occurred are already destroyed. A conviction can then take place without presentation of "direct fact." This was true, for example, when I was fired along with eighty-one other longshoremen. At one point I was accused of chiseling. There was no prima facie evidence to which I or others could get access in order to disprove the allegation. The officers of Local 10 investigated the accusation against me and reported to the membership that I was absolutely innocent. The international union's committee reported to the employers that I was guilty and together they acted upon the accusation as if it were fact.

It is logical that it is the victims of bureaucratic corruption who call for its reform. The ranks of the ILWU permit abuse of the low-man-out system, out of the failure of too many to examine it closely for fault and then make the needed corrections. Just above I have given examples of a critical fault by which criticism and dissent within the union can be splintered and silenced. Failure to make needed reforms in the dispatch system—which is the foundation of the union—threatens the basis of union strength and currently that can mean the virtual extinction of the longshore occupation. It is dialectical as well as ironic that the system which established the union's strength should also contain within it the basis for coercion on which a highly developed bureaucracy can grow.

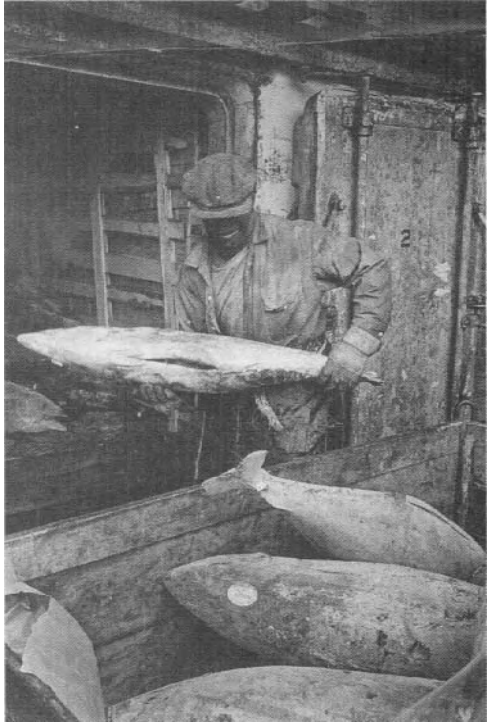
The low-man-out system is the most precious of the union's institutions. But it is in need of still more rules. There are all kinds of penalties for rank and filers who abuse the system, but precious few, if any, for bureaucratic abuses of it. To my knowledge the ranks have never taken on a section of the top officialdom which was hounding a longshoreman inside the dispatch process.

Thus, one of the most prized results of the low-man-out system is being

lost because the ranks at no time over the years have taken fuller control of the dispatch system and the record-keeping process. There is no reason why all longshoremen could not perform the dispatcher's job for brief periods by rotational turn, maintaining two regular dispatchers as cadre and instructors. But that is only one alternative plan and there are others, any of which might help to prevent bureaucratic abuse of the system. It is quite obvious that the ten dollars which each longshoreman pays each month as his pro-rata share for the upkeep and maintenance of the hall does not purchase each a complete enough citizenship in the system. It is improbable that the longshoremen entering the "dispatch hall" of today find the sense of security they found in it thirty-five, twenty-five, or even fifteen years ago. Not only has rank-and-file power been weakened in the dispatch process, but the power by which the ranks once used to get what they wanted from both the employers and union officials—job action power—has been cut off by the employers and those officials with the aid of heavy legal penalties for any failure to use the arbitration process. In the last analysis, the job rather than the union hall is the basis of the longshoremen's strength.

(1975)

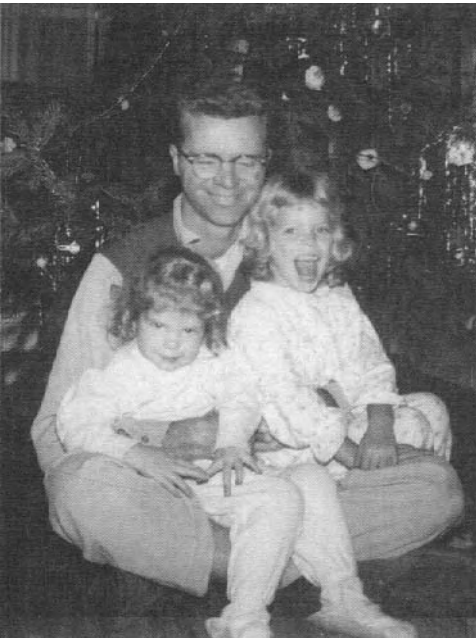
Longshore worker, 1962.  
Photograph by Paul Hassel.



Longshore work, 1962. Photograph by Paul Hassel.

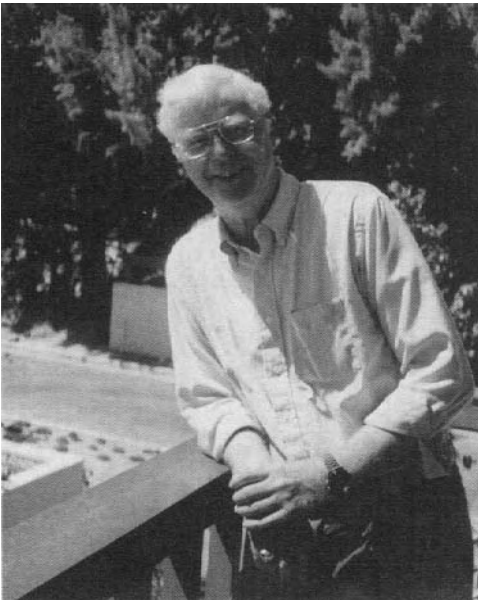


Mary and Stan Weir at Seal Beach, 1947. Photograph by Albert Glotzer.



Stan Weir and daughters Laurie and Kim (later Hari Simran), circa 1958.

Mary Knox Weir, 1968.



Stan Weir, 1985.





Stan and Mary Weir with grandson Stefan, 1990.



Mary Knox Weir and daughters Hari Simran and Laurie, 1989.

## Review of *Punishment and Redress in a Modern Factory* by Carl Gersuny

I was an industrial worker for over twenty years. For most of that time I was a shop steward or grievance bargaining representative. I was fired several times. For seven years, from 1968 to 1975, I regularly conducted classes in grievance handling for local union stewards in a variety of industries and I regret that Carl Gersuny's book was not available to me for all of that period.

There are twenty million union members in America. Nationally, the membership attendance at union meetings averages just over 2 percent on an annual basis. For the overwhelming majority, the union side of the grievance handling process is "the union." The stewards or "lowest" echelon of representatives who provide aggrieved workers with counsel at the initial step of the grievance procedure are usually the only union officials with whom the ranks have any personal contact. The grievances they process, particularly those involving punishment, and the settlements they obtain are the subject of numerous conversations, both open and hushed. It is rare to find a workplace in which a sizeable portion of the actual felt grievances get formally and officially filed. Fear of the existing quasi-judicial system—or lack of confidence in it—is widespread. It is often the case that the grievances placed in the "machinery" really represent a dozen or more unstated ones. It is common to find workplaces in which most union members look upon their contract's grievance procedure as woefully inadequate or worse, but it is the one option for legal redress available. At the same time that minor forms of industrial sabotage are at all-time highs, grievance machineries remain overloaded. There is hardly a product or service delivered to the consumer that has not somewhere along the way been affected by this complex drama. The entire experience grinds on without benefit of a literature to provide the many discussions of it with structure, continuity, or societal recognition.

The publication of Gersuny's book is a positive event. After two brief

introductory chapters it drops the jargon and formalism which characterize so many academic studies of collective bargaining and offers a real learning experience. It contains two case studies. The first involves an analysis of 255 disciplinary penalties. All were appealed through a grievance machinery by a local union in a Ford Motor Company plant with seventeen hundred hourly rated employees. Gersuny has categorized the grievances by type of offense, degree of penalty, the technological setting within the factory from which they emerged, and the skill categories of the penalized. In addition, the author examines the differentials in punishment according to the race, age, and job seniority of the accused grievants. Success in obtaining redress is then scrutinized and success comparisons are made between the two different regimes of local union officials that held power during the four-year period of the study's focus. The result provides rare opportunities for those who have no access to the factory worlds that lie shut off behind chain link fences and time card racks.

It is regrettable that the material in Gersuny's book is not presented or marketed for mass distribution so as to reach some of the people who punch the time clocks. It will reach their opponents, who as always have regular access to university libraries. That some factory bands might sharply disagree with a portion of the author's conclusions is a plus. Gersuny has provided audiences with a chance to expand debate and a model for structuring an area of experience. This in turn makes it easier for readers to more systematically structure and assimilate their own experience with the institution that collective bargaining has become.

As an extension of the disciplinary penalty case study, Gersuny discusses the role of gambling in factory subcultures or how the "underlife of the factory emerges in the nooks and crannies of the formal organization, in areas beyond the control of the official chain of command." One senses the author's pleasure with this subject matter and wishes there could have been more of it.

The second case study involves the discharge of twenty workers (in a plant of eight thousand) for their alleged leadership of a five-day wildcat strike. The discharges in the first case study were for individual rule infractions such as absenteeism, careless workmanship, and theft. In the second, the firings were a response to that form of strike that places its participants in collective confrontation with both management and the official union leadership. The mutineers were of course dealt with much more strictly than those with individually rather than collectively expressed problems of adaptation to factory life. In witnessing the comparison, the

readers are led right up to that point where the decisive political control issues of the workplace begin to emerge and from which the humans involved can no longer remain abstractions.

Since World War II, American workers have lost the right to strike to obtain redress of grievances during the life of their collective bargaining agreements. A modicum of due process is afforded only to those disciplinary "cases" who do not openly seek a change in the present institution of collective bargaining. Now, more than in the 1930s, Americans lose their rights as citizens while they are on the employers' property or time. The language of labor contracts includes few of the due process concepts as spelled out in the Constitution and Bill of Rights. Employers have the right to immediately suspend or fire employees (make bodies disappear from the places of work) and keep them outcast, as if guilty until proven innocent beyond a reasonable doubt. The grievance procedures do provide appeal channels, but contain nothing like an industrial counterpart of the writ of habeas corpus. *Ex post facto* rules and bills of attainder (guilt by association) are still common employer weapons. Few of the thousands in the labor force who are fired each year are provided with representation and a full and final list of accusations at the moment that the disciplinary action against them is initiated.

Few workers are allowed the right to face accusing witnesses or a compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in their own behalf. Most forget that they have the right not to testify against themselves and routinely make inaccurate and damaging admissions before obtaining counsel. This is only the beginning of the long list of missing rights that could be made. Putting aside for an instant problems like those created because most industrial workers "must work as directed" and are contractually denied the right to apply any sizeable amount of their creative powers in the production process occurring immediately around them, the year of the Bicentennial provides a reminder that in the founding documents of the nation there is a set of criteria for judging the condition of punishment and redress in the American workplace.

(1976)

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## VII. The Failure of Business Unionism, the Rank and File Alternative

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## American Labor on the Defensive

### *A 1940s Odyssey*

It is impossible to discuss the condition of American labor in the 40s without brief mention of international working-class developments during the quarter century prior to the World War II decade, and without some examination of the formative period of the CIO in the 30s.

The Russian Revolution of 1917, still the epochal event of this century, experienced totalitarian reversal by the time of the General Strikes in San Francisco and Minneapolis. In what had been the Soviet Union there were no free functioning workers' councils or unions. The valiant revolutionary attempts made in Germany, Finland, Poland, and Hungary right after World War I had been crushed. The British General Strike of 1926, the Chinese Revolution of 1927–29, and the Spanish Revolution of 1931–39 all ended in bitter tragedy. Near-revolutionary situations were checked in Germany during the years just before Hitler came to power, and in France and Austria soon after. These defeats in turn made the drift toward world war inexorable. The major factor in the ability of the United States to pull out of the Great Depression in the 30s was the expanding market for war products. The resulting growth in employment provided mass-production workers with the main part of their ability to organize. It is ironic that the more rapidly the condition developed that would allow five million workers to join CIO unions in three years (1937–40), the nearer would come the war that so tremendously accelerated the elimination of rank-and-file power in the new unions.

The 1935 decision of John L. Lewis to form a Committee of Industrial Organizations inside the AFL was a response to the seemingly spontaneous formation of independent local industrial unions—a movement that appeared as early as 1932. Lewis was not a radical social visionary, but he had great ambition supported by just as great an administrative ability. The leader of the one major union that was already industrial by nature, he recognized the power to be had from centralizing the new and mainly



isolated industrial unions that were beginning to organize. Technology and historical circumstance selected him to head the drive. A hardened bureaucrat, he was faced with the need to respond rapidly, before the workplace revolts centralized themselves independently of any established bureaucratic structure and ideology. He had organizers, but not enough to accomplish such a “Herculean” job. He was forced to seek an alliance with the Communists, the only grouping that could provide him with what he lacked. They had cadres of organizers trained in the handling of radical situations during the Third Period of the Communist International, when it was their policy to organize dual unions. They eagerly responded to the offer extended by Lewis.

It is a tragedy that the often heroic activity of Communist field organizers was used for bureaucratic ends by Lewis and the top Communist Party labor policy makers. Down “below” in the ranks of the workers there was indeed a form of revolution in progress. The mass introduction of assembly-line techniques, particularly during the First World War and the 20s, had finally created the basis for the industrial unionism so long called for in various forms by the IWW, the Socialist Labor Party of Daniel De Leon, and the Socialist Party of Eugene Debs. The workers who began to organize their own unions right after the Depression, however, viewed the industrial union organizational model as a means, not an end. They had become witness to the calculated “de-skilling” of millions of jobs. They had seen their nation nearly come apart in the credibility crisis of the Herbert Hoover administration. It was apparent to all that there was no political or economic stability at the international level. The press reported the existence of workers’ struggles in other lands. These factors merged to create a liberating effect. Mass production, transportation, and maritime workers led an attempt to make a fundamental change in the nature of contract and grievance bargaining.

As practiced by the AFL unions prior to the 30s, collective bargaining had degenerated into negotiation for demands that are marginal to the one that is central in the daily life of all who work—that is, the amount of work that is to be done each day to obtain a wage. AFL leaders bargained for more pay and economic benefits, but did nothing to negotiate restrictions that would keep employers from getting back wage increases via unrestrained productivity programs. The new unions that would create the foundation of the CIO very early forced demands onto bargaining tables that were openly designed to increase employment and to limit speedups or increased workloads.

While the first demand of the new unions had to be for union recognition, the motivation was improvement of working conditions. These unions would seek higher wages, impose work rules to check productivity drives, and obtain steward systems to daily police the gains won at the tables.

By its very nature, the drive that brought the right to bargain individual grievances as well as collective contracts became more than a union organizational campaign. Now, each night in industrial centers across the land, as thousands of "semi-skilled" production workers returned to their neighborhoods, homes, and families, fewer came to supper tables with bellies already full from a day's experience with submission. The nature of American home life experienced some liberation as summary firings and foremen's abilities to play favorites diminished. The side effects of the improvement were many; they are of major importance, but they are seldom discussed. Black workers, for example, had participated in the building of the new unions and thereafter utilized the grievance procedures like other workers. While this was a routine expression of union progress, however, it demanded that the whites observing it jettison a whole set of old cultural beliefs on how blacks supposedly act toward bosses while on the job. While few blacks had illusions that the CIO would bring them full equality on the job, it provided some ways for them to demonstrate to themselves and others the vital role they were performing in American industry.

Due to the nature of work in a number of industries, it was possible for the new unions to negotiate direct limitations on production. One of the best examples of this is provided by the West Coast longshoremen who, in the period right after the 1934 San Francisco General Strike, won and enforced the demand that no more than 2,100 pounds of break-bulk cargo could be hoisted on any sling, board, or net. Previously there was no limit at all. Loads up to five thousand pounds were not uncommon. The limitation was secondarily a safety factor; its first function was to break the production routine in half with more than twice as many of the pauses that are necessitated by landing in or hoisting out loads. The "make work" demands that came out of factory situations could seldom be so direct. The rubber workers obtained a six-hour day while imposing some checks on their employers' ability to increase individual productivity. In other factory-ized industries, piecework was eliminated or modified and standard hourly rates of pay were established, while inroads were made toward relatively more livable production quotas. The United Auto

Workers, during the term of their first president, Homer Martin, sought contractual language that would give the union in each assembly plant a voice in the setting of line speeds throughout the life of the bargaining agreement. This was the first time, and only time thus far, that the top UAW leadership made anywhere near a sincere attempt to serve this first need of the ranks, but at least the attempt was made.

The most frequently used effort to check production by the new unions was one that attacked the problem on a piecemeal basis. The right to strike over unsettled workplace floor grievances was sometimes contractually protected to a degree, but far more often was informally asserted and taken. Shop-floor stewards elected at individual departmental levels took the time and freedom to move about in their territory. Many performed the role of advocate rather than administrative agent. Grievants got immediate representation many more times than they would in later years.

By the end of the decade, when the independent CIO was still only three years old, its leadership in each industry was already consolidating its bureaucratic position. Having signed contracts that limited daily rank-and-file on-the-job initiatives, they were put in the impossible position of trying to lead the ranks while stripped of the one strength that could bring real success. They had little choice but to become isolated disciplinarians. For a time, however, out of the strengths of their recent victories, the ranks could check the bureaucratic drift here and there through on-the-job bargaining by informal work groups, quickie strikes, slowdowns, and minor acts of sabotage. That local and even international officials of the new unions had only recently left the workplaces meant that many among those who remained in the shops were personally acquainted with their higher officials and could use that familiarity to check bureaucratic drift to some degree. In both harsh and friendly ways, officials got reminders of their rank-and-file origins and sources of their new powers.

The ability of labor's ranks to sustain control over their leaders dwindled as warring European countries placed larger orders with American industrialists. New jobs were created. Increasing numbers of Americans left old jobs in plants they had helped organize and took higher-paying jobs elsewhere, sometimes in faraway cities. The focus of public attention began to move to military retreats and advances overseas. When France fell to Hitler's armies in 1940, the U.S. began open war preparations. The first peacetime draft army was about to be mobilized. The combination of conditions that in the 1930s had forced working-class and lower-middle-class Americans to initiate actions for social change was gone. Enormous change

was now being imposed on them by external forces, and there was a growing fascination with it. As a part of that change, the countless rank-and-file cadres that had built the unions at the point of production were already losing members to the armed forces and defense jobs. Educated militants who remained on the jobs they helped to organize found it difficult to sustain struggles against their employers and for internal union democracy. They had now to contend with the lower level of consciousness in the workers who were hired to replace the vanishing veterans of the organizing period. At the same time, those same rank-and-file organizers of the CIO who left to take war jobs found it difficult to mobilize the new defense workers on a militant basis: large numbers of those new heavy-industry workers were recruited from poor rural areas and so-called "marginal" jobs. Industrial employment at relatively high wages was for them an exciting new freedom.

Moreover, the unions in wartime industry were for the most part set up without rank-and-file participation. The right to represent this newly mobilized segment of the labor force was handed to the now established officialdoms in return for their "full cooperation with the war effort," as arranged by the Roosevelt administration. The contracts they negotiated in this way contained a "sweetheart" quality. Worse still, these contracts and the manner of their administration created for the employers and government the model from which to mold industrial relations in the postwar period: unconditional no-strike pledges, arbitration, and the inability to support grievances via strike action.

The changes in all aspects of American life created by four years of total war mobilization were so great and came so fast that the population could not assimilate them. Veterans of the period, whether they served in the Pacific, Detroit, North Africa, San Francisco, Europe, Bayonne, India, or Peoria, would not be able for some time to comprehend the society to which they returned in 1946. This is not to say that Americans fully understood the currents of their world during the 30s; but for seven years, from 1932 to 1939, from just this side of the depth of the Depression until just before U.S. entry into the war that brought full employment—there was a sense of social progress. Each victory over an employer, landlord, or governmental employment agency allowed the participants a sense of participation in a national movement. Part of each victory was the increased understanding of power relationships existing in the overall society. Feelings of being adrift decreased as large numbers discovered a role that allowed them to determine in part their own destinies. The coming of war

did not strike dumb the people who built the new unionism of the 30s, but it did remove them from the workplaces and the social combinations inside the shops that were the basis of the organizing drives.

Also, it geometrically accelerated the bureaucratization of their unions. They thereby lost a major facility through which they could assimilate their experience with change and in which they had previously been able to bank growing class consciousness. The employers and government were quick in taking advantage of the condition. Improvements in working conditions won in the 30s that survived the war were increasingly "bought back" by the employers with increases in wages and fringe benefits. With only rare exceptions, the labor officialdoms, including the leaders of "Communist-led" unions, cooperated in the "sale." In its totality, the leadership of the mass movement of the 30s folded. The problems at work and in every aspect of American life signaled the need for leadership. That leadership was unwilling, unavailable, or incapable.

Social unionism was a war casualty. Not even independent or individual analyses of the postwar condition were forthcoming. Most of the well-known radical intellectuals and social critics, who had been so vocally anti-war until Hitler's attack on Russia or the "sneak" attack on Pearl Harbor, had become silent. For all union reformers, militants, and revolutionaries developed out of the experiences and ideologies of the 30s, World War II swept in a long period whose major characteristic has been isolation.

In the early summer of 1940, a friend and I were walking from one factory to another in East Los Angeles trying to find employers who would accept job applications. We were both five months out of high school. Unrelated to anything we had been discussing, one of us suddenly broke in with "When in the hell is this war going to end? It's been going for years now, and it's still growing." In 1939 Franklin Roosevelt had announced that ". . . no American mother's son will die on a foreign battlefield." For that lie he was the more beloved—even worshipped. We needed that assurance to jump to in moments of quiet panic. As editor of the senior class book I had tried to get Roosevelt to write the foreword and had failed. Still, I had made the dedication to him and had written "The world is now closer to peace than at any time in the last decade." France fell less than a year later. There were some few in America who were not so naive, but my attitudes were unfortunately far closer to the national norm.

I attended UCLA in 1941 and joined an eating cooperative: five days of meals for six dollars. There and in associated co-ops were a considerable number of young Communists. Through them I had my first contact of

any kind with organized labor struggles. Representatives from the Vultee Aircraft strike (and others) visited to make speeches and collect money. We listened and made modest donations. On occasion, we were also visited by Norman Thomas.

On the Monday morning after "Pearl Harbor" (December 8), the atmosphere was taut. Students moved from class to class with jumpiness. Every male knew he would have to go. But each one had dreamed up a deal that might keep him out of the armed forces—or at least out of range of actual battle. I met no one who wanted to fight. The same was true of my friends across town working in factories. They too had individual schemes to avert the risk of death. The only youths of my acquaintance on either side of town who volunteered for duty were those whose civilian lives were in deep crisis; that is, they had serious personal problems or they were in the process of rebellion against university or industrial work life. That there was no sentiment for the war should cause no consternation. Well into 1940 the media were popularizing anti-war views. I recall a particular monologue done by a well-known actor on coast-to-coast radio. Portraying a fictional Pittsburgh steelworker, the dramatically accented voice delivered lines close to the following: "My name George Danovic. I came from the Old Country. I get job in mill. I love steel. I make wheels for railroad trains . . . Then there is a war. I make things now to kill people . . . I hate steel." Repeatedly, messages like this one from the media gave expression to our disgust with the coming war—to our growing uneasiness and sense of future appointment with some kind of guilt.

I was one of those in rebellion against the university system prior to the war. I didn't understand it. No one in my family or acquaintance had ever gone to college. I didn't know how to play the game. A philosophy course began a process that made me an atheist in a vacuum. The professor was one of those who at the Chancellor's request visited men's living groups to urge support for the war. I junked my books before finals and walked away. A week later I was in a merchant seamen's training school. I never completed the training. I learned that one could get a regular berth on a ship without it.

I sailed on deck. The AFL Sailors' Union of the Pacific (SUP) had contracts covering all deck seamen on all organized West Coast ships. Andrew Furuseth was its top official starting in 1886, and the influence of the IWW that opposed him was still visible in the ranks. It would become a mid-World War II casualty. Secretary-treasurer was the highest office. There was no president. The SUP had been rejuvenated by the maritime

strikes in 1934 and 1936–1937, when it won total control of hiring. Its main membership bases were the largely Scandinavian and Finnish steam-schooner men of the coastal lumber trade and the multi-racial Hawaiians of the sugar and pineapple “island run.” They had a healthy antagonism to all official authority. Even late in the war when these older men were many times outnumbered in the union by newer hands, no SUP members dared to buy themselves the phony naval-type uniforms easily purchased along the waterfronts. The reverse was true in the National Maritime Union (NMU), based on the East Coast, which went along with the militarization at a time when the government was trying to destroy the civilian (union) status of merchant seamen.

My experience on my first ship was a liberation. The deck crew would not work if the Chief Mate put a foot on the main deck between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. I had never before seen on-the-job authority defied with immunity from retaliation. I felt I had found a channel through which to express all the resentments I carried from previous jobs and schools. Within a year I was sailing as a deck crew union representative. Fights for better food, mattresses, showers, and draws against wages in foreign ports were made successfully, sometimes by lining up on the dock or going to a nearby bar at sailing time. By mid-1943 it was becoming impossible to sustain this sort of fight to protect conditions. The Coast Guard had recently taken over the issuance of seamen’s papers from the Department of Commerce. Later in that year I came off a wheel watch (helm duty) just as the ship was about to cross the bar outside the Golden Gate, coming into San Francisco. On deck, the Chief Mate, a retired naval officer, had ordered the very green crew to break out the cargo booms—dangerous work at any time, but deadly on a rolling deck. I shut off the steam to the machinery and notified the mate that no gear would be broken out until we tied up alongside the dock. He accused me of trying to “take over the running of the ship” and left the deck.

Nothing more was said. Two days later, when the entire crew went into the officers’ mess room to sign off the ship and collect the voyage pay, the company informed me I would have to go to the Coast Guard in the Federal Building to get my money. I went there, but I had to give them my seamen’s papers to get paid and was informed that I might get them back only after my “hearing” three days hence.

Two Coast Guard Lieutenant Commanders were already seated behind a large oak table when I entered the hearing room. They made no accusations. Instead they questioned me about my union activity and political

beliefs. "Did I ever carry my union activity beyond union activity?" they asked. Several ships earlier I had met a member of the Workers Party. Like all the Marxist groupings it had members in the armed forces and war industries, but it alone refused political support to any war establishment or bureaucracy. Because of my experiences and resulting ideas it was the only socialist group that I could have joined. I did and was vulnerable before this Coast Guard tribunal. I asked if they were judging me for anything I had done or for what I thought. They double-talked. Finally, and as if begrudgingly, they returned my papers. Without them I would have been drafted into the army within weeks "under special circumstances." In every port this scene was being repeated daily on an assembly-line basis by this intelligence branch of the Coast Guard. NMU members I met waiting their turn at those hearings told me that their officials had given the Coast Guard office space in the New York hiring hall.

I had two more of these hearings before the war ended. One for refusing to bring a Second Mate on watch a second cup of coffee. I had brought him the first traditional cup as I had relieved my watch partner at the helm. He wanted another as I was in turn relieved, but couldn't find it within himself to ask rather than order. He was recently out of an officer's school. The second hearing came after I refused to call the Norfolk shipping commissioner's agent "sir" while he was signing on our crew. Both hearings followed the same pattern as the first. During the last hearing the head officer finally said that they were "going to let me go this time, but if I came back again it would look funny." His companion officer looked at him and said, "Yes, you'd laugh like hell." I followed up the opening with a question: "Does the sum of a collection of innocent verdicts equal a guilty one?" They indicated the hearing was over and shoved my papers at me, and I left with a motivation that remains with me to this day. At no time did any of the maritime unions provide the defendants with representation. In time the Coast Guard would provide union officials with an effective way of dealing with oppositionists.

Shoreside employers used the same basic methods to intimidate defense workers, but couldn't do it as bluntly. Nevertheless, all militants experienced paranoia. "The slip of the lip may sink a ship" and "The enemy is always listening" said posters with block letter slogans superimposed on a large ear. Yet it was clear that the word "enemy" had a double meaning—"subversive" supposedly meant "Hitler agent," but one only saw investigators looking for radicals. The Communists, however, were "on our side," 150 percent patriots who branded all their critics "Hitler agents,"



“red-baiters,” and “Trotskyite fifth columnists.” Those who were not members or friends of radical sects could make little sense of this area of their wartime experience. Always readily available around the NMU halls at that time, for example, were books like Sayer’s and Kahn’s *The Great Conspiracy* and pamphlets like George Morris’s “The Trotskyite 5th Column in the Labor Movement.”

They helped create a lynch atmosphere. I do not use the term entirely in a figurative sense. Morris urged that those from the “cesspool” were enemies and should be “treated as such.” He hailed the imprisonment of the “eighteen Trotskyites” who led the 1934 Minneapolis General Strike, and twice quoted a collaborative Teamster vice-president to make his own point, “If Trotsky had taken over at the time, Russia would probably today be a part of the 3rd Reich . . . Trotsky is dead. Unfortunately too many of his followers are not” (pp. 13, 29–30).

American workers in this period faced many riddles, but none more bewildering than the one posed by the Stalinists. All that most unionists had ever heard about the Communists, whether in the labor or daily press, told them that the CP represented “revolution,” but during the war they were such postured patriots that it would have been comic if they had not had so much official power over unionists’ lives. The education program of the NMU was officially advertised as “Reading, Writing and No Striking.” Both black and white seamen were told to forget their grievances for the “duration.” The presence of Afro-Americans in the Communist-led unions was the party’s one cover for its ultraconservatism.

The conflict between the NMU and the Sailors’ Union and its affiliates became more dramaturgy than feud. It came to constitute a way of life in shoreside as well as maritime unions, between the United Electrical Workers (UE) and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), between the UAW and the International Association of Machinists (IAM), between the International Longshoremen’s and Warehousemen’s Union (ILWU) and the Teamsters, and between more but smaller unions. Still, war industry continued to grow and the arrangement between the Democratic Party and the top labor leaders paid off in numerical growth of dues payers. In this way the war was very good to most of the high union officials.

In the mid-1930s two of the three Reuther brothers, Walter and Victor, went to Russia. They toured and even worked in factories. They returned as the organizing drive in auto got into full swing. They were back in Detroit only a few weeks when they visited a friend of mine who was the

newspaper editor for a newly self-organized auto local. They asked him to forget all the “class struggle stuff” and work with them. For them, an American form of the Social Democratic approach was now the “only thing that would work.” They saw “the old” or more radical approach as “dead” and “off the agenda.” Walter Reuther was early on a UAW vice-president in charge of the GM department. During the war, the three Reuther brothers (Roy plus Walter and Victor) carefully watched the growth of the Rank and File Caucus in the UAW. Led by anti-war radicals and militants, it stood as the only formally organized force against the Conservative-Communist bloc that dominated the top offices. The Caucus opposed the Communist proposals for a return to piecework in auto and other giveaway programs. It was for rescinding the wartime no-strike pledge in order to stop the takeaway of working conditions being conducted by the employers who were using the war as an excuse to weaken the union and increase their government-guaranteed profits. In 1945, with the war still on, the Caucus forced a referendum in which 40 percent voted to take back the right to strike.

As the war ended, Walter Reuther was freed to move against the coalition leadership in control of the UAW represented by the conservative president R. J. Thomas and the Communist-oriented secretary-treasurer George Addes. The Thomas-Addes program for the union contained no more than the usual call for “substantial” wage increases—increases of the sort that would easily be wiped out in the growing postwar inflation. The ranks had just endured four years of wage freeze. The Thomas-Addes program did not provide a way to end the four-year lag. Further, the UAW leaders’ overly eager wartime collaboration with the employers had made the Thomas-Addes leadership unpopular with the ranks. Also, the one reason for Reuther’s inability to work with the Rank and File Caucus during the war—its opposition to the wartime no-strike pledge—was gone. With a peacetime popularization of the R&F Caucus’s program, he was able to take over the caucus. With slogans like “Wage Increases and No Price Increases,” “Open Industries Books,” “Public Negotiations,” “For a Sliding Scale Cost-of-Living Clause in the Next Contract,” Reuther mobilized for the 1946 strike against General Motors. That strike became the keystone of the strike wave. It was an enthusiastic strike. Expectations were high. Wages but not profits had been frozen throughout the war. There was big catching up to do. After many weeks, the UAW strike was coming to a climax, and just hours before it did the Communist-led United Electrical Workers betrayed the agreed upon CIO strategy. The

CIO mass-production unions in electric, rubber, and steel agreed to hang back and follow the pattern set by the settlement in the key industry, auto. The UE broke ranks, however, jumped in, and accepted an offer of a pay increase of eighteen cents an hour. That became the reward to most mass-production workers for the weeks, even months, spent on the picket line. There was no real sense of victory. An opportunity to establish a current of movement in post-war labor struggles was missed. There were no movement ideas available. The Communists were in disrepute. Reuther could therefore turn to radical-sounding Social Democratic rhetoric to build a cover for a standard labor bureaucracy. The vacuum of ideology would enable him to win over large numbers of former radicals with excellent reputations in the ranks.

Yet the blame for the routine settlement of the 1946 strike wave cannot be put mainly on the UE. The rank-and-file groupings that had built the CIO in each workplace had been atomized in the previous six-year period and the bureaucracies had hardened. CIO president Philip Murray was not interested in seeing Walter Reuther become a full-blown labor hero and competitor. None of the top CIO leaders led their strikes with real enthusiasm, Reuther included. He had tried for a substantial wage increase and had obtained a cost-of-living clause for auto workers, but he had only half-heartedly presented GM with the demand for "wage increases without raising the cost of cars," "Open the books," or "Public negotiations."

The "Communist-dominated" unions were expelled from the CIO in 1949. Free and open debate within the CIO unions withered, and opposition was silenced. It was never again a healthy organization. It crawled into its merger with the AFL in 1953, and what little was left of the old CIO attitudes all but disappeared.

Not until the mid-1960s was the rank and file of American labor able to begin to break the bureaucratic deadlock which still binds it. The ongoing fight is quite different from that which began in the early 1930s when the Communists were able to take the lead of almost every major rank-and-file struggle. For this we are in part indebted to the East Berlin uprisings of 1951, the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, and the Polish and Czechoslovakian uprisings of the 1960s. At the same time, there are few if any illusions that any segment of the top labor officialdom has ideas or perspectives that can find a way out of the present crisis within the unions, industry, or society. In fact, the individuals in even the secondary stratum of top union leadership who are pushing for a break with old

approaches probably constitute no more than a handful. While many of the old illusions have withered, there is as yet no formulation of an independent set of alternative ideas to guide the struggle of the ranks. As long as this ideological vacuum continues to exist, American workers will have to remain on the defensive.

(1975)

# USA

## *The Labor Revolt*

The rank and file union revolts that have been developing in the industrial workplaces since the early 1950s are now plainly visible. Like many of their compatriots, American workers are faced with paces, methods, and conditions of work that are increasingly intolerable. Their union leaders are not sensitive to these conditions. In thousands of industrial establishments across the nation, workers have developed informal underground unions. The basic units of organization are groups composed of several workers, each of whose members work in the same plant area and are thus able to communicate with one another and form a social entity. Led by natural on-the-job leaders, they conduct daily guerrilla skirmishes with their employers and often against their official union representatives as well. These groups are the power base for the insurgencies from below that in the last three years have ended or threatened official careers of long standing.

During the same period, farm laborers, teachers, professionals, white collar, service, and civil service workers, who were not generally reached by labor's revolt of the 1930s, have demonstrated an adamant desire to organize themselves into unions. For the first time in over three decades, the United States faces a period in which the struggles of the unionized section of the population will have a direct and visible effect on the future of the entire population. Because the press coverage of the revolts has been superficial and because they have been ignored by the liberal publications (and a majority of radical publications), it is necessary that the major revolts be examined in some detail.

### Widespread Revolt Begins in Auto

The General Motors Corporation employs as many workers as all other auto manufacturers combined. In 1955, United Automobile Workers president Walter Reuther signed a contract with GM that did not stop the

speedup or quicken the pace of settling local shop grievances. Over 70 percent of GM workers went on strike immediately after Reuther announced the terms of his agreement. An even larger percentage "wildcatted" after the signing of the 1958 contract because Reuther had again refused to do anything to combat the speedup. For the same reason, the autoworkers walked off their jobs again in 1961. The strike closed every GM plant and a number of large Ford plants.

The UAW ranks' ability to conduct a nationwide wildcat strike is made possible by a democratic practice that has been maintained by GM workers since the thirties. Every GM local sends elected delegates to Detroit to sit in council during national contract negotiations. They instruct their negotiators and confer with them as the bargaining progresses.

Ideally the council and negotiators arrive at an agreement on the package that the latter have been able to obtain from the employer. Then both the rank and file delegates and leaders recommend ratification by the ranks at the local union level. In 1961, however, when the council unanimously recommended rejection of the contract and to strike, Reuther notified the press that the strike was official, that he was leading it, and that it would continue until all grievances concerning working conditions had been settled in separate local supplemental agreements rather than in the national contract. He thus maintained control. The ranks were outmaneuvered and angered.

Just prior to the negotiation of the 1964 contract, a development took place in the UAW that is unique in American labor history. Several large Detroit locals initiated a bumper sticker campaign. In all cities across the country where UAW plants are located the bumpers of autoworkers' cars pushed the slogan: "Humanize Working Conditions." Lacking the support of their official leaders, they were attempting to inform the public of the nature of the struggle they were about to conduct, and that its primary goal would be to improve the condition of factory life rather than merely increase their wages.

Their attempt to bypass Reuther failed. Contrary to established practices, he opened negotiations with Chrysler, the smallest of the Big Three automakers. He imposed the pattern of the Chrysler contract on the Ford workers, and announced that the Chrysler-Ford agreements would set the pattern for the GM contract. The workers in General Motors plants made their dissatisfaction with this state of affairs very clear very quickly. They struck every GM plant for five weeks and were joined by thousands of Ford workers. Although they returned to work under a national contract

no better than those signed with Ford and Chrysler, their strike settled a backlog of local grievances, created pride in the ranks by challenging Reuther's strategy, and made possible the further development of rank and file leaders. The workers made it clear that they would not give ground in their efforts to make bargaining over the national contract a weapon against speedups and against a grievance procedure that allowed the settlement of individual complaints to take as long as two years.

The wildcat strike of UAW-GM Local 527 in Mansfield, Ohio, started because two workers were fired for refusing to make dies and tools ready for shipment to another plant in Pontiac, Michigan. GM has long followed a policy of transferring work out of plants where workers have established better working conditions to other plants with less militant work forces. The Mansfield workers had long observed this practice in silence. To be forced to participate in their own defeat by helping move work out of their plant was the final indignity for them. Mansfield is a key GM parts feeder plant and the strike idled 133,000 men in over twenty shops. Instead of utilizing this power to win his men's demands, Reuther declared the strike illegal. Moreover, he threatened to put the local into trusteeship and suspend local democracy. In an all-day session, his leadership pressured Local 527 leaders into asking their men to return to work without winning resolution of their grievances. The local leaders were told that the strike was poorly timed because it came on the eve of the UAW's big push for annual salaries and profit sharing in 1967 bargaining. These two demands were to be given preference over all others. The Mansfield strike prematurely revealed the argument that Reuther would use later against rank and file demands that held that the big push should be to eliminate the speedup and to fix the inoperable grievance machinery.

Reuther underscored his opposition to rank and file concerns about grievances and speedup in an administrative letter issued to elaborate Reuther's position on his split with George Meany and the leadership of the AFL-CIO. It contained a long and detailed "Outline of UAW Program for the American Labor Movement." Under its section on collective bargaining it stressed the "development of a sound economic wage policy." No mention or hint was made of the need to improve working conditions—the actual cause of the major crisis for Reuther's leadership. The administrative letter stressed collective bargaining and "appropriate progressive legislation" as the methods to be used to advance the interests of union members and their families. Reuther's policies, however, ensured that direct action, including wildcat strikes and minor acts of sabotage in

the plants, would continue to interrupt production daily. His conservative union leadership did not include goals that would enable him to lead and contain the rank and file revolt. His failure to champion an improvement of working conditions created a consequent dimming of enthusiasm and support for Reuther's new program for American labor, both within the UAW ranks and the ranks of unions whose support he hoped to win. His actions also tended to undercut the possibility of success for the many good policies his program contained.

### Longshoremen and Steelworkers

In 1964 the ranks of the International Longshoremen's Association (East and Gulf Coasts) conducted a strike/revolt against both their employers and union officials that was identical to and almost simultaneous with that accomplished by the UAW rank and file. The stevedoring companies and ILA officials had negotiated what appeared to be an excellent contract. It contained a significant wage increase by past standards. It guaranteed every union member a minimum of sixteen hundred hours of work per year and minor economic fringe benefits. Yet, the dockers struck immediately upon the announcement of the terms. Their president, Thomas W. Gleason, hurriedly toured all locals at the request of George Meany, on a mission called "Operation Fact." Gleason claimed the ranks wildcatted because they didn't understand the contract. They understood only too well. In return for the recommended settlement, the union had agreed to cut the number of men in each work gang from twenty to seventeen. The employers originally demanded a gang size reduction to fourteen men, a size more nearly in line with manning scales negotiated by International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union president Harry Bridges for West Coast longshoremen. The ILA ranks did not give in to this or the many other undercutting pressures they faced. President Johnson declared a national emergency, invoking the eighty-day "cooling off" period under the provisions of the Taft-Hartley Act.

Wildcat strikes resumed on December 21, one day after the "cooling-off" period ended. They continued through January. All ports were on strike at the same time for over eighteen days, longer in southern and Gulf ports where separate and inferior contracts were offered. Longshoremen in New York and northern East Coast ports returned to work having lost on the main issue of gang size, but their defeat in this battle was not accompanied by a deep demoralization. Their union has long been unofficially divided into separately led baronies. For the first time in the



history of the ILA the entire membership initiated and conducted an all-union strike.

The United Steelworkers union revolt deserves special attention because it demonstrates how long it takes in some instances for a revolt to develop. In 1946 the steelworkers conducted a 26-day strike; in 1949, a 45-day strike; in 1952, a 59-day strike; in 1956, a 36-day strike. All of these strikes were conducted with only reluctant or forced support from the international leadership. In 1957, an obscure rank and file leader named Ronald Rarick ran against USW president David McDonald. Rarick, a conservative who has since become a reactionary, based his entire program on opposition to a dues increase and an increase in the salaries of officials. As the campaign for the presidency developed, the rank and file could see that Rarick was not a militant unionist. Militants couldn't vote for him with enthusiasm. His candidacy was used in the main to record opposition to McDonald. Yet Rarick beat McDonald in the Pennsylvania region by a slight margin, although he lost nationally. The vote ran 223,000 for Rarick, 404,000 for McDonald. In the same election, I. W. Abel, running for secretary treasurer, got 420,000 and his opposition got 181,000. In effect, Rarick disappeared after the election, but the vote he received alarmed the leaders of the large unions.

Four years later, McDonald ran unopposed and received only 221,000 votes. It was obvious that McDonald had been able to win a large vote against Rarick because he was able to utilize the treasury and resources of the International. To beat McDonald a candidate had to be recruited from inside the International who also had access to its facilities.

As early as the Special Steelworkers Conference of 1952, the regional and local union leaders of the USW had warned McDonald that he would have to do something about the deterioration of working conditions in the plants. They further warned that the resulting rank and file anger was threatening their position and they might have no other alternative than to transmit this pressure to him.

Twelve years later, many of these same secondary and tertiary leaders realized that they could not survive under McDonald's leadership. They picked I. W. Abel, a man who had not worked in a mill for twenty-five years, to challenge McDonald. After a long dispute over the ballot count, Abel was declared the winner. Under his leadership a significant democratization of the negotiation process has begun. Delegates to the 1966 USW convention terminated the union's participation in the joint employer-union Human Relations Committee whose function was to study plant

working conditions and to determine how they could be changed in order to cut the costs of production and speed the automation process. The union's 165-member Wage Policy Committee that had the power to ratify contracts was also completely stripped of its power. A new and somewhat liberalized method for allowing the ranks a voice in negotiations was instituted. The policy of last-minute "shotgun" bargaining a few days prior to contract expiration was substituted for McDonald's practice of beginning negotiations a year in advance of deadline.

### Electrical Workers and Their Secondary Leaders Unite

James B. Carey, president of the International Union of Electrical Workers, was removed from office in a struggle similar to that which deposed David McDonald. By 1953, he had been out of contact with his membership for many years. He had failed to lead them in a fight for improved working conditions against the General Electric and Westinghouse corporations. He had been less successful than Reuther or even McDonald in obtaining wage increases to ease his ranks' anger. He felt the pressure of coming rebellion and sought to oppose rather than appease it. He proposed a constitutional change for his union that would have had the employers collect union dues and send them directly to the union's Washington, DC, headquarters, which would in turn dispense to the locals their stipulated share.

The secondary leaders recognized the danger to themselves in this plan, and in 1964, with the backing of the ranks, organized an opposition to Carey. In Paul Jennings of the Sperry local in New York they found a candidate with a good union reputation. Jennings beat Carey, but a majority of the ballot counters were Carey supporters and they declared Carey the winner. Jennings's forces challenged the count and Carey supporters readied a second set of ballots to show the challengers. They would have given Carey the victory. Because of the ease with which Carey made enemies, even among men like George Meany, the supporters of Jennings were able to obtain aid from a source unfamiliar to the union's ranks. The U.S. Department of Labor impounded the original ballots before a ballot switch could be made.

The struggle for rank and file autonomy in the IUE did not end with Jennings's 1964 part-coup part-victory. In a very short time Jennings did more to improve wages than his predecessor, but he too neglected the fight for working conditions. Under his leadership the IUE engineered a united effort of eleven unions in the 1966 negotiations and subsequent

strike against GE. A showdown was long overdue. GE had a 1965 volume of \$6.2 billion, up one billion over 1964. It spent \$330 million for capital expansion and still netted \$355 million profit after taxes. Profits after taxes for the entire 1960–1965 period were up 52 percent. They had grown accustomed to docile union negotiators. The IUE-led united front broke GE's Boulwarist approach to bargaining, i.e., GE's practice of making their first settlement offer their last settlement offer under Board President [Lemuel] Boulware's chairmanship. It also broke President Johnson's 3.2 percent wage guideline and obtained a 5 percent wage increase. However, after the contract was signed, major locals of all unions in the front, including thousands of workers of the IUE, UAW, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, and Independent United Electrical Workers, stayed out on strike. Jennings, and the leaders of the other unions, had failed to negotiate gains in respect to grievance machinery and working conditions. A Taft-Hartley injunction was necessary to end the strike of those involved in defense production.

Carey and McDonald were not the only leaders of large industrial unions to be felled. In that year O. A. "Jack" Knight, president of the Oil, Gas, and Atomic Workers, retired three years early in the face of a developing rank and file revolt. During the Miami convention of the United Rubber Workers union in September 1966, the widespread unrest and revolts in the local unions that had preceded the convention forced incumbent president George Burdon to withdraw his candidacy for re-nomination. In an emotional speech he conceded the "serious mistakes" made during his administration. The major criticisms leveled against him were that he had lost touch with the ranks, did not participate personally in negotiations, and that he had attempted to have the union pay his wife's personal traveling expenses. Veteran vice-president Peter Bommarito was swept into office by acclamation. He immediately pledged to take a tougher position against the employers

### Coal Miners and the Lewis Legacy

The 1963–1966 (and still continuing) revolt in the United Mine Workers union did not unseat its president, W. A. "Tony" Boyle, the hand-picked successor of John L. Lewis. However, the insurgent nominees for all top offices at the 1963 UMW convention, standing firm in spite of the violence committed against them, provided the first formal opposition to top UMW incumbents since the 1920s. Steve "Cadillac" Kochis (Boyle's challenger from Bobtown, Pennsylvania) and his supporters lost as they predicted.

They knew they had decisive strength in the Ohio-Pennsylvania–West Virginia region, but they also knew the dangers of the very loose UMW balloting system. They knew that the Boyle forces would build up a commanding block of votes in faraway districts that they found impossible to monitor.

Boyle inherited the revolt. Immediately after World War II, John L. Lewis turned from his policy of leading militant strikes based on demands closest to the desires of his membership and started an all-out program to speed the mechanization of the richest mines. The shift was hailed in the press for its technological progressiveness, but the human cost was staggering. Between 1947 and 1964, the UMW lost over 380,000 members. Lewis retained as members only those who worked in mines that could afford to automate; the rest were cut loose.

The abandoned did not all lose their jobs. More than 100,000 remained in the small mines, or after a period of unemployment found work in mines that had been shut down because their veins were near exhaustion. The Lewis shift enabled these mines to reopen by hiring displaced miners at low pay. In West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Ohio there are now a large number of mines that have headroom that is often no more than thirty-six inches. The miners who work them literally spend their lives on their hands and knees. By 1965, the production of coal in the poorer, non-automated, and non-union mines accounted for 30 percent of total U.S. coal production. Their owners are again making fortunes. They employ embittered and impoverished former UMW members who have top experience and skill, at fourteen dollars a day, little more than half the union rate. They do not have to pay pension or fringe benefits. Thus, a small-scale mechanization of the small mines has been made possible.

The increase in the strength of the competitive position of the non-union mines has in turn forced the large mine operators to impose a speedup on their employees. Pressure is applied, resulting in a deterioration of protective working and safety conditions. Fatalities are as high as they were during World War II when 700,000 men were working coal underground.

During the summer of 1965, at the Ireland Mine near Moundsville, West Virginia, five local union leaders refused to work under unsafe conditions and were fired. An unauthorized strike ensued (which in one week spread over the West Virginia, Ohio, and Pennsylvania region). Roving bands of pickets easily shut down mine after mine, including United States Steel's large captive Robena mine. The UMW International leadership, including

the grievance processors they appoint at the local levels, lost all control. The halfhearted legal efforts of the U.S. Department of Labor, that had the year before attempted to increase the democratic rights of the local and regional UMW organizations, had failed. The local leaders, the only authority the rebel ranks would follow in a disciplined and responsible manner, were labeled "instigators of anarchy."

The main reason for this large unauthorized strike was the jam of unsettled grievances in mine after mine. In addition, the rank and file miners were angered that their top officials had negotiated a wage increase in the previous contract at the expense of improving working conditions. The main demands of the rebels became the right to elect their own local business agents and a democratized union structure from bottom to top. They felt that only by obtaining these rights could they find ways of helping themselves and their friends, relatives, and former union brothers in the small mines. They returned to work only after being promised a greater voice in the negotiation of the next contract. In what was a major departure from past practice in the UMW, Boyle sent out a call for the Contract Policy Committee to meet before the opening of formal negotiations with the operators in 1966.

The contract obtained a 3 percent wage increase for the 100,000 soft coal miners who are left in the UMW. Their economic fringe benefits were slightly improved, but they are still far behind the workers in auto and steel. They won the right of first preference to any job openings in other mines in their district if laid off. During the negotiations they had to conduct a series of wildcat strikes to obtain these gains, and their only satisfaction lay in the knowledge that the contract was an improvement over the one negotiated two years earlier. The revolt and the conditions that generate it persist. "Non-union" union men work for poverty-level wages under nineteenth-century conditions. In this period between contracts, sporadic acts of all forms of sabotage are on the increase.

### Bridges, Automation, and B Men

In 1960, International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union president Harry Bridges negotiated the first six-year "Mechanization and Modernization" contract with the Pacific Maritime Association. Like the contract that John L. Lewis negotiated for the automation of Big Coal, Bridges's contract allowed the unrestricted introduction of containerization of cargo, the use of vans, and automated cargo handling machinery. At the same time, it eliminated thousands of jobs. Primarily because of

increased maritime activity due to war shipments, widespread unemployment up to now has been avoided.

Just as in coal, however, the human costs have been staggering. In the first year of the contract, the accident rate in what has become the nation's most dangerous industry went up 20 percent according to the *Longshore Bulletin* of ILWU Local 10, February 8, 1962. In the same year the longshore accident rate on the East Coast declined. To obtain this contract Bridges gave in to the employers' request that they be allowed to "buy" the elimination of the major working and safety conditions improvements won in the militant struggles of the 1930s. The long-established manning scales and the 2,100-pound sling load limit were eliminated. These provisions were not only eliminated for labor performed on containerized cargo, but also on the still very sizeable amount of cargo manhandled piece by piece and sack by sack.

Even more than Lewis, Bridges won the respect of employers everywhere. His actions drew admiration in many liberal circles, including in the press, where he was given the title of "labor statesman." The contract established one gain for only one section of the longshoremen during the six-year life of the contract. Those who entered the industry before 1948, had achieved union membership prior to 1960, had reached the age of 65, and who additionally had 25 years of service, could retire with a \$7,900 bonus in addition to their unimproved pension. They could retire earlier if disabled and receive a smaller bonus on a pro-rated basis. Or, if they had 25 years in the industry at age 62 they could collect the \$7,900 in monthly installments until they reached 65 when the regular pension payments began.

Although the fund that pays the bonuses is created by the tonnage worked by all longshoremen, the recipients are older union members who work little more than half that tonnage. The majority of cargo is moved by B men and casuals working under the jurisdiction of the union and the younger men who became union members (A men) after 1960, none of whom are allowed to share in the fund.

The dissension that has developed between Bridges and other top ILWU leaders since last July has become so deep that news of it has appeared in the San Francisco press. Rumors persist that the fall-out is over the question of how to handle the growing revolt in the ranks. Whether Bridges continues to pursue the automation policies on which he has staked his entire reputation or abandons it to pursue winning improvements in working conditions as desired by his ranks, the effect will be to stimulate

opposition. He is now plagued by lawsuits, including one filed by the expelled B men and another filed in Federal Court several years ago by ILWU Local 13 in the name of all members in the large port of Los Angeles. James B. Carey and David McDonald learned, and now Bridges is learning, that the pursuit of policies that alienate the ranks can also isolate a top leader from his co-officials and hasten his fall from power.

### More Trouble in Maritime

The accelerated advancement of cargo handling technology during the last decade has in the last two years created an opposition to the leadership of Joseph Curran, president of the National Maritime Union. There has been a sharp decrease in the time that ships remain in American ports, and the seamen are allowed ever-shorter time with their families. The seamen's anger has been increased by the small monetary compensation for the special sacrifices of family and social life demanded by their industry. Curran has not responded to these problems, but instead has attempted to improve his position with the large New York membership by announcing plans for the construction of rent-free housing built with the union's pension fund. The announcement—an example of a positive and conservatizing reform initiated from above to quiet dissatisfaction—did not quell the revolt.

An aspirant to office in the NMU must already have served a term as a paid official. James M. Morrissey was one of the few oppositionists who could meet this requirement. The press has done nothing to inform the public of the fight made by Morrissey and his supporters. To this date the only source of printed information about it comes from Issue No. 23 of editor H. W. Benson's respected journal, *Union Democracy in Action*, published in New York. In an election whose honesty is not established, the incumbent officialdom conceded that Morrissey got 34 percent of the total vote and 14 percent of the New York vote in his struggle to unseat Curran.

Morrissey got close to what is the full treatment risked by rank and file opposition leaders in unions whose democratic practices are limited. Last September three unidentified assailants beat him with metal pipes outside his union hall. No arrests have been made. His skull was shattered in several places and the bone over one eye was crushed. He still lives, as does the opposition he leads. Curran is still embattled in his fight to retain the job that pays him \$83,000 annually.

By the autumn of 1966 it was possible to observe that with the exception of the United Packinghouse Workers (UPW), every major union that

contributed to the creation of the CIO in the 1930s had experienced a major revolt. Conditions in the coal, auto, rubber, steel, electric, and maritime industries in the sixties are now renovating the unions whose formation they stimulated in the thirties. It should also be observed that most of the unions being renovated belong to and are a majority in the AFL-CIO Industrial Union Department, headed by Walter Reuther. The reasons for the UPW's exemption from the revolt process thus far are apparent: to the credit of its president, Ralph Helstein, the first day of its 1966 convention was thrown open to the delegates to voice their gripes about conditions in both their union and industry.

### The Airline Mechanics Strike

Most of the major industrial union revolts broke into the open prior to last summer. The press reported each as an individual phenomenon, if it reported them at all, and the full significance was missed. It took the five-week July–August strike of the airline mechanics, who are affiliated with the International Association of Machinists (IAM), to make the general American public conscious of what *Life* magazine's August 26, 1966, issue called the "New Union Militancy." Like the November issue of *Fortune*, this account documented a period of "dramatic shift from the familiar faces to the facelessness of the rank and file." This strike of less than 30,000 men did what the much larger strike revolts failed to do. By stopping 60 percent of the nation's air passenger travel, they directly touched the lives of the nation's middle class.

Without advance signaling from liberal social analysts, who are usually among the first to call attention to signs of labor unrest, the daily press gave recognition to labor's new era, and no wonder. The mechanics made it impossible for reporters to ignore the observation, but characteristically, the press stressed wages as the issue. Robert T. Quick, president and general chairman of IAM District 141, gave an indication of the real issue in one of his strike press releases: "We're working under chain gang conditions for cotton picking wages."

The public had not witnessed a stance like that taken by the mechanics since the 1930s. They rejected the first contract proposed by their new president, P. L. Siemiller. They rejected a second contract worked out under the direct intervention of the Johnson administration. Siemiller stated he was sure his ranks could live with this contract, but the strike continued without pause. They went further: not only did they make plain their opposition to Johnson's intrusion in their affairs, they rejected labor's



allegiance to the Democratic Party. The four largest mechanics locals on the Pacific Coast—Los Angeles, San Francisco, Portland, and Seattle—sent telegrams to George Meany, Walter Reuther, James Hoffa, and Harry Bridges asking that “immediate action be taken to form a third political party that will serve the best interests of labor.”

The mechanics returned to work having broken more than the 3.7 percent wage guideline of the nation’s chief executive. More than damaging his prestige, they increased their own. It is certain that back on the job they will be treated with more respect by their immediate supervisors and that it will be easier for them to unofficially institute improvements of their “chain gang” working conditions.

### Revolt against Hoffa Rule

The revolts have not all been national or union-wide in scope, but this does not diminish their potential or importance. In the latter months of 1965, James Hoffa’s Teamster leadership became unable to restrain the rebellion of the Philadelphia Teamsters. Local 107, City Freight Drivers, have a long tradition of opposition to their International. The leader of their local in 1963–1964 was Ray Cohen, a Hoffa supporter. The ranks were dissatisfied with the representation he supplied. Two caucuses existed in the local: “The Real Rank and File Caucus” (pro-Hoffa) and “The Voice Caucus,” so called because of the name of its publication.

The opposition to Cohen became so great that Cohen became a liability to the International. Hoffa made his first appearance in Philadelphia, after becoming International Brotherhood of Teamsters president, to announce Cohen’s demotion. The elimination of Cohen evidently created no basic changes in the local. In June 1965, at Roadway Express Incorporated’s freight loading dock, a young worker, eighteen years old and the son of an “over-the-road” Teamster shop steward, was helping to load a big box into a trailer. He refused to work under conditions he considered unsafe. The foreman said: “If you don’t do it, I’ll fire you.” The young freight handler answered: “Screw you. Fire away.” He was fired. Four other men were ordered to do the same job; they said the same and were also fired. The five men left the job together and went to the union hall. They told their story to the ranks standing around the hall and to the local leaders. A meeting was held. The Voice Caucus took the lead away from its opponent caucus and made a motion for a general strike of all Philadelphia Teamsters. It carried and the strike was on. Starting with a grievance by just five men, it grew into a strike of every driver and handler in the

city and outlying region in less than twenty-four hours. To ensure that the strike was general, the Teamsters patrolled the streets, stopped trucks, and made out-of-town drivers get off their trucks. As a main location for the latter activity, they chose the area in front of Sears and Roebuck's department store. There is an immense lawn and the highway widens out allowing room to parallel park trucks and trailers in large numbers. After several days of this activity, the police attacked the local drivers. The out-of-town drivers then joined the strikers against the police. A pitched battle ensued. Within five minutes, the boulevard in front of Sears and Roebuck was impassable due to overturned trailers. This guerrilla-type warfare continued in many areas of the city for several days. Finally, by injunction and because both factions of the leadership backed down, the strikers were forced back to work. Although none of their strike gains have been contractualized, they are working under better conditions because they are able to express their newfound and strike-won strength on the job. At present, both caucuses—Real Rank and File, and the Voice—are in dispute among the ranks because both backed down in the face of local authorities. Hoffa has threatened to take the local under trusteeship. To demonstrate their resolve, the rank and file had a meeting and passed a resolution which stated that such an attempt would be met by another strike.

### The Painters and Dow Wilson

The 1965 Building Trades strike in northern California's giant home building industry was particularly important because it involved skilled workers with relatively high wage scales. Plumbers, laborers, sheet metal workers, and painters struck against the wishes of their international union leaders. All but the painters settled within a few days. Ten thousand painters, however, stayed out for thirty-seven days.

San Francisco Painters' Local 4 is the largest local in the International Brotherhood of Painters. Dow Wilson and Morris Evenson led it. Its strike demands, including coffee time, were some of the most radical ever made by painters. Painting labor processes are more rationalized than those of any other trade in the building industry due to the rapid recent advances in paint chemistry. Time studies and resulting speedups are the rule. Paint foremen, rushing to make new tracts ready for the developers' sales forces, stand over painters with blank wage checkbooks protruding from their pockets. If a man falls behind, he can be summarily fired and paid off in full. Tension of all kinds is high. Yet still unsatisfied, the employers have for some time been pressuring the union to allow them to institute the

use of new methods of paint application—the elimination of brushes for manual rollers, pressure rollers, and spray guns.

During the strike the leaders of the international union publicly sided with the employers' automation demands. Local 4 and its leadership stood firm. Leaders in several other northern California locals backed down and their ranks rebelled. Less than halfway through the strike Dow Wilson, in effect, became the leader of the entire strike and a majority of San Francisco Bay area locals. The painters won their strike, their coffee time, a big wage increase, and temporarily checked the advance of technological unemployment.

Wilson knew that the international leaders would be vindictive and that they would try to get at the ranks through him. The strike filled out his reputation as a model union leader, unique in these times. He was an independent political radical who was unhampered by dreams of wealth. He saw himself as a servant of the ranks. Wilson had exposed collusion and corruption in the painting of government housing that was cheating the taxpayers of millions of dollars, and he had used his prestige to bring Negro workers into the industry. He was a threat to the international union and employers. Wilson realized he would have to carry his ranks' fight for union democracy to the international convention.

In the early morning hours of April 6, 1966, Dow Wilson was assassinated gangster style in front of the San Francisco Labor Temple. He was felled by a shotgun blast in the face. A month later, Lloyd Green, president of the nearby Hayward local and a colleague of Wilson's, was killed in an identical manner. The leaders and ranks of Local 4 accompanied by Wilson's widow and children demonstrated on the main streets of San Francisco and in front of the homes of city and federal authorities. Arrests were made shortly thereafter.

An official of a painting employers' association confessed a major role in authoring the assassinations and admitted driving the getaway car. His trial made it clear that his power in labor relations came from money he stole from the painters' pension fund and from threatening recalcitrants with a visit from his friend Abe "The Trigger" Chapman, whose name was formerly identified with Murder Incorporated. He also implicated a top regional union official who is a supporter of the international union's policies. The official's guilt has not been proven. Legal proceedings continue.

In a matter of weeks after the burial of the assassinated leaders, the international officials of the painters' union made their first unsuccessful attempt to take several Bay Area locals into trusteeship and suspend local autonomy. The courts have refused to grant an injunction against further

attempts of the International to take control, but the rank and file painters and their remaining leaders, headed by the courageous Morris Evenson, continue to show a willingness to protect their independence in every way.

### Disaffiliation as a Revolt Tool

The revolt of California, Oregon, and Washington pulp and paper workers in 1964 received little publicity. However, it caught the attention of labor leaders nationally. In compliance with National Labor Relations Board requirements, workers in locals that were affiliated with two aging and eastern-based AFL-CIO internationals (International Brotherhood of Pulp, Sulphite, and Paper Mill Workers and the United Papermakers and Paperworkers) broke away to form the independent Association of Western Pulp and Paper Workers (AWPPW). The old unions lost face and \$500,000 a year in dues monies.

The AWPPW members, whose work in forty-nine mills accounts for 90 percent of pulp and paper production on the Pacific Coast, set up headquarters in Portland, Oregon. They announced the birth of their union through the publication of a monthly newspaper, *The Rebel*. They elected a president who is typical of the new union's staff; before taking office he was a mill electrician.

Since its initial organization the AWPPW has had strong support from regional and local unions in areas where they set up locals, but life has been hard for this new union. Its newness and small membership has made it impossible to build the large treasury needed to operate a union today. It is not just the high cost of routine operation, collective bargaining against large corporations, and legal costs that have created problems. The AWPPW is continually harassed by the two bureaucratized unions from which it split, both of which have the support of George Meany and the conservative AFL-CIO hierarchy. As their isolation increases and the official support they receive from other unions shrinks owing to pressure from Meany, their energies are expended in a fight for existence rather than growth.

Throughout the United States there are large numbers of workers in local and regional units whose position is similar to that of the Pacific Coast pulp and paper workers, prior to their establishment of independence in 1964. Their working conditions and wages are artificially depressed because of what amounts to captive affiliations with conservatively led international unions. Their tolerance of their captivity seems unlimited only because at present there is no progressive alternative available.

## Doug Fraser's Middle-Class Coalition

On July 19, 1978, UAW president Douglas Fraser resigned from the Labor Management Group. The group is technically a non-governmental committee organized by former Labor Secretary and Harvard Professor John T. Dunlop. It contains eight representatives each from management and labor. On the employer side are the chairmen of Bechtel Corporation, General Electric and General Motors, Jewel Companies Inc., du Pont de Nemours, U.S. Steel, Mobil Oil, and the First National City Bank.

Minus Fraser, the labor members are the international presidents of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers, Teamsters, Seafarers International Union, United Steelworkers, and Plumbers and Pipefitters, AFL-CIO secretary-treasurer Lane Kirkland, and AFL-CIO president George Meany.

Fraser's long and unusual letter of resignation says that he has the highest personal regard for Dunlop and the corporate CEOs. But that attractive as the personalities may be, "we all sit in a representative capacity. I have concluded that participation in these meetings is no longer useful to me or the 1.5 million workers I represent as president of the UAW."

"For a considerable time," Fraser continues, "the leaders of business and labor have sat at the Group's table—recognizing differences, but seeking consensus where it existed. That worked because the business community in the U.S. succeeded in advocating a general loyalty to an allegedly benign capitalism that emphasized private property, independence and self-regulation along with an allegiance to free, democratic politics."

Now, however, we see a "new approach of the business elite," says Fraser. ". . . with few exceptions, they have chosen to wage a one-sided class war today in this country—a war against working people, the unemployed, the poor, the minorities, the very young and the very old, and even many in the middle class of our society. The leaders of industry, commerce

and finance . . . have broken and discarded the fragile, unwritten compact previously existing during a past period of growth and progress.”

As examples of what Fraser calls the shift of the business community toward “confrontation rather than cooperation,” his letter points to the fight that business waged against the Labor Law Reform bill as the most “vicious, unfair attack on the labor movement in more than 30 years.” After making clear that the corporate members of the Labor Management Group finally wound up supporting some of the most anti-labor segments of the business world on the matter of labor reform, Fraser’s letter contains one of its most revealing paragraphs.

“GM, the largest manufacturing corporation in the world,” Fraser says, “has received responsibility, productivity and cooperation from the UAW and its members. In return, GM has given us a Southern strategy designed to set up a non-union network that threatens the hard fought gains won by the UAW. We have given stability and have been rewarded with hostility. Overseas, it is the same. General Motors not only invests heavily in South Africa, it refuses to recognize the black unions there.”

“My message should be very clear,” Fraser adds, “if corporations like GM want confrontation, they cannot expect cooperation in return from labor.” He feels that there is “no chance” that the business elite will join the fight for national health insurance, that instead business will continue to blame inflation on workers, the poor, and the consumers, that it now wants tax laws that create “even wider inequities,” and that it will continue to build “barriers to citizen participation in elections.”

Fraser comes to the resolution of his long letter with the statement that there is no point continuing discussion inside the Group “when we on the labor side have so little in common with those across the table.”

I cannot sit here seeking unity with the leaders of American industry, while they try to destroy us and ruin the lives of the people I represent.

I would rather sit with the rural poor, the desperate children of urban blight, the victims of racism, and working people seeking a better life than with those whose religion is the status quo, whose goal is profit and whose hearts are cold. We in the UAW intend to reforge the links with those who believe in struggle: the kind of people who sat down in the factories in the 1930’s and who marched in Selma in the 1960’s.

I cannot assure you that we will be successful in making new alliances and forming new coalitions to help our nation find its way. But I can assure you that we will try.

The week after Fraser resigned from the Group the *UAW Washington Report*, the newsletter that goes to every UAW official down to the rank of committeeperson and steward, reprinted the full text of the letter under the caption: "Doug Lays Down The Gauntlet." Shortly thereafter, reprints of the letter were distributed among the general membership. On September 19, Fraser put out a call to well over 100 unions and liberal and left organizations. He asked that they attend a one-day planning meeting in Detroit's Cobo Hall on October 17, the purpose being "to consider and plan formation of a new alliance of progressive forces." As the following excerpts indicate, the tone of Fraser's call letter was as aggressive in tone as his resignation from the "Group."

As the American political system now exists it does not and cannot respond to the people's needs and demands.

The time has come . . . for a vigorous counterattack against the right wing corporate forces and the political system they dominate.

We do not have true democracy through which to achieve equality and economic justice, because they have subverted its processes.

. . . the current crisis facing us cuts across virtually all the issues and calls for an overall alliance that hopefully will yield a broad comprehensive program for the rest of this century.

We live in one of the longest periods of discouragement about the prospects for social progress known to modern times. If ever there were phrases consciously designed to lure liberal and left forces from their demoralization, they are the phrases contained in the two Fraser letters mentioned above. Reading without care and without skepticism grounded in a careful examination of the limitations put upon Fraser by his position as a top union official, one could easily build the importance of Fraser's call to false proportions.

The first grounds that give one pause when reading Fraser's resignation and subsequent call for a "coalition of coalitions" is his view that American capitalism was in some way working for the "have-nots" until sometime in the early months of 1978. The second reason for not letting one's hopes mount is found in one of the contradictions in Fraser's new coalition idea. The logic of his appeal for independence from forces dominated by business leads to the conclusion that labor, liberal, and left forces should break with the two major parties. Yet Fraser, like the Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee (DSOC) with which he has close public

ties, is for concentrating political reform efforts inside the Democratic Party.

The third and most demanding cause for lowered expectations is that Fraser is the captive of forces that have victimized generations of labor union officials. Like all other American labor leaders he is the signatory to a very conservative contract. It automatically creates a divorce between leaders and ranks. It demands of Fraser that, as he himself calls it, his efforts remain a "coalition from the top."

An hour before the October 17 Cobo Hall conference opened, Douglas Fraser met the press flanked by Eleanor Smeal, president of the National Organization for Women (NOW); Cesar Chavez, president of the United Farm Workers; Benjamin Hooks, head of the NAACP; and Roy Pomerantz, chairperson of Friends of the Earth. It was 9 a.m., but that could not account for the total lack of enthusiasm in the room. There wasn't a new or original idea being put forth. Everyone had been over the same ideological ground many times before. Fraser began by announcing that only one of the unions that had been invited had refused to come, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU). He added, for openers, that George Meany had called him and apologized for not attending because it is "AFL-CIO policy not to participate in the life of political parties." From there, Fraser and the other four speakers stuck mainly with the theme that the parliamentary system is breaking down and that a revival of grass roots voter registration is needed. Hooks lauded Fraser for his membership in the NAACP and then explained that his organization went to the conventions of both parties with the same program. He said he preferred a position which would allow him to work with both parties. A reporter asked if any labor candidates would come out of the actions taken by the conference that followed. Eleanor Smeal answered, "This is a bi-partisan effort."

One reporter asked: "Won't all this [coalition activity] eventually point to the need for a Ted Kennedy to bring it all together?" Fraser: "That's not what I have in mind."

In his opening statement Fraser had said, "We are on a collision course with the Democratic Party." Shortly thereafter a reporter asked: "When you quit the Labor Management Group you mentioned a labor party. Why not now? Fraser replied: "We are not in favor of a labor party. It cannot work and is not viable in the U.S. at this time." Question from another reporter: "What's the next step you see if efforts to reform the Democratic Party fail?" Fraser: "I don't think we will fail. Both parties should put out their programs and if the one that's elected fails to put



programs into action then the people should turn it out of office and try something else.”

The formal postures usually adopted at press conferences were dropped only once. At one point Fraser looked right and left at his colleagues sitting with him on the dais and asked, “Am I the only one up here on the stand who is a member of the Democratic Party?” The body language response of Cesar Chavez indicated that there was one more. Two out of five were labor leaders and two out of five were Democrats.

None of the reporters were warming to their work. The press conference wasn't producing much to give them a story. There seemed a sense of relief when Fraser announced press time at an end so that he could move immediately to the larger hall next door. The conferees were assembled and waiting for him to make the opening speech.

It was 10 a.m. The conference opened featuring two delegates each from many different kinds of groups, from civil liberties to ecology, from consumer protection to farm policy. Two socialist organizations (DSOC and New American Movement) were also represented in the room by two delegates each. By midday the number of organizations would grow to 115. No such gathering had occurred in any way for more than three decades. As Fraser made his keynote speech on the need to gather in the Democratic Party in order to stem the new offensive of the right wing and the corporations, there wasn't a sign that anyone in the audience was experiencing a ripple of excitement.

It appeared that the representatives divided roughly into three groupings. The largest came from thirty-three labor unions. Most of their representatives wore business suits and ties, and were on the average somewhat older than the other delegates. The second group was composed of liberal left-of-center Democratic Party people who made their presence felt every bit as much as the unionists. Finally there was the miscellaneous grouping composed of representatives from all the other special issue organizations, each with a separate identity, but with politics that made their presence meaningful to the conference.

The featured speaker who followed Fraser was Berkeley congressman Ron Dellums, the representative of the New Democratic Coalition and a DSOC member. Dellums is both a capable speaker and an attractive personality. He began his remarks by posing a series of questions in the process of which it became clear he was addressing the delegates as the “left” of American politics. The representatives began to stir. Projecting his voice, he was going beyond Fraser's statement that there is no turn to the right

in this country, but rather a well-organized right efficiently pushing its views on the nation. Dellums was telling the audience that "the middle is diving for cover. The left must now emerge and pick up on the decisive issues." "Who are our enemies? Not the Bakkes, but the system." "In the 60s and early 70s it was the quota system. For every 10 hired, 5 could be white and the rest had to be blacks, browns, and women. The issue for now and into the 80s is will those 10 jobs even be there?" After hitting at the reactionary role of war and the Pentagon, Dellums closed with the idea that the civil rights movement didn't require an ideology because the people in it believed they could "get inside the system and make it work" and that now a different series of questions has to be faced.

Dellums received a standing ovation. The excitement he stirred was to be unique to the conference. Mike Harrington, chairperson of the DSOC, was the first speaker from the floor as the applause for Dellums died down. He made it clear that he agreed with all that Dellums had said and went on to argue that "we have the issues" on which to develop a viable new movement. "There is the issue of a National Health Program. We should have been out in front on Proposition 13. We haven't done a job on inflation. GM can raise the sticker price on its cars in the middle of a recession when auto workers are being laid off. We have to approach these issues in language that Americans can understand."

Light applause. Bella Abzug took the microphone right behind Harrington. "At last," she said, "we are responding positively. We must find a couple of common issues in this group. National Health, inflation, oil monopoly. We should set up a commission on issues to select and formulate them."

After Abzug, the delegate from the Environmentalists for Full Employment made the point that would be made by a number of others throughout the day. "The conference should attempt to build a grass roots organization as well as an issues coalition."

Saul Stettin of Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers changed the course of the discussion and offered the audience one of the few opportunities of the day for a laugh, even though of the sort that is used to hide other feelings. "I have been in the labor movement for forty-five years. I've been through Labor's Non-Partisan Political League and other labor political moves. In the Democratic Party meetings at the lower levels it's people looking for jobs in a machine and not a cause. I'm beginning to wonder if it's best to sit on the sidelines. This group should either get into the Democrat Party fully and completely or get out and form our own

party. One or the other, not neither. I don't know what's right, but I know one thing, right now, we are neither."

"Worse than being on the sidelines in the Democratic Party is to be in the Democratic Party being used by them." The speaker was Ed Donahue of the Graphic Arts International Union. "We should pick two issues only to move ahead together on. Congress is owned and controlled by oil. The issues should be taxes and oil."

While the speaker from the National Council of La Raza was stating that he came "with both hopefulness and skepticism because the speeches sound good, but the racial minorities usually get treated as minorities," a special attentiveness documented the seriousness of the statement. The main focus of the speakers, however, was still on the question of the Democratic Party.

Veteran civil rights and labor attorney Joseph L. Rauh Jr. is a force to be contended with whenever he appears. He played a major role in helping Arnold Miller take over and "Reutherize" the UMW leadership operation. He received some mention in the campaign to put Ed Sadlowski at the head of the Steelworkers union. He is often to be found wherever there is potential threat to his party, whether it be from conservative or progressive forces.

Speaking for the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights he hit the mike with this opening statement: "I don't agree with all this stuff about the powerlessness of the Democratic Party." "I want to make the party we have work. We don't need a new platform. The one we have has never been initiated. The real problem in this Congress is the absence of presidential leadership. Quit talking about a new program and pass some of the program we already have. Send Carter a message that he should live up to his promises. Put him on the spot, not tell him we are going somewhere else."

Shortly, it was time for lunch. An hour later Doug Fraser reconvened the conference by introducing the second and last featured speaker, balancing out the morning speech by Ron Dellums. It was Don Fraser, the former congressman from Minnesota, recently defeated in an attempt to win the Senate seat vacated by the death of Hubert Humphrey. His speech was an extension of Joe Rauh's. "The Democratic Party Chairman is picked by the incumbent in the White House, and that has to be changed. The party works best when it doesn't have an incumbent in the White House. It's then more responsive. Our first challenge is to improve on the rules of the quadrennial struggle. We need to reduce the number of states holding presidential primaries." "I chair the Democratic Conference. The

Democratic National Committee lacks the broad base to get the money to operate. Our challenge is not to make the party more progressive, but more effective." "The enemy is single issue politics and pre-primary endorsements."

The good lunch was weighing on us all. Don Fraser wasn't helping any. There had been a feeble attempt at a standing ovation when he was introduced. There was less general enthusiasm when he sat down.

"Single issue organizations are not the problem. It's the multiple issue organizations. They make trade-offs." "If a labor grouping wants support for one of its bills it has to go along on the issues favored by those who gave them the support," argued a delegate from the Citizens Utility Energy Coalition, adding "Common Cause is into so many things, is so spread out that it can't do anything."

The representative from the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW) was brief and to the point. "We won ERA extension. It shows that the system does work if you work hard enough."

"We in the labor movement have abdicated," acknowledged a representative of the Democratic Agenda. "We have lost touch with the ranks. Maybe we are too far away from our base." (Very mild applause.)

"I'm Johnny Brown of the Operating Engineers and I'm the Legislative Director for my union on Capitol Hill. The rep from the Laborers said it right. Corporate power is the problem. There have been no labor bills passed in two years. Unions aren't given a fair shake. Don't even have a committee in the Senate. Not even a subcommittee. It was taken away from us. You won't have your ERA's if the unions go down the drain as in a fascist country. You won't have anything left."

Russell Means of the American Indian Movement spoke of the plight of the Indians and finished by saying: "I want to welcome you all to the fight. We have been in it longer than anyone here. It has been threatened that troops could be used to break the postal strikes. We have known this action many times."

The representative of the Americans for Democratic Action took the floor to say that he "agreed with everything" he had heard during the day and added, "We need a coalition to do the long hard labor it takes to build a real political party in this country. We can't get progress on issues until we get a party. I hope Doug Fraser undertakes the job of forming continuing committees. I move we agree to give him that authority."

It was getting to be that time. The representatives had been sitting long enough. An impatience had appeared. Tom Jones of the National Union

of Farm Workers had taken the floor to say that the conference had to make clear "how I can keep my autonomy" while working with the rest of the groups here. He asked, "Do I have to loan the coalition one of my staff members? What are the mechanics of getting this thing going?" Right behind Jones, Roberta Lynch of the New American Movement (NAM) echoed Bella Abzug. "Let's get a couple of good issues. What are the mechanics here that we can use to do these things? What can we do now to build something concrete?" The same and similar points had been made by several others and would be made again and for the last time at the conference by Heather Booth of the Citizen Labor Energy Coalition and the Midwest Academy. "I'm looking forward to the boring work of developing grass roots organizing," she contended. Aiming her remarks at Doug Fraser she added that she felt it of importance that he had "declared class war."

Two commissions had to be set up to do the continuing work of the coalition in the next period. This had been made clear in copies of a UAW press release available to all before the conference started. An Issues Commission would be formed to develop "new strategies and approaches to the substantive social and economic goals shared by progressives." A Political Reform Commission would "develop efforts for governmental and party reforms such as an end to the filibuster and strengthened party accountability." Fraser reminded the representatives of the need to form the commissions and explained that he plans to report to his constituents about what happened at the conference. He went further to make clear his intention to carry the word of the Conference to Congress and to build organizational arms of the coalition at the community level.

Marcus Raskin of the Institute for Policy Studies congratulated Fraser and moved that the body give Fraser the authority to move ahead as indicated. The motion carried unanimously by a standing vote. Fraser closed the conference by telling the representatives that he would communicate with them in relation to actions to be taken and that he would convene the two commissions shortly after the November elections.

That was it. The conference was over an hour ahead of schedule. The Democratic Party activists held a fractional meeting and the rest made their way to the parking lots. As I walked out I overheard someone say that they had noticed the presence of Tom Hayden and James Farmer and that they were sorry that neither of them spoke. Others could be added to the same list such as Dave Selden former president of the AFT and James Herman, new president of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union. Then there were others whose absence spoke to the

limitations of the coalition, popular black leaders like Ken Cockrel. A black man and a socialist, he was the only candidate elected to the Detroit City Council in 1977 without UAW and Democratic Party endorsement. He was the lawyer for the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement and other Black Revolutionary Union Movements in Detroit.

But the main question on the minds of those filing out of Cobo Hall was undoubtedly Douglas Fraser. It really had been mainly his show. His authority is established because he leads a union that deals with GM, the largest corporation in the world, and its competitors. How far will he be willing to carry what had been started in Cobo Hall? In auto, aircraft, aerospace, agricultural implement, and electrical products plants around the country his union has a membership of almost a million and a half. The decisive question is, will he make a serious effort to stimulate their direct involvement?

It is unlikely in the extreme that the president of the UAW will mobilize the ranks of his union to "Fight back against reactionaries who today possess so much momentum." In the first place, Fraser has picked the Democratic Party as the arena in which to make his fight. That is clear from all his public statements and the materials printed by the UAW for use at the Planning Meeting. It may well be that millions of American workers vote the Democratic Party ticket, but it is not an arena that a mass of people can get into. The party is consciously structured to make it possible for it to accept votes, but not mass participation of the kind that determines party policy.

In the second place, Fraser could not—and dared not—make a real and general appeal to his ranks, asking their participation. Most auto workers today reject the international leadership of their union. The rejection is a complex one. They do not reject their union despite their oftentimes disgust and even hatred of its officials. It is the only institutional weapon they have going for them. But the leadership of the union refuses to champion the demands they need to fight for most. The ranks have been openly fighting the officials at Solidarity House (UAW International headquarters building), Walter Reuther, then Leonard Woodcock, and now Douglas Fraser for a quarter of a century, trying to get them to lead a struggle to obtain some control over unchecked production speeds. Fraser and his staff, like those of the UAW presidents before him, are experts at outmaneuvering and coercing the ranks into accepting contracts they don't want, contracts in which "packages" are substituted for improved working conditions. In short, the leadership has become the seller of bribes.

Around the country today are hundreds of former auto workers who were once popular rank and file leaders in their workplaces. They led rebellions against contracts the ranks rejected. Finally, they were fired and the ranks were forced into temporary acceptance. The participants in the rebellions knew and know that the buffer standing in the way of their fight against the employer was the international union. They were denied the leaders of their own choosing, leaders of the sort that would have been officially hailed as union heroes and heroines in the 1930s, now the victims of firings in which due process was a mockery.

Fraser has an international union field staff of almost a thousand people. He has the power to fire any one of them. In addition, in many local unions there are members who would like to obtain staff jobs. Fraser can involve these employees in the activity of the coalition. But if he sought the open help of his regular rank and file, he would then owe them. He would in turn have to make some important concessions to them. It is certain that the ranks would turn the coalition into an arena for airing their case against Fraser and the International.

In order to counter the "one-sided class war" that Fraser says is now being waged against the working class, he cannot involve the workers themselves. He is not free to do so. Neither is any other labor union official in this country. It is not that they are bad people. The institution of collective bargaining as it has come to operate in this country is reactionary. Until it is changed, the men and women we elect to lead our unions will continue to have no choice but to act as disciplinarians of the ranks.

During World War II, the employers learned the great advantage to be had in signing collective bargaining contracts that gave arbitrators the final authority in all local grievance disputes. With the aid of the conservatism created in the top labor officialdom during the war, the Taft-Hartley Act, and numbers of anti-labor judicial decisions, by the late 1960s over 90 percent of all union contracts contained unconditional no-strike pledges. That is, the local right to strike was denied and could not be used to back grievances that arose during the life of the contracts. In the place of that right came arbitration, which in 99 percent of all cases is conducted by male university professors or industrial relations lawyers.

Two complicating factors should here be explained. Many contracts entered into prior to 1942 contained no-strike pledges but the prohibitions of those clauses were not backed by heavy penalties (contractual and legal) for the individual violators. There are many contracts today like those that the UAW has with the Big Three auto manufacturers which

have an unconditional no-strike pledge. They allow the right to strike over grievances involving speedup and lack of safety. But the right to use that "right" requires the sanction of the international union and so is seldom exercised.

Contract unionism of the sort that denies the ranks the right to decide to strike to back a grievance at the local level creates an automatic gap and conflict between ranks and officials. The officials are put in the position of going before the employer to represent the ranks without being able to use the power of the ranks. This puts the employers at even greater advantage than at first meets the eye. It allows them to remove themselves, in appearance, one step away from the conflict. They say no to a grievance demand and the union has to report that "no" back to the ranks and enforce it. Yet there is a cost to the employer connected with this advantage. The arrangement manipulated by the employer requires that there be some stability in the union leadership. In turn, this requires that the employer make just enough concessions to the ranks, through the officialdom, to keep down rebellion. The arrangement has become a national plague within the unions, a boon to the worst sort of bureaucratization processes.

Part and parcel of the manipulation that alienates ranks from officials is a fraternization process that the employers deploy with union officials, providing them with status and prestige in the community. This is accomplished in many ways, but the most common and effective way is provided by the two-party system. It happens at all levels, through committees formed at the behest of mayors and presidents. It is precisely groups and committees formed by John T. Dunlop that have sustained the arrangement for corporate employers with top union officials for years.

It took until the late 1940s for the American employer community to drop its previously "hard" approach to unions. Until that time, it had usually fought the leaders and ranks alike. When post-war prosperity became assured, employers across the nation began to enter into collaborationist relationships with the union officials in their industry. No-strike contract unionism was a necessity and prerequisite for this collaboration.

In the past two years, there have been increasing signs that employers are experimenting with a change of approach. Some are beginning to make moves that would lead them away from the "soft" industrial relations of the last thirty years. Due to the economic squeeze, longtime collaborations are being threatened. Fraser's break with the Labor Relations Group of John Dunlop is a major incident in this new process. It is both fascinating and



important. Nothing like it has happened since the industrial relations era of the 20s and 30s. It is to Fraser's credit that he made a partial break. He has yet to make the big one, the break that both Reuther and Woodcock promised to accomplish and couldn't—to take on GM, in particular, and support the fight of the ranks on the question of production standards.

In order for the auto workers to gain some control over production speeds and working conditions, they have to get the right to strike at the local level. With that right the entire dynamic of intra-union relationships would change. The gap between ranks and officials could narrow to a point where an aggressive leader could actually lead, be a champion. Someone like Fraser, if he chose to do so, wouldn't be forced to try to use the liberal wing of the Democrats and young radicals as a substitute for involving his membership. Tragically, the change for Fraser and many incumbents like him would not be an easy one to make. Far too many auto workers know Fraser as a breaker of strikes. Such an identity is hard to overcome and is better remembered in the auto plants than outside.

The atmosphere during the Cobo Hall coalition meeting was without the excitement of new ideas because of the isolation of union officials, liberals, and socialists from the ranks of labor. One of the big problems, of course, is the length of the period during which the fights made by workers have not broken out of the workplace with sufficient force to become national public events. The coal miners' strike against both the operators and union leaders earlier this year was an exception. The widespread localized rank and file rebellions of the 1964–1969 period were frustrated by the combined efforts of the employers and union officials. Those rebellions and revolts could have become official struggles aired before the public had the union officials been free to lead them. No-strike contract unionism has eliminated the union leadership's ability to act as a communication link between the working class and the middle-class public, its more radical sections in particular. The period of isolation of workers from radical intellectuals, and what has often appeared to be an era of apathy for both, exactly parallels the period of the "soft" industrial relations approach of the large corporations.

Doug Fraser's coalition is a response to the passing of the "soft" period. The breadth and scope of the organizations in attendance at the first meeting is impressive and important. Not one of those organizations, however, has any real touch with any mass grouping in America or makes claim to such. Only Fraser can in any way be looked to change that condition for the other organizations in the coalition at this point. It is in the nature

of the long drought that many will pin high hopes on Fraser without knowing the limitations that bind him. There hasn't been a serious public discussion and examination of the condition of collective bargaining for more than a generation. Woefully, too, between now and the 1980 elections that Fraser is so focused on, those who want to stay in the coalition will have to make concessions to the Democratic Party.

All institutional forces involved in collective bargaining and the role that the two-party system has played in its degeneration conspire to keep rank and file auto workers out of Fraser's coalition. Moreover, I don't believe that an invitation to join would be attractive to them. There is not only a resentment against the international union, but an attitude of ridicule toward the sort of things that even the most liberal of two-party politicians must do in their dealings with people.

The question has and will again be raised as to whether or not it is correct for socialists to participate in the Fraser Coalition. It appears an easy matter for those who have decided that socialism can develop "from above," through progressive although bureaucratically taken small steps. But those who are committed to the concept that socialism is only possible through initiative from the ranks of the working class may have a harder time. The Fraser Coalition is the first fissure, crack, or cranny, that many have seen in the establishment's politics for some time. Though distorted, it will be seen as some sort of opportunity to break out of isolation. This is an illusion, in my view. In the longer run, it guarantees isolation. How can any who believe that social progress is dependent upon the free and independent involvement of the working class make entry to any area where, in effect, the working-class entry is denied?

(1979)

## The Failure of Business Unionism

For the first time in over half a century, we are beginning to see many and varied examples of working people asserting their own leadership rather than demanding that it be provided by union officials. There is both an urgent necessity for a national organization standing for a rank and file alternative to business unionism and a real possibility of building such an organization based on existing and future networks of working people.

This statement, then, is intended to give further encouragement to the formation of a structure that can play a vital role in assisting rank and file workers in their efforts to extend and deepen their communication with one another across workplaces, across union affiliations, and even across national boundaries.

In several cities and regions in the country, workers are forming rank and file networks that cross traditional union lines. They are building support coalitions within local communities. They are beginning to create the basis for new types of unions based on the principles of local autonomy, democratic control, community support, and the formation of solidarity networks. These networks range from the “New Directions” caucus in the UAW to the community support committee built by predominately Latina workers in their courageous cannery strike in Watsonville, California.

So far, the most well known example is the national support for the Local P-9 strike against Hormel in Austin, Minnesota, that began in 1985. Based on solidarity from other union members and the general public, the P-9 experience demonstrated that permanent, nationwide networking across boundaries of contract, union jurisdiction, and industry was possible. Finally, however, the international officers of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) were able to break P-9 because of the inability to obtain the primary form of solidarity—independent but united action by workers at a majority of Hormel plants. Nevertheless, the wide support given Local P-9 by hundreds of thousands of workers demonstrates

a deep generosity, and far more, an awareness of the need for solidarity wherever laboring people are under attack. Still more, it indicates that union members throughout the country are able to identify with the P-9 struggle against their union bureaucracy.

The P-9 solidarity network and the networks created in other rank and file struggles indicate the beginnings of a new form of unionism. The “horizontal” nature of this movement stands in sharp contrast to the “vertical” nature of traditional business unions. In a business union, members who want the support of another union must proceed “vertically” through bureaucratic channels within their own union. Eventually, the “international” officers will contact their counterparts in the other union, and the request for solidarity will trickle down through another bureaucracy. As working people have learned to their pain, the “vertical” unions are ill-equipped to respond to the offensive of multinational corporations, which are capable of shifting capital and jobs from one city to another, from one part of the world to another. Thus, we see the efforts of working people to “horizontally” rebuild the labor movement as a response to both the multinational corporate attacks and, more importantly, the failure of the union bureaucrats to deal with these attacks. To truly understand the significance of today’s rank and file initiatives, we must study both these dimensions. In addition, we must retrieve aspects of labor history—rank and file labor history—so that we can understand the development of business unionism and the periodic rebellions of rank and file people to create an alternative.

In the 1970s, millions of American workers came under a new kind of attack. Large, unionized corporations were able to open an offensive against workers in one plant without fear that top union officials would mobilize retaliations in other plants. Employers were able to kill hundreds, even thousands, of jobs in a very brief period by use of the new, computerized forms of automation, such as microprocessing and robotics. They could quickly shut down entire operations and then reopen them in other regions or countries.

For a time, the reaction among workers was shock and disbelief. But within a decade, union members realized that their leaders at the international and federation levels—and even local levels with rare exceptions—were going to continue to cast their lot with the employers, even though the layoffs and runaways were eliminating their dues base. They had negotiated away the right to strike and allowed multinational corporations to pick off workplaces one by one.

The actions of the union bureaucrats disarmed the rank and file and promoted a feeling of terrible isolation among working people. This feeling of isolation, coupled with the loss of the right to strike, explains the apparent overwhelming power of corporations in this period. It also begins to explain the crisis within our labor movement.

What is the cause of the current crisis in unions? On one level, the crisis is based on changes in production on a worldwide scale:

1. The new world economy is no longer based on national production and international exchange but on international production. By international production, we mean such phenomena as the "world car" assembled in one set of countries and sold in others.
2. Operating in this new world economy are new forms of business organization, the multinational, or transnational, corporation.
3. These corporations use a new technology based on the microchip, the computer, the robot, the optical cable, and satellite transmission, which have revolutionized production, warehousing, sales, and finance.
4. All these changes have been largely based upon a revolution in transportation involving uniform containerization, the automation of sea and land cargo.

The multinational corporation is able to move its capital, plants, and labor with incredible facility. It can take advantage of markets, natural resources, and labor throughout the world. It is especially able to take advantage of "cheap" labor, unorganized labor, and labor controlled by military dictatorships (which it may also finance and support). As the employers once played one neighborhood against another and one ethnic group against another, so now they play one nation against another, threatening to pull out their entire operation. The result is a new kind of blackmail and colonialism.

These changes affect not only the United States, but also Europe and Japan, Taiwan and Singapore, Mexico and Brazil. The new order, based on world production, affects workers in both the capitalist and the Communist world, in both industrialized and developing nations.

However, while the corporations have been able to organize a new world economy, they have not been able to control that economy. Fierce competition continues between corporations; they struggle for higher profits, which sometimes means bankruptcies for the losers. The new world economy has intensified the economic crises of the past. Since 1974 the world

has seen at least two depressions, and unemployment rates are now two or three times what was considered acceptable in the 1960s.

The new technology, plant closings, runaway shops, and job blackmail have provided employers a vast array of weapons against workers. Within the United States, these weapons have been linked to important political and economic developments:

1. Ronald Reagan's firing of some thirteen thousand members of PATCO, the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization, showed that the changes in industry had been accompanied by an anti-labor shift in the political climate. The firings had a chilling impact on all workers, but most particularly on public workers.
2. The shutdowns and runaways, as they added up, produced what has been called the "deindustrialization" of America. While the "deindustrialization" may have been somewhat exaggerated, it certainly did lead to a decline of the industrial sector and a growth of the service sector, which had many ramifications, including less union organization, lower wages, and a reduced tax base.
3. Changes in the economy have resulted in the creation of two poles of workers: one group of professional and unionized industrial workers earning relatively high wages, and another group of non-union industrial, clerical, and service workers earning low wages. In part, this accounts for what has been called the "feminization of poverty." The incomes of women are only 60 percent of those of men.
4. Changes in the economy also have led to the growth of the low-wage sector, workers in small shops doing industrial home work or in agricultural or domestic labor at or around (and in some cases below) the minimum wage. Many, if not most, of these workers are racial minorities, Latinos and Asians, new immigrants, and women.
5. One of the basic measures of the crisis of unionism is the fall in the number of organized workers from something like 35 percent in the 1950s to only about 17 percent in the late 1980s.

Although the crisis of the labor movement is based on broad changes in worldwide production and more specific political and economic developments in the United States, the key to the crisis is understanding the role of labor officials. In this period of momentous changes, it has been the union bureaucrats who have disarmed and isolated working people. They have negotiated away the right to strike during the term of a labor

contract. They have allowed corporations to introduce automation and eliminate thousands of jobs under the guise of increasing productivity and promoting progress. They have permitted multinationals to attack workplaces one at a time, and they have opposed the efforts of rank and file members to build solidarity networks.

It is easily forgotten that employers have gotten tough in the last decade precisely because they saw that their employees were in a near-defenseless position. Why bother to give employees pattern-bargained wage increases? Why go through the charade of negotiating with leaders who long ago cut themselves adrift from their dues payers? Most simply put, some employers no longer need the labor officials, no matter how helpful they were in the past. Moreover, even the business union is a liability in the competitive struggle for profits in an era of recurrent economic crises.

The takeover of industrial relations by corporate "hard-liners" does not mean that the "soft-liners" have been eliminated. They are waiting on call, ready to pump artificial life into business unionism, should the situation so require. For example, Felix Rohatyn's books and articles represent the "soft-liner" perspective, calling for a bureaucratic reorganization of the labor movement. Right now it is the hard-liners who are in command, and the labor bureaucrats are responding to the corporate attacks with what seems to be an unbelievable stand: they are presiding over the destruction of the very organizations that have fed their personal careers. Their strategy in the face of corporate attack is to sell credit cards and insurance policies to workers they can't inspire or organize. How did this scandalous situation develop?

Today, there are indications that working people are beginning to develop new approaches to unionism. These approaches are not really new, since they are based on a historic tradition of rank and file revolts against the narrow confines of business unionism. For example, since the creation of the new labor bureaucracy in the late 1940s, there have been waves of rank and file resistance to both employers and union officials. As early as 1951, during a special one-day convention of the United Steelworkers of America, district and local leaders told the higher officials that they were too far away from the ranks to know that trouble was brewing and that for too long too little had been accomplished at the center. The second big signal came in 1955 when GM workers wildcatted against a contract containing no controls over the pace of production. Local rebellions peaked in the years 1964–1969 when union members toppled six incumbent international presidents. The actions were directed at union

leaders who were perceived by members as not willing to defend them against the employers' offensive based on automation.

The rebellions were finally defeated for several reasons: (1) the union bureaucrats still had close ties with the employers, and both worked together against the rebel leaders; (2) the rebel activists were isolated from each other and had not planned the formation of networks in advance; and (3) veterans of the campus struggles of the sixties had not yet entered the unions. There was little basis for forging the "worker-intellectual" alliances that always appear when basic change is on the agenda.

As the incidence of rebellions dropped severely in 1969, employers experienced the largest wave of absenteeism, tardiness, and minor product sabotage in memory. This individual form of resistance sounded the alarm that spawned the government-led campaign for "Quality of Work Life" programs. At the same time, myths were promoted about the total obedience of the Japanese working class, despite militant struggles against plant closures, which went unreported by the U.S. media.

One very important movement of the sixties, and one which had a great influence on the seventies, was that of the United Farm Workers (UFW), led by Cesar Chavez. The strikes and boycotts of low-wage Filipino/a and Latino/a workers, many of them women, helped to instill a sense of idealism in a labor movement that had become conservative and in some cases even corrupt.

Another important movement was that of public employees—teachers, social workers, clerical workers, janitors—who joined unions like the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, the Service Employees International Union, the American Librarians Association, and the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees. In the late sixties and early seventies, these workers frequently engaged in illegal strikes and sometimes went to jail for the right to unionize.

The 1970s saw an impressive rank and file rebellion sweep through a variety of unions. Workers were influenced by other social movements, such as the civil rights and Black Power movements, the anti-Vietnam War movement, and the women's movement. But mostly workers were driven to fight in order to keep wages up with the double-digit inflation and to oppose the new technology. The movements often focused on union reform because as long as the unions were controlled by the bureaucrats, workers could not defend themselves against the employer.

In the coal fields, the "black lung movement," which provoked a wildcat



strike in West Virginia in February 1969, gave rise to Miners for Democracy, which fought to end the dictatorship of United Mine Workers union president (and murderer) Tony Boyle. Soon thereafter, in March of 1970, postal workers engaged in an illegal national strike that eventually spread to two hundred cities. In 1970, Teamster rank and filers rebelled, with some three hundred local unions engaged in a wildcat strike which gave rise to a national organization called TURF (Teamster Union Rank and File). Due to a lack of reliable leadership and program, the group soon fell apart. Finally, in July 1971, the New York telephone workers went out on strike.

There was also a strike against General Motors in 1970. In fact, throughout the late sixties and early seventies, there were constant rank and file movements among auto workers, including the black workers' "revolutionary union movement," the rebellion of young white workers at Lordstown against GMAD (the General Motors Assembly Division speedup), and, among the older, mostly white, skilled workers in the International Skilled Trade Council. It was a weakness of the auto workers' movement that these three groups never got together.

Many of the existing networks of union activists have their roots in the rebellions of the sixties and seventies. The movements have provided invaluable lessons. Today, as workers face a new attack by the multinationals in the form of the robot and the microchip, they have turned toward new forms of organization. The P-9 mobilization of solidarity against Hormel has been the most visible example, but it is far from the only one. There has been some report of independent networking between locals in every union in this country. This is occurring because not only are international union officials not providing leadership to the rank and file, they are not providing services to local unions. As dues income has dropped, the internationals have cut back on staff. The isolation of locals from the international officers not only necessitates, but legitimizes the growth of horizontal unionism, the networking between locals.

The automobile industry is one example of an industry that has become fully multinational in the last twenty years. It is the largest industry in the United States and is led by the world's largest corporation, General Motors (GM). Auto workers are the most strategically located segment of the American labor force and are often the first to feel the tension and torsion of shifts in international capital investment. Yet even at this point, the UAW officials will not stand up for their members. They went along with the joint Toyota-GM deal at the Fremont plant in California. They colluded in the layoff of all the workers who had been employed there

before the deal was cut and in the refusal to provide them first preference in rehire when the plant reopened under Japanese management. Thus, the militant in-plant leaders were eliminated, along with hundreds more.

At the UAW's 1985 GM Council meeting in St. Louis, twenty-three locals networked on the spot and demanded a national strike vote on the basis of five demands. The very first demand was that all the Fremont workers who had been cheated out of their jobs be recalled. The remaining demands related to re-winning concessions about working conditions. The delegates went home believing that the strike vote would be called and that they had won an important victory. But in the end, the delegates lost because they still believed that their leadership was democratic enough to carry out a democratic decision it opposed. The officials of UAW Solidarity House did just the opposite of the instruction: they placed the original Fremont GM local under trusteeship, seized all of its assets, and acted as its official mortician. The lesson was obvious: if the rank and file wants to accomplish something, it has to be ready to carry it out itself.

In 1984, when GM announced that it intended to close a score of plants permanently, the Owen Bieber UAW leadership let all locals know that they were on their own and would have to compete with each other for survival. At Mack Truck, in a response which completely surprised UAW officials, four locals this year apparently countered their abandonment by each entering into negotiations with management for memorandums of understanding. This action brought the international union back into the bargaining. It is not a great distance from the type of action initiated by the Mack Truck locals to an independent network of GM locals with the goal of creating a united bargaining front against the shutdowns.

Finally, it is important to stress that the network movement is rooted in the rank and file campaign to assert the authority of the shop floor committee over that of outside officials in dealing with working conditions. For example, Pete Beltran of UAW Local 645 in Van Nuys, California, recently gave up his position as local president in order to successfully run for the chairmanship of the shop committee. Beltran and his supporters saw the move as essential to their fight against management's promotion of the "team concept" in production. It is also not surprising that these same activists are at the forefront of the campaign to keep the GM plant open through the building of a community coalition, based primarily in the surrounding Latino community.

Movements such as the P-9 solidarity network and the developments within the UAW are recent examples of a new, horizontal unionism. In

addition, there are other important sources of rank and file power, such as the independent organizing campaigns of women and racial minorities. The founding convention of the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW) in March 1974 took place at the height of the feminist movement. The enthusiasm among women could have been used to revitalize labor unions in new ways. Women came to that CLUW convention prepared to go out and organize low-paying industries employing women. But the top union bureaucrats had their women officials at the convention. They did a job. They laid down the rules: Union women were free to participate in organizing campaigns, but not as women. All organizing would be done through the organizing departments of the international unions.

Black workers in the 1960s, built their own on-the-job organizations in a number of industries, mainly in auto. In most plants they took the name "revolutionary union movement"—and they were revolutionary because they fought for democratic rights in the context of workplaces where management holds all the power, and where the Constitution and Bill of Rights do not apply. The union officialdom felt threatened by the black activists and destroyed their organizations. Since most of these organizations were ideologically separatist, they had made few attempts to form even temporary alliances with whites, Latinos, or other workers. While there were some attempts to link the black groups at different plants, on the whole each group tended to remain isolated. Thus, although the black revolutionary union movement was short-lived, it provides many lessons for the future.

There have been several recent successes among racial minority and immigrant workers which show the powerful potential of these movements: In the last few years, immigrant Chinese restaurant workers in New York's Chinatown have formed their own autonomous unions through organizing drives which required the mobilization of support from Chinatown residents and community organizations. The workers only took the step of forming independent unions when they were unable to get help from the established union in the restaurant jurisdiction.

In Watsonville, California, cannery workers, mainly Latina women, won a yearlong strike through the formation of a strong rank and file committee and on the basis of community support networks. In Seattle, Washington, in the 1970s, a rank and file caucus of Filipino American activists took power in their International Longshoremen and Warehousemen Union. They built links to the major grassroots union movement in the Philippines. Their activity represented so much of a threat to the Marcos

dictatorship that it provided money to the former union president to assassinate two leaders of the reform movement.

In Van Nuys, California, a rank and file committee within UAW Local 645 has built a coalition based in the Chicano and Latino communities to keep the GM plant from closing. In Boston, Massachusetts, Chinese garment workers, most of them immigrant women, successfully fought a plant closing with rank and file organization and community support. In southern California, rank and file activists have contacted their counterparts in Mexican border cities to promote communication between workers in plants owned by the same multinational. The network has resulted in a newsletter, *Puente* (Bridge). Finally, across the United States, grassroots labor–community coalitions have arisen to deal with the new Simpson–Rodino immigration law. It is likely that these coalitions will work toward the organization of newly documented immigrants into unions.

The rank and file upsurge among women, racial minorities, and new immigrant workers has had an impact on other sectors of society. For example, within the multinational IBM corporation, workers from nine countries—both union and non-union members—have formed the IBM Workers United and have produced a newsletter, *Resistor*. In late April 1987, the group held a joint meeting with other networks, the National Black Workers Alliance of IBM Employees, and representatives of the Communication Workers of America, and the organization Integrated Circuit. Following the meeting, worker delegates attended the IBM stockholders' meeting, where they presented a joint statement relating to worker concerns. Similar types of rank and file networks have begun to emerge in other arenas. Thus, recently the publication *Citizen Soldier* called for the unionization of U.S. Army soldiers.

Public employees continue to play a particularly key role in the transformation of the labor movement. Like private-sector employees, they suffer from the closing of industrial plants which reduce the tax base and form the conservative political climate which has led to budget cuts, layoffs, and reduced wages and benefits. But public workers have certain advantages, as compared to those in the private sector. First, they are not subject to the same pressures. Some of their jobs provide essential services and cannot easily be eliminated. Second, because many public-sector jobs involve services to clients rather than the manufacture of products, public workers often have strong links to the communities which they serve. Third, the public sector is often a major employer of minority workers and women, who tend to be better represented in the ranks of

their union leaderships. Thus, public employee unions have a special role to play in the fight for minority and women's rights in the workplace, the union, and society.

One recent illustration of the potential of public employee struggles was the 1986 teachers strike in Oakland, California. Begun as a salary dispute, parents and students in the predominantly black city mobilized in support of the teachers at the picket lines, at rallies, and at school board meetings. As a result, the teachers won their demands and laid the basis for an ongoing teacher-parent alliance.

Throughout the United States and around the world, a new type of labor movement is beginning to take shape. Although still in its infancy, the rank and file movement has certain distinctive features. It tends to take up the issue of the humanization of work. It organizes itself horizontally. It strives toward democratic ideals. These values drive it into conflict with the bureaucracy of business unions, with the employers, and with the government.

In the era of the multinational corporation, it is not surprising that the trend toward horizontal unionism has begun to cross international boundaries. Rank and file auto workers from different countries have been meeting for years without the assistance of international unions. Recently union activists from Mexico and the United States met in Tijuana to discuss the impact of the Simpson-Rodino law on their unions and their peoples.

More than ten years ago, longshoremen of eleven European nations formed the Congress movement, with members from each nation refusing to work the ships struck by others. The network idea is now being tried by seamen in some of the same countries. So far, no Canadian or American seamen are participating, and no official U.S. labor publication has ever published information on the Congress movement. Similar types of horizontal formations are COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions) in South Africa, the May First Movement in the Philippines, and Coordinadora in Spain.

The most well known example of horizontal unionism is Polish Solidarity, where workers created a nationwide network linking hundreds of separate workplaces based on strong support from local communities. The network knocked out the existing structure of bureaucratic unions in a matter of weeks.

There is a need for the formation of a national support group to assist rank and file efforts in building the new horizontal unionism. The first

question we must address is, why not merge our support efforts with one of the existing labor groups, since there are several organizations attempting to provide an alternative approach to the policies of labor officials? These groups include Trade Union Action and Democracy (TUAD) and National Rank and File Against Concessions (NRFAC).

There is a need for the formation of a nationwide support group to provide assistance to working people in their efforts to set up solidarity networks of all kinds. In this regard, we believe that the primary task of the support group should be to *facilitate* rank and file activity and initiative, not substitute itself for it. Toward this end, the group should assist the movement that is already occurring by:

1. Providing working people with new contacts locally, nationally, and internationally.
2. Creating forums for discussion of ideas generated by the networks.
3. Making available the history of rank and file struggles that are forerunners of the current movement. This history should assist the creation of horizontal, rather than vertical, unionism, and help explain the development of bureaucratism in the labor movement.
4. Explaining the nature of no-strike and arbitration clauses that dominate more than 90 percent of all labor contracts, as well as the importance of retrieving the right to strike during the term of a contract.
5. Putting forth ideas that begin to bring union control back into the workplace.
6. Publicizing attempts at international networks in which American workers participate.
7. Exposing the strategic weaknesses of multinationals. They operate with slim margins for error in communications and transport of product, meaning that they must establish and maintain tight central control over their entire operations. Any time control of the union in any one of their workplaces is taken from the labor bureaucracy and moved onto the job, these international giants experience crisis. The formation of solidarity networks to protect local unions by the rank and file is the primary condition for a counteroffensive by labor. To bring union control back onto the job is not simply a basic tenet of union democracy, but the best defense against attacks by multinational employers.
8. Explaining how the structure of local unions was designed to make it easy to control them from above and far away. The chairperson of the shop committee or shop stewards committee is the elected officer who

has the natural power of the rank and file. He or she resides in office at the place where production is performed. But the vast majority of local union structures deny full authority to this office and the stewards and members that it directly represents. Instead, an additional office is created which calls upon its holder to govern the local from outside the workplace.

In the overwhelming majority of unions, local presidents preside in offices or union halls across the street or down the road from where rank and filers spend most of their waking hours. They are the officers who are first of all in direct communication with the international offices. Local presidents are the official and legal links between the international officers and the memberships. In the local unions that experienced revolts in the sixties, it was most often the heads of the shop or office union committees who stuck with the ranks, while the presidents were the ones who most often caved in to pressure from the internationals. It becomes the task of this new time to support efforts to end this artificially split structure in official local union government.

9. Being alert to the possibility of common support actions between organizations of rank and file workers, of professional workers, and intellectuals who are finding they are forced to fight to improve the condition of life on this planet and need the kinds of alliances that can be sustained without a loss of autonomy.

In *Ideology and Popular Protest*, social historian and author George Rude presents the idea that when efforts at accelerated social progress in modern times have been successful, they have been accomplished by alliances between radicalized workers and radicalized intellectuals. This alliance did, in fact, occur in the French and American revolutions and accompanied or was a forerunner of some of the most heartening developments in the early 1930s, which in turn opened the way to the formation of industrial unions in the United States. The growth and main life of this most recent alliance was cut short by the outbreak of world-scale war. Since that time, the only major avenue available for involvement of intellectuals with labor has been through its union bureaucracies, and so the opportunities for unfettered get-togethers have been rare.

The reappearance of rank and file worker networks and groupings once again creates opportunities for alliances to occur without top labor bureaucrats imposing their ideology or fear of new ideas. In short, we believe that the networking now going on raises major responsibilities for

labor activists. First, instead of the ineffective, legalistic tactics favored by most union officials, the new networks must retrieve such traditional solidarity tactics as the mass picket line, the secondary boycott, and the “flying squadron” in order to counter the employers’ increasing use of strikebreakers backed up by the police and National Guard. Most importantly, they must retrieve the right to strike—not only at the end of contract, but during the life of a contract. Second, in order for the new horizontal union structure to avoid bureaucratic control, the new networks must emphasize the authority at the level of the workplace, at the level of the shop floor committee, not the level of outside officers.

(c. 1988)



# The Australian Dock Strike

STAN WEIR AND GEORGE LIPSITZ

The self-initiated strikes by rank and file longshore workers in Australia in response to their employers' lockout and violent attacks during the past year represent one of the most important breakouts from the containment imposed on workers internationally during the last half century.

Since World War II, the longshore men and women of Australia, like so many other union workers around the world, could feel the power to direct even their own local union and to control the conditions of their work weakening rapidly. They were never treated as if they were the ones who knew the most about their work. The top leaders of their unions and management officials worked together to bring automation to the waterfront during the 1960–1980 period. In unions around the world, it is common to find top union officials in the role of disciplinarians, enforcing even employer layoff policies. In fact, when the new technology began to eliminate large percentages of union jobs, the people in power in the industry seemed to have forgotten that they had promised workers such a thing could never happen.

So the wharfies did the same as millions of us have had to do; they learned the “ins” and “outs” of the new technology. They did their work and didn't share many of their thoughts with official union leaders or with management. By the 1970s, they knew what the new machinery could do and became its expert operators. In short, they learned their new jobs so well that the designers of robots were able to use human models to develop the future generations of robots.

The 90s brought unexpected change to many waterfronts. Dockside managers and engineers were seeing to it that productivity continued to increase, and they continued to demand more. Escalating demands on workers usually lead to resistance, but different from the kind that can be expressed through formal institutions in contract language. Here and there little developments probably took the form of actions limiting the speed of container movement for short time periods.

There are employers in most industries who not only insist on a work speed that can risk lives, but who freak out if they are not getting all that is humanly possible from their employees—all the time. Down on the ships, the workers still may not have realized that a minute or two might mean thousands of dollars, often more. Containers can carry loads whose values can run into the millions. The employers are unwilling to hire the additional workers and equipment necessary to sustain the speeds they desire. Instead, they want swift delivery even as they add names to layoff lists.

The fleets of modern merchant ships carry most of their cargoes in sealed containers. Without them, there can be no global production or distribution. The size and speed of the ships serving global markets can make them deliver all the machinery and raw materials for a new factory being transferred from one country to another. From this new process has come the term “instant inventory.” The needs of a factory unit’s production get filled immediately and nothing gets warehoused. There are of course few jobs for warehouse workers under this system.

It is not hard to imagine the nightmarish world of the new breed of managers in industry. The clock is their boss and rules even the speeds by which fast waitresses must serve. Managers become ecstatic seeing a crane driver load cargo even seconds faster than the previous one. But their ecstasy disappears when they realize the speedups they have come to rely upon can cause accidental misplacement of containers to places where they can squat for days.

Shipping companies and financiers live in constant fear of workers controlling the new technologies. In the 1990s, Australian maritime workers began to learn that their own (federal) government was recruiting mercenaries from the nation’s armed forces to break their union. Recruits were sent to the ports of Rashid and Jebel Ali in Dubai on the Persian Gulf for special training. The International Transport Workers Federation threatened to blockade Dubai and the exercise was temporarily abandoned. But by late 1997, dozens of commandos had been trained in using weaponry, in supervising “killer” dogs, and operating automated longshore machinery.

Employers and the Australian government worked together to place these commandos aboard ships alongside regular union workers in Melbourne, the country’s largest port. Their arrival revealed a crisis that was not postponable; their job was to break the union by force. If that happened—as it did less than a decade ago, when the Mexican army forcibly

destroyed the longshore union in the country's largest port (Vera Cruz)—the end was at hand and there would be no second chance.

In preparation for the union-breaking attack, management tried to break workers' power on the docks through a variety of measures. They transferred union jobs to non-union subsidiaries and insisted on lower pay and longer hours for longshore workers. The Patrick Stevedore Company shifted more than \$300 million in assets to subsidiaries so that it could plead poverty if fined for unfair labor practices. A Hong Kong container management firm put up \$10 million to finance the training of commandos in Dubai. Other "anonymous" corporations in Australia helped raise a \$20 million war chest for management to help it break the union.

The company thus succeeded in provoking a series of strikes in the early months of 1998. On April 7, management sent a team of commandos to eject the work force from the docks and announced that its entire 2,100-person work force had been dismissed. At this point, some mercenaries may have gone over the side of the ships and others went as directed by the wharfies. Hide-and-seek games may very well have begun at this point with containers as the hidden objects. Nearly twelve thousand containers became impossible to find during the strike. By this time, the rank and file of the regular longshore workers had secured control of the Melbourne port. As the news of what the workers had done reached foreign ports, the most geographically widespread international solidarity movement in history began to develop.

Support from dockworkers in Japan and the U.S. threatened to disrupt the entire global system. For reasons of self-interest and solidarity, workers in ports large and small around the world refused to work ships carrying cargo containers loaded by scabs. Longshore workers in Long Beach, California, refused to unload the *Columbus Canada* because the ship carried beef and lamb loaded by strike-breakers in Australia. Wharfies in Papua, New Guinea, placed an indefinite hold on all goods handled by non-union personnel in Australia. Swedish dockworkers soon followed suit and announced an embargo on cargo from "down under."

Official leaders of unions unknown for their militancy for a short time did things which made them look good to their rank and file. The Japanese longshore union proved particularly active, calling for an all-port strike in support of workers in the same industry in Australia. These actions no doubt reminded management of what happened to the container ship *Neptune Jade* less than a year earlier in Oakland, California. When that ship (chartered by a company in Singapore) tried to discharge the cargo that

had been loaded by strike-breakers in Liverpool, England, dockworkers in Oakland refused. The *Neptune Jade* sat in port for four days, but not one container was unloaded. The ship then sailed to Vancouver, but workers there refused to unload it as well. Management then tried the ports of Kobe and Yokohama in Japan, but the longshore workers there stood fast. Ultimately, the company had to send the ship to Taiwan, sell it to another firm, and give the ship a new name before even cargo untouched by scabs could be unloaded.

In the Australian dispute, expressions of support for the striking workers from working-class communities and other sympathizers raised the political costs of breaking the strike for the Australian government and for the corporations. In Fremantle, the Patrick Stevedore Company tried to take over the docks at 2 a.m. in the morning with a force of nearly seven hundred police officers and security personnel. The wharfies detected this operation at the last minute and activated a phone tree that brought 2,500 people to the waterfront in time to mount a successful blockade. The Australian Supreme Court eventually ruled that the longshoremen were fired illegally and were entitled to receive penalty payment.

In response, the stevedore company that did the firing began a move to restore the authority and power of the official longshoremen's union. The union and employers negotiated a contract in July that imposed layoffs, wage cuts, and many more concessions on the workers. The new agreement fired four hundred workers and made security guards out of some who were threatened with layoffs. As so often happens, union negotiators gave up in the conference room the gains that workers had won on the picket line. This move was successful. It revealed that top union officials were back in control, at least for now.

Yet the disastrous contract that ended the strike does not change the key facts. Not many months ago, regular working members of the union had the power to make decisions for themselves and they succeeded for an extended time in taking union-breaking power away from the Australian government, the corporate employers, and the union bureaucracy. This will not be forgotten easily, especially by those who did it.

Provoked by private capital and coordinated by elements within the government and military, the union-busting campaign in Australia was designed as an object lesson for workers in many countries. It was designed to be a defeat that would destroy control over the job by longshore workers in Australia and other countries, leaving management with complete control over the movement of finished products and raw materials. But

successful resistance by Australian strikers, the general public, and support from workers around the world, plus political miscalculations by business and government leaders, produced a very different result. Because of this strike, it may now be possible to see how the present global system based upon “on time” production contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction because of the added leverage it offers workers.

Collective mobilization by rank and file workers in Australia stopped a concerted union-busting campaign, and exposed the weaknesses of business unionism in which the leaders always give management more than the regular members would. Most important, this strike showed that transportation is the weak link in the employers’ global economic system. Capital now has more control at the point of production because of computer-generated automation, “instant inventory,” and “on time” production. But this means that work stoppages and fights for workers’ control at the points of shipment and delivery are now weapons of defense and counterattack. The strike also exposed the vulnerability of new technologies to workers’ direct action protests, and it showed the importance of trans-national workers’ alliances in combating the power of global capital.

The Australian dock dispute demonstrates the kind of unionism that may well be used in the future to challenge the destructiveness of management control over the way people who do this work want to live. Effective unions in the future will need to be

1. Based on the job, rooted in the solidarity of primary work groups at the points of production, shipment, and delivery. Unions become effective when they are focused on the job, not in the offices of union officials.
2. Based on the rank and file with no paid full-time staff, a teaming steward system, and union representatives who must spend at least 75 percent of their time on the job, working. A basis for this kind of organization might come from the example of Coordinadora, an already existing Spanish longshore union incorporating these structural items.

The lessons to be learned from this strike are many, but some of the most important are:

1. *Violence can be an increasingly common feature of labor-management conflicts in the transportation industry.*

The stakes are so high in the struggle for control over the global economy that the police and military power of the state as well as private paramilitary forces will be quickly called into action against working people. Violence has become more and more the first resort rather than the last. The union bureaucracy's willingness to agree to massive lay-offs as long as some of the laid-off workers secure replacement jobs as "security personnel" was and is an especially bad decision. It shows the union leadership's willingness to cooperate with management and the state to militarize management control over the waterfront.

2. *Management can over-reach.*

The magnitude of the corporate assault on the Australian dockworkers left them with little choice but to fight back. Mass firings, violent attacks, abrogation of contracts, and attempts to eliminate worker control over the job forced the workers to react out of a sense of self-interest and self-respect.

3. *The nature of new technologies based on computer-generated automation makes obtaining workers' control more important than ever.*

Control from below is intolerable to employers. It is very difficult to switch entire shipping operations to new ports every time workers act to control their working conditions.

4. *New technologies demand new union structures.*

Networking between groups in the same workplace or those making the same products in different places can have more influence and power than ever before. Workers can win support from courts or labor relations boards now only when they display sufficient power where the work is done. Business unionism will no longer work; new technologies have revealed that the unions must be brought back to the job. Simply to survive they must be run by their regular members.

5. *Under current conditions local disputes immediately and automatically become global concerns.*

Containerization links workers from all continents together into an integrated system; under these conditions an injury to one is truly an injury to all. Internationalism becomes something practical, immediate, and possible rather than something symbolic and idealistic.

6. *The most ferocious responses to the initiatives of capital come from respected rank and file organization rather than from the slick-talking official leaders of trade unions.*

New technologies force workers to struggle in ways that are practical, technologically aware, and carefully planned. The rank and file sees

what is at stake in this struggle in a way that the union bureaucracy cannot.

7. *Containerization places longshore workers and other transportation workers at the center of the world economy. Without them, globalization is a pipe dream.*

Transportation workers have and can enlist support from allied transport workers from around the world.

The news media have not reported what went on in the Australian dock strike. As a result, very few people in the United States know about the wharfies and what they did. This news blackout is part of management's strategy: the less workers know and the less they talk about technology the better things are for management. One reason for the success of the Australian longshore workers in seizing technology and using it for their own purposes stemmed from the long history in that country of workers' discussions and activism on technology issues. Just over twenty years ago the Australian telecommunications technicians union blocked the introduction of a new automated system until management agreed to consult with the unions about it. Shortly after that, building laborers protested the construction of a luxury high-rise apartment in Sydney that would have eliminated a portion of a working-class neighborhood. At the same time, oil workers in Queensland joined with environmentalists to stop a project by American and Japanese companies to drill for oil in the offshore barrier reefs. These battles compelled workers to ask questions about technology, especially who benefits from it and who should control it?

Under the leadership of labor militants including John Baker, Australian telecommunications technicians engaged in long discussions in conferences as well as in informal meetings about how to get hold of the technology itself, in their case, how to lock up computerized systems and make them work for labor. They encouraged the development of committees in factories, offices, and other workplaces to take inventory of the technologies they were using, to demand notice of forthcoming changes in technology, and to discuss ways of using technology to produce more jobs and to make technology serve the people rather than their employers. They wanted to enable workers to control technology, develop their own systems, and put a working-class imprint and direction on the technology of the future. Their discussions did not produce results right away, but the success of the Australian dock strike proves that they did the right thing and paved the way for the struggles to come.

Because the news media has done such a bad job covering the war on the Australian waterfront, we have to treat everything we have learned about it as incomplete. Our account has been put together from a variety of news reports, personal contacts, and unofficial sources. We hope other people will draw on their own sources of information and share their knowledge with the readers of *Impact* in future issues.

As time passes, however, the information will certainly come out. Workers everywhere will become more aware of the fear that management has of job-based unionism and of solidarity actions by rank and file workers. They will see that workers already have in their hands important weapons in the fight against declining wages, worsening working conditions, and increasing control over the job by management.

(1998)



## Stan Weir

### *Working-Class Visionary*

GEORGE LIPSITZ

Although he has been dead for some time now, I can hear Stan Weir whispering in my ear as I write these words. “Don’t write what a great guy Stan Weir was,” he’s telling me. “You know every time one of us is made to sound *greater* it makes the rest of us seem *lesser*. Don’t let people feel that their job is to sit back and admire somebody else. Get them to see what’s happening around them in the here and now. Persuade them to listen to the workers, to respect what they know, and to help them do something about the way things are.”

I know what Stan would have wanted, but it is difficult for me to write about him without first acknowledging what a remarkable person he was, how valuable his example has been to me and to so many others who knew him. Stan lived life in the right way. He was steadfast in his beliefs, but always attentive and open to others. His words and his deeds matched up perfectly. He had an evident and enthusiastic affection for working people. He never lost faith in them, even when he was deeply disappointed by the things they did. He had an overwhelming curiosity about the world, and he tried to get things right, to understand how society worked, so he could do the right things in the right way. He could have used his astounding intelligence, unbounded energy, and forceful personality to secure wealth, fame, and position for himself, but he preferred to use his energies on behalf of the collective interests of working people. Perhaps most important, his infectious laugh, mischievous wit, and gentle demeanor brought out the best in everyone around him.

Stan loved to tell you about the bar in San Pedro that was so rough the only thing that could pass through it safely at night was a bullet; about the time immigration authorities were trying to track down a man named Sexauer and called up an office to ask “Do you have a Sexauer there?” only to be told, “Mister, we don’t even have a coffee break”; and about why the professional bass fishing shows on television were worth watching—

because it's tough enough to catch regular bass, much less bass who have given up their amateur status to turn pro. Stan could talk forever about the workers he encountered in his life, people with lyrical names: Ethan Gums, Blue Edwards, Bicycle Kovacs, Dress Up Danny, and Necktie Charlie. He once told me that he went through life imagining himself always being judged by a jury of his Garfield High School peers, working hard to make sure that he would never do anything to dis-identify with the people and the community that had nurtured and sustained him. But he would not want the force of his personality to obscure the reason for this book—to air the ideas he developed along with other workers during more than five decades of labor activism.

*Singlejack Solidarity* presents the things that Weir observed with his own eyes and learned through collective action on the shop floor. It is, in my experience, rare to read a book written by a rank and file worker organized thematically around key issues in working-class life, rather than around moments of personal biography. Weir tells about the ideas, concepts, and structures that mattered most to him, about shop-floor cultures of solidarity and struggle, about the human cost of automation, about solidarity networks and alliances that cross communities, countries, and continents, about vanguard politics and working-class self-activity, about informal work groups, about battles between union bureaucracies and rank and file workers, and about working-class culture and its pleasures and pains.

Randall Robinson often reminds us that when farmers want to make mules work, they first put blinders on them. Blinders keep a mule focused on the work ahead; they prevent any glances to the side that might reveal the context in which the work is taking place, that might reveal who is working alongside the mule and who is not working at all. Robinson's story has relevance for all of us in respect to the silencing of working-class voices in our society. We pay a terrible price for the blinders imposed on us by the absence of the situated knowledge of working people, past and present, from school lessons, popular journalism, and literature. In this materialistic status-oriented society, just about the only thing people know about the working class is that they do not wish to be a part of it, but this disdain, and the erasures on which it is based, deprive us all of valuable knowledge about ourselves and about our society.

People who work for wages, who get paid by the hour, who carry their lunch to work in paper bags, who make clothes they cannot afford to wear, build houses they cannot afford to own, clean hotel rooms they cannot

afford to rent, and prepare food they cannot afford to eat, all know a great deal about our society. They know about the unequal relationships between work and reward, about the mal-distribution of opportunities and life chances, about the gap between our society's pretensions and its actual practices. In speaking for himself, Stan Weir speaks for them and reveals how much we can learn about our lives from the people whose labor sustains it. This is not a matter of telling heroic stories about the historical victories of the trade union movement, although those are important to understand. We need to know why labor loses too, why established institutions remain so resistant to change, why the best efforts of courageous and dedicated people have so often failed to change the alienations and indignities of waged work. Weir teaches us to look honestly and realistically at labor's shortcomings, at the radical divisiveness and disunity among workers, at the problems posed by business unionism and its bureaucratic practices, at the racism, sexism, and xenophobia that an abstraction like working-class solidarity so often seems powerless to combat.

Weir grew up in a working-class neighborhood in East Los Angeles. Attending high school in the late 1930s, he became an accomplished dancer to swing music, an enthusiastic basketball player, and surfer. But he also experienced firsthand the effects of what Lizabeth Cohen calls the "culture of unity" that emerged from the labor organizing of the Congress of Industrial Organizations during that decade.<sup>1</sup> The culture of unity transformed immigrants and their children from unwanted aliens into redemptive insiders, from people whose languages, religions, phenotypical features, and accents disqualified them from "real" American identities to quintessential representatives of an America made up of diverse people from all over the world. They broke the hegemony of white Anglo-Saxon Protestant male power, and in the process enacted a democratic and egalitarian renewal of U.S. society and culture. When the United States entered World War II, Weir joined the merchant marine, where he received an education in the class struggle from other workers, especially the "34 men," the veterans of the West Coast waterfront strike of 1934 that inaugurated a quarter century of workers' control in the maritime and longshore industries.

*Singlejack Solidarity* presents unparalleled insights about things Weir saw with his own eyes as a worker—the democratic solidarity forged on the job by primary work groups at the point of production, the impact of automation on the lives of laboring people, the price paid by workers for the power of bureaucratic business unionists and elite vanguard party

radicals, the need for solidarity circles and networks to unite people divided by doing different jobs at different workplaces under different conditions in different cities, regions, and nations. Weir presents fascinating portraits of people he has known, of the great writer James Baldwin, whom he first met working as a fellow worker at a Caribbean restaurant in New York; of the tormented working-class philosopher Eric Hoffer, whom he first encountered on the San Francisco docks and at International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union meetings in the 1950s; and of C. L. R. James, Pan-Africanist and Trinidadian Trotskyist, whom Weir encountered in a cold-water tenement room in upper Manhattan when Weir was recruited into the Workers Party during the early years of the Second World War.

Although he did not have the close personal relationship with C. L. R. James that he did with Baldwin, his affinity for the West Indian's politics offers insight into the trajectory Weir's activism would take. Weir had joined the merchant marine rather than the army because he could not give more than qualified political support for the war. He opposed fascism, but agreed with C. L. R. James that the capitalist basis of the U.S. war effort would only leave the world with more totalitarianism at the war's end, rather than less. When the war ended, the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe and the start of the Cold War convinced Workers Party leader Max Shachtman that the best the democratic left could do would be to hold on and wait for a future break because there would be no immediate revolution in Western or Eastern Europe. Weir appreciated and shared James's refusal to share this pessimism.

The key area of agreement between Weir and James had less to do with their common conclusions about the war and the politics of the Workers Party than with their common commitment to certain visions of working-class life. James was the first left intellectual Weir met who knew about and endorsed informal work groups on the shop floor, who predicted that workers' councils would prove to be an important form of struggle. Weir felt that James respected workers and displayed evidence of having listened to them and having learned from them. The kinds of worker solidarity and self-activity that Weir had learned growing up on Alma Street in East Los Angeles, that had been codified for him by the veterans of the 1934 West Coast maritime strikes, found rich theoretical justification in the words and writings of C. L. R. James.

In James, Weir also found a kindred spirit, someone whose flamboyant personality, intellectual curiosity, and enthusiasms for music, film, fiction,

and food embodied a way of living that Weir found to be political in itself. He noted that James had a confidence in himself that led him to trust the judgments, abilities, and desires of others. James's success as a young cricket player in Trinidad seemed to have taught him a sense of teamwork and shared purpose that Weir recognized as an important part of his own experiences as a surfer, jitterbug dancer, and basketball player. Weir also valued James's cosmopolitanism, knowing from his own travels and interactions as a merchant seaman the importance of thinking beyond purely national categories of culture and politics. Perhaps most important, Weir viewed James's artistry as a novelist and playwright as a strategically important part of the struggle for social change, as a way of enabling people to envision a world worth enacting.

These views permeated Weir's activism on board ships during the war, his participation in the Oakland General Strike of 1946, his leadership on the shop floor in the East Oakland Chevrolet plant, and his dramatic but ultimately unsuccessful battle against labor-management complicity in implementing automated containerization on the West Coast waterfront in the 1950s and 1960s. Critical of both business unionism and left vanguard parties, Weir advanced a politics of job-based unionism, primary work group militancy, and international solidarity in dozens of contexts, venues, and movements until his death in 2001.

Weir's leadership kept alive in the courts for nearly two decades the case of the "B" men, terminated by the Pacific Maritime Association and the ILWU in 1959 because of their real and potential opposition to automation. As a labor educator at the University of Illinois, he helped thousands of rank and file workers realize the strength they drew from shop-floor solidarity, drawing them into lively and vibrant discussions that helped them recognize, articulate, and theorize the lessons they had already learned from their lives as laborers. As a member of various activist groups and as an independent radical, Weir acted almost alone to advance trenchant and perceptive critiques of the cost exacted on the left by the legacy of Leninism and the ideal of the vanguard party. He wrote numerous vivid descriptions and compelling analyses of the problems posed by collaboration between corrupt corporate power and compliant business unionism, but he also chronicled creative new forms of struggle fashioned by rank and file workers around the world, especially in his writings about the Coordinadora movement in the Spanish shipping industry, about the struggles of Solidarity in the shipyards, streets, and cities of Poland, and the worldwide activism on behalf of the 1998 Australian dock strike.

The nature of waged work in our society has changed so dramatically since Weir took his first full-time job in the 1940s that it might seem daunting to discern exactly what his experiences and observations can teach us today. Pier 39 in San Francisco—where Weir used to unload large ships filled with coffee—is now a festival mall with coffeehouses where tourists and executives pay premium prices for flavored concoctions and a view of the docks on which Weir used to work. All of the West Coast ports where Weir used to work have been transformed by containerization: now that longshore work relies mainly on lifting large containers off ships by cranes that place containers directly onto trucks and trains, far fewer workers are needed. Sparks, Nevada, is now one of the most important “ports” on the West Coast even though it is located in the high desert 230 miles from the ocean, because trains and trucks bring cargo there from the West Coast ports to be sorted and shipped to new destinations.

Yet precisely because so much has changed, Weir’s accounts and analyses can play an important role in taking the blinders off. The core of his book is an account of how the 1934 West Coast strikes produced a “social warrant” that transformed the meaning of work and culture for an entire generation. In the aftermath of the 1934 strikes, West Coast longshore workers established twenty-five years of workers’ control on the job. They secured control over hiring and job assignments by replacing the shape-up (where workers would congregate daily and ask the employer for work) with a union hiring hall administered by elected dispatchers to prevent favoritism. The “low-man-out” system equalized work opportunities by giving the right of first refusal on new jobs to workers who had been without work the longest. Hatch seniority meant that the work crew assigned to any one hatch had the right to work there as long as the ship was in port, making it impossible for employers to shift work gangs to ships with less work to be done and fewer opportunities for overtime pay. Sling loads could not exceed 2,100 pounds, a rule that protected the safety of the workers, created more jobs, prevented companies from speeding up the work, but also catered to the social world of the workers by ensuring more breaks in between loads. This social warrant enabled longshore workers to select work partners compatible with them and to organize the work process as they saw fit. Weir describes situations where longshore workers refused to work with a company foreman present, insisting that management officials give them a list of tasks to be completed and then return later in the day to check that the work was completed. In these cases, no work would be completed as long as company supervisors remained on the scene.

Weir emphasizes that the era of workers' control in longshore ushered in by the 1934 strikes did not depend solely on the terms of collective bargaining agreements. In case after case, longshore workers took more control over work than was actually granted to them in strike settlements, and they enforced their gains through a culture of solidarity and militancy that made management afraid to challenge them. Weir makes clear that the key resource in this struggle was the social warrant fashioned in the 1930s strikes—the process of organizational learning that led workers to connect their immediate grievances with management to a larger struggle for a more egalitarian and democratic life in every aspect of social relations. When workers gained control over the hiring process by creating hiring halls with elected dispatchers, they found a way to become different kinds of people. They ended the humiliating subordination that made them have to win the boss's favor to get work.

Weir's reminiscences underscore the findings of historians who have found desires for autonomy and dignity at the center of the working-class upheavals in the United States during the first half of the twentieth century. In *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives*, Vicki Ruiz shows that foremen and other management officials sometimes demanded sexual favors from women workers in return for favorable work assignments.<sup>2</sup> In other cases, workers had to bring the boss a bottle of whiskey or kick back part of the pay in order to get work. Under this system, they also learned to see other workers as the enemy and fear that if one did not make humiliating concessions to management, some other worker would. Once longshore workers created the hiring hall with elected dispatchers, the low-man-out hiring system, and the 2,100-pound sling load, they did more than secure better working conditions: they secured changes in the culture of working-class life that had important ramifications both on and off the job.

The social warrant of the 1930s influenced life and culture in the United States in many different ways. The "culture of unity" that Lizabeth Cohen credits for winning many of the social democratic reforms of the New Deal, and the Popular Front culture of what Michael Denning calls the "age of the CIO," brought a more democratic and egalitarian tone to every aspect of culture and social structure in the United States.<sup>3</sup> Union meetings conducted in several different languages and the flaunting of ethnic differences on the picket lines brought a new legitimacy to the multiethnic history of the United States. Immigrants and their children previously stigmatized as unwanted aliens developed a broad range of cultural forms and practices that celebrated immigrants as Americans by choice and

struggle, and therefore even more deserving of representing the nation than the descendants of those who came to North America on the *Mayflower*. A proliferation of small magazines, theater groups, camera clubs, dance troupes, and musical ensembles threw forth egalitarian opinions and ideas that permeated commercial culture and high art as well as vernacular expressions for decades to follow. The leisure time made possible for longshore workers by the social warrant of the 1930s helped nurture working-class writers, poets, and artists, and in places like San Francisco's North Beach, New York's Greenwich Village, and other centers of artistic production. Longshore culture influenced a broader "bohemian" culture as well.

By turning labor strife into a broader generational warrant, the 1934 strikes changed the tone and texture of social life and culture in the United States for decades to come. They even set the stage for the next great social warrant, that of the 1960s when aggrieved racial groups, women, gays and lesbians, and other groups excluded from the major rewards and benefits of the social warrant of the 1930s waged extensive grassroots struggles that eventually influenced the tone and texture of every aspect of U.S. life and culture. Yet the world of work that Weir describes—and the social warrant that produced it—may be difficult for most of us to understand today. Thirty years of counterrevolution against the gains of the 1960s have effectively erased consciousness about the meaning of the 1930s as well. It is possible that no workers today enjoy the degree of control over their jobs that Weir and his fellow workers exercised, and it is possible that no workers in the future will be able to secure similar command over the pace, nature, and purpose of production ever again. That does not mean, however, that a new social warrant is not being forged at the present time. Social struggle is constant. There is never a time when oppressed people are so defeated and demoralized that they do not fight back. But unless their contestation becomes generalized into a broader social warrant, grassroots struggles remain confined to the worlds of those who wage them directly.

We are presently in the middle of one of the most intense periods of labor struggle in history. The exploitation of immigrant labor has lowered the costs of goods and services for consumers while allowing ruthless employers to violate minimum-wage laws, health and safety restrictions, and their obligations to pay Social Security and mandatory overtime. Wages in drywall work in southern California went from nine cents per square foot to only four and a half cents per square foot when drywalling became



a job performed almost exclusively by immigrants. In some cases, the workers would not even receive their wages, only taunts from employers who confidently dared them to sue for nonpayment, knowing that many of them lacked documentation and risked deportation if they complained to the authorities.

Yet the drywall workers drew upon old and new forms of struggle from militant roving picket lines and mutual self-help to intervention by allies connected to the social justice agencies of the Catholic church. As undocumented immigrants unaffiliated with any recognized union, the drywall workers could not get protection from the National Labor Relations Board or other U.S. government agencies; as expatriates they could not secure any real aid from the Mexican government either. Employers and the press harped on the “illegal” status of many of the workers, portraying them as greedy interlopers, as noncitizens rather than as denizens whose hard work created sources of value and profit for citizen consumers and entrepreneurs. When the balance of power, physical repression, and the legal advantages owned by citizen employers over noncitizen workers threatened to defeat their movement, the drywall workers and their allies from the Catholic church came up with a new strategy—they asked the employers to open the books and prove that in their dealings with the workers they had obeyed the laws about the minimum wage, overtime, Social Security, and worker health and safety. Confronted with a demand by “illegal aliens” that would expose construction firms as “illegals” in their own right, the industry settled with the workers, handing them a great victory.<sup>4</sup>

Like the southern California drywall workers in 1992, immigrant low wage workers in service jobs, small workshops, and even factories around the country have been fighting ferocious battles for recognition and dignity, for freedom, liberty, and justice. These struggles require the creation of new identities and the forging of unexpected affiliations and alliances.<sup>5</sup> When the largely Latino work force at the Los Angeles New Otani Hotel sought union representation from their employer, the Japanese-owned Kajima Corporation, activists from the Asian American Movement supported their efforts strongly. They recruited support in Korea from workers who had long protested against the corporation because of its role in benefiting from the coerced labor of Koreans during the Japanese occupation of that country between 1910 and 1945. The prominence of Asian Americans and Koreans among their supporters prevented the New Otani strike from being seen as an anti-Asian battle by the Latino workers, and

also frustrated the assumptions of the Kajima Corporation that it could exploit Latino workers in the United States with impunity. The Asian American activists even brought taiko drums to the picket lines in a brilliant move that enabled them to celebrate their ethnic heritage and its traditions of struggle, yet support the class-based struggle for justice by Latino workers. Thus they drew upon the organic solidarity that comes from a common ethnic background, but also built connecting links to allies from another community in pursuit of common aims. Their struggle did not ignore race—given the racial polarization between labor and management, it could not—yet it built solidarity on the basis of culture and commitments rather than color. The New Otani campaign—and many others like it—encourage participants to draw their identities from their politics rather than basing their politics on their identities.<sup>6</sup> More recently, Korean Immigrant Worker Advocates in Los Angeles has waged a successful organizing campaign in Korean-owned restaurants by building a workers' center that has brought together Latino dishwashers, janitors, and table clearers from the restaurants into a coalition with Korean and Korean American waiters and waitresses to wage a common fight against their immigrant employers.<sup>7</sup>

These intense struggles are not only transforming the nature of low-wage labor in the United States, but they are throwing forth new social relations and social imaginings in a way that resembles the social warrant of the 1930s. In a brilliant analysis of the Los Angeles group *Ozomatli* in *Cultural Values*, Victor Hugo Viesca demonstrates how new forms of cultural coalescence and creativity are emerging from the shared struggles of Latino, Asian, black, and even some white workers in contemporary Los Angeles.<sup>8</sup> Just as the drywall workers, the New Otani organizers, and the Korean Immigrant Worker Advocates have had to go beyond the form of the trade union to create new sites and forms of struggle, new cultural institutions like the Peace and Justice Center and the People's Resource Center serve as sites for both artistic expression and activist mobilization.

It is too soon to know if the intense labor conflicts of our own era will generate a social warrant on the scale of the one created during the 1930s. The outcome depends in part on the things that we do, because intellectuals, artists, and activists of all kinds are needed to transform local resistance into more generalized social and cultural change. Yet asking if something like the social warrant of the 1930s can be created today obligates us to look at the weaknesses of that warrant as well as its strengths—or, more precisely, to see how its strengths and its weaknesses came from

many of the same sources. The solidarities of sameness that enabled long-shore workers to build solid cooperation among people performing the same job left them vulnerable to automation processes that enabled “long-shore” work to be done by crane operators, truck drivers, and warehouse workers far from the docks. The control over place that underscored longshore power over the ports and the neighborhoods nearby prepared them poorly for containerized work sites that took up so much space they had no surrounding neighborhoods. The rapid mobility of capital today requires workers to draw upon the dynamics of difference, not just the solidarities of sameness, to forge flexible affiliations, associations, and alliances with people very different from themselves. Contemporary capitalism does not homogenize all workers into one collective identity, but instead profits by generating an endless succession of new forms of difference.

Yet while many things have changed, some things remain the same, and it is those things that *Singlejack Solidarity* says so much about. After viewing audience responses to black musicians at New York’s Apollo Theater in Harlem in the 1940s, C. L. R. James wrote: “Time and again I noticed the extraordinary power that came from them . . . All the power is hidden in them there. It’s waiting to come out. And the day . . . it takes political form, it is going to shake this nation as nothing before has shaken it.”<sup>9</sup> That is what Stan Weir saw over and over again in the culture of working people. His optimism sometimes made him suspect among his friends on the left who wondered how he could speak so confidently about the future when the present seemed so bleak. They did not understand that Stan had a secret strength, that his life among working people armed him with the feeling that socialism was already here, because in so many ways for him it was. He did not have to dream it up through some utopian vision, did not have to wait for the seizure of state power or the withering away of the state. He had already seen it, and felt it, and lived it on the assembly line and on the picket line, in the union hall and in the beer hall, on the shop floor and on the dance floor. He recognized in all of those places a power that was waiting to come out, and he knew that on the day that power took political form it would shake this nation and this world as nothing before has shaken it.

# Notes

## New Technology

1. In the second six-year mechanization contract, which went into effect in 1966, the bonus was \$13,600.

2. As of 1982, there were less than eight thousand active registered long-shoremen working on the West Coast of the United States.

3. Paper by T. H. Bryan, "The Australian Waterfront Labor Scene," p. 14 n. 15, delivered at the International Container Terminal Operators Conference, Oakland, California, October 1979.

4. Late in 1971, ILWU members voted to strike by a 96 percent majority. After 101 days, a Taft-Hartley Act injunction sent them back to work for the eighty-day cooling-off period. With that time served, 93 percent voted to resume the strike. The basic goal of the ranks was to eliminate the employer's right to bypass the hiring hall when recruiting steady men for container terminal jobs. They twice rebuked their international president for refusing to negotiate an end to this concession. After thirty more days of picketing they accepted the third contract offer brought before them by Bridges but it too contained the paragraph that had given a large proportion of control over hiring back to the PMA.

5. *In the Matter of: James U. Carter, California Unemployment Insurance Appeals Board Case Number SF-3033*, San Francisco Referee Office, May 14, 1964, at 11-14.

6. *Williams v. Pacific Maritime Ass'n*, n. 42284 (n. d. Cal. Filed April 14, 1964).

7. Stan Weir, "The ILWU: A Case Study in Bureaucracy," *New Politics* 1-2 (winter, summer 1964).

8. The ruling was preceded by a hearing on our complaint before the court. Our former counsel, Sidney Gordon, was seated at the defendants' table conferring with the PMA and ILWU legal staffs. We never did learn the precise reasons for his presence on that day.

9. *Williams v. Pacific Maritime Ass'n*, 384 F. 2d 935, 939 (9th Cir. 1967).

10. 386 U.S. 171 (1967).

11. *Williams v. Pacific Maritime Ass'n*, 384 D 2d at 937-38. Five of the men fired in 1963 had taken their cases to the NLRB. A local San Francisco trial examiner, Herman Marx, ruled that their deregistrations were invalid and that they should be returned to their jobs as B men. On December 5, 1965, John H. Fanning, Gerald A. Brown, and Sam Zagoria, as general counsel for the NLRB, reversed

the Marx ruling in favor of the PMA and ILWU. *Accord*, Pacific Maritime Ass'n (Johnson Lee), 155 NLRB 1231, 1234 (1965).

12. *Williams v. Pacific Maritime Ass'n*, cert. Denied, 390 U.S. 987 (1967).

13. See Stan Weir, "The Retreat of Harry Bridges," *New Politics* (winter 1969).

14. C. P. Larrowe, *The Shape-Up and the Hiring Hall* (1955).

15. C. P. Larrowe, *Harry Bridges: The Rise and Fall of Radical Labor in the United States* (1972), 364.

16. For further detail, see the review of Larrowe's book by Clancy Sigal, then a stranger to the case, in the *New York Times Book Review*, January 7, 1973, 3. A discussion by Harry Bridges appeared in the *Times* book review section on February 18, 1973 (p. 32) followed by my own discussion in the same venue on May 13, 1973, p. 34.

17. Civil suit n. 42284 in the court of Judge George B. Harris.

18. It had been established in earlier testimony that the source was PMA staff representation with whom Carter was working at the time. *Williams v. Pacific Maritime Ass'n. Reporters Partial Transcript*, July 3, 1974, 10–11, 12.

19. *Ibid.*, 52.

20. H. Benson, "Harry Bridges' Own Witch-Hunt," *Union Democracy in Action*, September 1964, 13; Haskell review of Charles P. Larrowe's biography of Harry Bridges in *Union Democracy Review* (summer 1973): 4.

21. *Williams v. Pacific Maritime Ass'n*, Proposed Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law Lodged by Defendants, PMA, ILWU Local 10. Civil n. 42284 GBH, 14–15 (mimeograph of original).

22. *Williams v. Pacific Maritime Ass'n*, 617 F. 2d 1321, 1334 (9th Cir. 1970).

23. *Ibid.*, 17.

24. J. Atleson, *Values and Assumptions in American Labor Law* (1983), 2.

25. Burton H. Hall, attorney for proposed *Amici Curiae*; of counsel, Staughton Lynd.

26. In the Supreme Court of the United States, October Term 1980, *Williams v. Pacific Maritime Ass'n*, 617 F. 2d 1321 (9th Cir. 1980), cert. Denied, 449 U. D. 1101 (1981). Motion of Teamsters for a Democratic Union for leave to File Brief as *Amici Curiae* in Support of Petition for Certiorari, 16.

27. The names of all plaintiffs are: George R. Williams, William Jones, Paul May, Ethan Gums, Jr., Edgar J. Dunlap, Walter L. Robinson, Frank Nereu, Louis T. Lacy, Leroy J. Provost, Roger W. Fleeton, Robert E. Birks, Anthony Melvin, Jr., Oliver Geeter, Antonio S. Cafeterio, Edward Reed, Albert W. Roberts, Percy Fountain, William J. Hurst, Jr., Willie C. Merritt, Mack Hebert, Manuel Nereu, Jr., Arthur G. Winters, Frank Giannino, Stanley L. Weir, Fred Hayes, Willie J. Whitehead, Rhody Adams, Mario V. Luppi, Arthur J. Hughes, Jeremiah Richards, Cleo Love, Louis J. Richardson, Charles J. Johnson, Reginald W. Saunders, Willie Jenkins, Jr., Willie D. Palmer, Conway T. Hudson, John T. Leggett, Alfred Straughter, Thomas Nisby, Timothy E. Carter, James U. Carter, Melvin Kennedy, Henry Imperial, James Langford, Johnny J. Cherry, Ellis E. Graves, James Green, Ulysses Hawkins, Theodore Tolliver, Lawrence Johnson, and Herman Crawford.

28. Over the years substantial changes were made in the theory of our case and its presentation to the courts. The shift was away from a focus on the political

motivations which had led to the discharge, to a concentration on the lack of just cause—yes, we had been wronged, but an analysis of why was missing. This weakened and undercut the case of the plaintiff who had most been involved in the politics of the industry as an elected representative of the B men, myself. In turn, all of us felt that this served to undercut the entire case. The change became documented in our appellants' reply brief to the Ninth Circuit Court: "Similarly, defendants set up a 'straw man' in the guise of one of the fifty-one of the plaintiffs, Stanley Weir, and emphasize his philosophical musings of defendants' intention." *Williams v. Pacific Maritime Ass'n*, 617 F. 2d 1321 (9th Cir. 1980) Appeal from a Final Judgment of the United States District Court of the Northern District of California, Appellants Reply Brief No. 77-1398, 4, served Oct. 11, 1978.

The "philosophical musing" referred to an explanation of how the fight of the B men for union representation, while not an organized factional war, was automatically antagonistic to the mechanization program of Harry Bridges and his eager acceptance of the employers' automation plans.

When the time came for filing an appeal for certiorari with the United States Supreme Court we gathered together closely once more in the Bay Area. The LJDC steering committee was again able to hold meetings. About the time that the Teamsters for a Democratic Union began to develop a brief in support of the issues in our case, and in reaction to criticism from longtime supporter Sam Bottone, we again began to act like full-fledged clients. We realized it was our last shot and that we would have to live with the outcome every bit as much as our attorney. We asked for a meeting with counsel. After several refusals to even entertain the idea of meeting with us to discuss any questions we might have, we sent a formal request, by letter, for a meeting. After all briefs were filed with the court, attorney Brunwasser sent the committee a twenty-one-page letter with a copy to every plaintiff. It attacked me and made strong inference that I was guilty of the charges alleged by the employer and union, explaining that while this had been known for some time it was not brought out because I was the best fund raiser in the case. Prior to receipt of the letter not a particle of distrust had ever entered my mind. We of the steering committee had always played the role of liaison with and defender of our attorney in relation to the rest of the LJDC membership. The other members of the steering committee immediately responded with a letter that rejected any validity in his accusations. In turn, they too were cut off as if for increased disloyalty and personal affront.

The problem between us clients and our attorney of record got escalated, very probably without hope of solution, and will ever remain a source of grief and loss. We have no way of making an accurate unbiased analysis of its causes. But as we look back to learn what we might have done differently, one thing is certain; over the years we should have given more recognition to the labors of Arthur Brunwasser while he was in the process of providing them. Acknowledgment is an essential form of nutrition. Shakespeare reminds us by exaggeration as the good Kent responds to Cordelia in *King Lear*, "[a]cknowledged is o'er paid."

29. Staughton Lynd, *The Fight against Shutdowns: Youngstown's Steel Mill Closings* (1982), 146-47.

30. *Ibid.*

31. The Office of the Clerk of the United States District Court, Northern District of California, in San Francisco provides access to case files stored in San Mateo, California. Taped interviews of approximately thirty of the deregistered longshoremen conducted by Elinor Randall Keeney will soon be deposited with the Regional History Office of the Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. This library contains extensive interviews with the late Paul St. Sure, former PMA president. An interview of Stan Weir by Paul Buhle is on file in the Oral History Department, University of California, Los Angeles. Numerous documents on this case collected by the plaintiffs have been archived in the library for the Center for Socialist History, Berkeley, California.

### The Human Cost of Automation

1. This was reported by Victor Reuther in late 1972 to several faculty members (including this writer) of the Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations at the University of Illinois in Urbana-Champaign.

2. For more on this, see Loren Lee Cary, "Institutionalized Conservatism in the Early CIO," *Labor History* (fall 1972): 475-504. For a firsthand examination of business unionism's fight against the ranks in the United Steelworkers as told by two of its prominent officials, see Philip Golden and Harold Routtsenberg, *The Dynamics of Industrial Democracy* (New York: Harper, 1942).

### Luddism Today

1. Clement Greenberg, "Work and Leisure under Industrialism," *Commentary* (July 1953); reprinted in Charles R. and Adelaide G. Walker, eds., *Modern Technology and Civilization: An Introduction of Human Problems in the Machine Age* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962).

2. Clyde Summers, "Union Powers and Workers' Rights," *Michigan Law Review* (1951): 805, 820.

3. From an article of the same title by Harry Henderson and Sam Shaw in *Collier's* (May 1945): 22.

4. The United Electrical Workers (UE), whose official pro-Communist policies were well known, quadrupled its membership during the war.

5. *UAW Washington Report*, January 11, 1980, 2.

6. For a full analysis of this period, see Ed Jennings, "Wildcat! The Wartime Strike Wave in Auto," *Radical America* (July-August 1975).

7. Nelson Lichtenstein, "Industrial Unionism under the No-Strike Pledge: A Study of the CIO During the Second World War," Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1974, 367; quoted in Joshua Freeman, "Delivering the Goods: Industrial Unionism during World War II," *Labor History* (fall 1978).

8. The idea and in some case word groupings in this paragraph were taken directly from George Harwood Phillips, *Chiefs and Challengers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 2.

### Effects of Automation in the Lives of Longshoremen

1. William W. Pilcher, *The Portland Longshoremen* (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1972), vii.

2. At the time of the award and until 1937, the Pacific District of the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) handled the formal contract negotiations on the West Coast. With the formation of the CIO as a separate federation in 1937, the unions of the ILA's Pacific District disaffiliated and formed the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU) as a charter CIO affiliate with Harry Bridges as its president.

3. Harold M. Levinson, Charles M. Rehmus, Joseph P. Goldberg, and Mark L. Kahn, "Simplism and Diversity in Maritime Labor Relations," in *Collective Bargaining and Technological Change in American Transportation* (Evanston, IL: Transportation Center at Northwestern University, 1971), 269.

4. Samuel A. Lawrence, *U.S. Merchant Marine Shipping Policies and Politics* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institute, 1966), 205-6.

5. Levinson et al., "Simplism and Diversity in Maritime Labor Relations."

6. *Ibid.*, 267.

7. *Ibid.*, 261.

8. Eric Hobsbawm, "National Unions on the Waterside," in *Labouring Men* (New York: Basic Books, 1964), 241-71.

9. Because of this right, America got its first regular longshorewoman. In 1979 a San Pedro longshoreman died and his daughter successfully claimed his job.

10. William H. Sewell, "The Workingclass of Marseilles under the Second Republic," in Peter N. Stearns and Daniel J. Walkowitz, eds., *Workers in the Industrial Revolution* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1974); Victor Nguyen, "Le Portefaix Marseilles: Crise et déclin, survivances," *Provence Historique* 12 (1926).

### Unions with Leaders Who Stay on the Job

1. *Bosun* is a commonly used contraction of boatswain. On West Coast ships of the common 4,000- to 10,000-ton class before the containerization (automation) of the 1970s, the bosun supervised all maintenance and repair work done of the main deck and above, with the exception of work on the cargo winches, which was done by a nonlicensed crew member called a deck engineer. After the Big Strike of 1934 the bosuns no longer had full supervisory powers but instead were "first among equals," because they got their jobs out of hiring halls owned and controlled by the Sailors' Union of the Pacific (SUP).

A ship's carpenter is seldom referred to by any other name than "Chips." Other than carpentry, his duties were to care for and operate the anchor windlass and to take the soundings in the ballast tanks. On liberty ships and other standard freight ships, the chips and the bosun shared the same room, or fo'c'sle. Neither of these men stood watches as the regular seamen did. They were often the older men of the Deck Gang. Able-bodied seamen (ABs) in the 1930s and 1940s carried either a blue AB certificate that required one year of seetime or a green certificate requiring three years of seetime. Additional certification of efficiency in the handling of lifeboats was also required. Ordinary seamen, called "ordinaries," are seamen who have less than the required seetime needed to get AB papers. With the ABs they stand sea watches for eight hours, four hours at a time twice in every twenty-four hour period on one of the three watches: eight to twelve, twelve to



four, and four to eight, a.m. and p.m. From the ABs and the bosun, the ordinaries learn deck duties, ship routine, how to steer a ship, and how to stand lookout. Those hands not at the wheel during daylight watches work on deck with the bosun. Ordinary seaman is an official rating listed on seamen's papers, like the others mentioned here.

2. In this writing, all references are to the lives, work, and unionism of West Coast seamen. The vast majority of seamen who sailed out of Atlantic, Gulf, and Great Lakes ports were organized in different unions with different histories. San Francisco was this writer's home port.

3. Almost 2 million (1,981,279) workers struck in 1943. In 1942, the first full year of the war, 2.8 percent of the nation's labor force became strikers. In 1945, the figure climbed to 12.2 percent. "Work Stoppages Caused by Labor Management Disputes in 1945," *Monthly Labor Review* (May 1945), cited in Martin Glaberman, *Wartime Strikes* (Detroit: Bewick Editions, 1980), 36.

4. "The hazards of sailing the merchant fleet were not so great in 1944 as in former years, because of better protection afforded convoys. The 1944 losses in personnel [brought] the total number to 725 killed, 4592 missing, and 581 prisoners of war. Despite the lower rate of losses and a greater number of men, the ratio of casualties was 1 in 33, a rate proportionately higher than the armed services." Vice Admiral Howard L. Vickery, vice chairman, U.S. Maritime Commission, "The Merchant Marine in the War in 1944," in *Proceedings of the American Merchant Marine Conference*, v. 1 (New York: U.S. Propeller Club, 1945), 18–20.

5. The chief mate is the mate from four to eight a.m. and in the p.m. The chief mate is the executive officer right behind the captain and oversees the deck crew's work.

6. Reciprocating steam engines with three pistons.

7. Paul Schlipf, "Building the UAW and the CIO in Oakland: An Activist Remembers, 1933–1950," *New Labor Review* no. 5 (spring 1983): 139–40.

8. Lorin Lee Cary, "Institutionalized Conservatism in the Early CIO: Adolph Germer, a Case Study," *Labor History* 13 (fall 1972): 493, 495. According to Sidney Fine, it was suggested just before the UAW convention in April–May 1936 "that delegates from the GM plants should caucus and consider the establishment of a GM council, made up of the representatives of the various GM locals, to present a united front to the organization." Fine concurs that it was on Germer's advice that GM delegates at the convention took no action on a resolution calling for the formulation of a GM council. Sidney Fine, *Sitdown: The General Motors Strike of 1936–7* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 92, citing Germer diary, April 28, 1936.

9. See discussion of Coordinadora in later chapters. David Bucah, "France Grass Roots Shake the Union Tree," *Financial Times* (London), October 30, 1993, 3.

### Eric Hoffer

1. *Life*, March 3, 1967, 38.

2. "The Savage Heart: A Conversation with Eric Hoffer," Eric Sevareid, Columbia Broadcasting System Television News Special, January 28, 1969. Transcript of the proceedings of the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence" (mimeographed), October 23, 1968. Washington, DC, 2079–84. Hoffer's

speech before the 1968 convention of the American Psychological Association on September 1, 1968, quoted in "Raps Psychologists for Riots Position," *Chicago Tribune*, September 2, 1968, 4.

3. *Riots, Civil and Criminal Disorders*, hearings before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations of the Committee on Government Operations, 91st Congress, 1st session, pursuant to Senate Resolution 26, 91st Congress, May 9, 13, and 14, 1969, Part 16 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), 2977; emphasis added.

4. *Ibid.*, 2980.

5. Eric Hoffer, *The Passionate State of Mind* (New York: Perennial Library, 1958), 25.

6. *Riots, Civil and Criminal Disorders*, 2987–88.

7. *Ibid.*, 1988.

8. *Ibid.*, 2993–94.

9. Eloise Dungan, "Eric Hoffer: Blunt Talking, Sharp Penned Bear of a Man," *San Francisco Chronicle and Examiner* (California Living Sunday Supplement), June 4, 1967, 12.

10. Dr. Stephen Fritchman, "Goodbye Eric Hoffer," *Sermon of the Month* (Los Angeles: First Unitarian Church), January 1969.

11. *Riots, Civil and Criminal Disorders*, 2991.

12. *Ibid.*, 2991–92.

13. *Ibid.*, 2994.

14. Eric Hoffer, *Working and Thinking on the Waterfront: A Journal, June 1958–May 1959* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969).

15. *Riots, Civil and Criminal Disorders*, 2981.

16. Calvin Tompkins, "The Creative Situation," *New Yorker*, January 7, 1967, 71.

17. Christopher Lasch, *The New Radicalism in America (1889–1963)* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), 336–37.

18. Rank and file union members rejected 14.7 percent of all contracts negotiated by their leaders in the more than seventeen thousand negotiations entered by the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service in 1967. Since 1964, the rejection trend has been at all-time highs. See Willoughby Abner, "A Mediator Views the Current Scene," address delivered at Niagara University in Niagara Falls, New York, April 19, 1968. Available in mimeographed form from the office of the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service Director, Washington, DC.

19. One of those incidents took place at the University of California, where Hoffer is employed. On May 5, 1968, San Francisco Bay area unionists picketed all entrances to the Berkeley campus when William Randolph Hearst, Jr., appeared there. They were protesting Hearst's use of scabs to break the strike against his Los Angeles newspapers. Most of the pickets were students. See *East Bay Labor Journal*, May 10, 1968, 1.

20. Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer* (New York: Harper and Row, 1952), 43–44.

21. "Ike's Favorite Author," *Look*, June 12, 1956, 40.

22. Calvin Tompkins, "The Creative Situation," 35.

23. Eric Hoffer, "American Confrontation: Insolence versus Paralyzed Authority," *Chicago Tribune*, September 14, 1969, 3.

24. Tompkins, "The Creative Situation," 61.

## The First Recorded Strike in History

1. W. F. Edgerton, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* (July 1951): 137–45.
2. “Strikes Haven’t Changed Much,” *Business Week*, September 8, 1951, 33–34.

## A Leninist Vanguard Party Dying in a Foreign Land

1. Research in the documentation of this series of revolutionary events reveals that Peter Veres, chair of the Hungarian Writers’ Union, said, “In this revolutionary situation, we will not be able to acquit ourselves well unless the entire Hungarian working people rally as a disciplined camp. The leaders of the party and state have so far failed to present a workable program . . . We Hungarian writers have formulated in seven points the demands of the Hungarian Revolution.” Quoted in *The Revolt in Hungary: Documentary Chronology of Events, October 23, 1956–November 4, 1956* (New York: Free Europe Committee, 1957), 6.

2. The correspondent did not identify this factory by name or location. My hunch is that it was, and possibly still is, located in the large industrial complex on the island of Csepel in the Danube between Buda and Pest. Nowhere in Eastern Europe in the period immediately after World War II did a major concentration of industrial workers appear to embrace Communism with more enthusiasm than at what the Kremlin leaders called “red Csepel.” And in no other place was its rejection more profound. Any information that would help make identification of this bicycle factory exact would be deeply appreciated.

3. Early in 1957, the ISL’s leadership proposed that unity be probed with the Socialist Party then led by Norman Thomas. The SP would not agree to merger and offered that ISL members could become SP members only as individuals to be phased in a branch at a time. The people around Shachtman and Michael Harrington led in the move for acceptance of the terms. Most were able to make the changeover.

## Life in a Vanguard Party

1. Shachtman, Carter, Johnson (C. L. R. James), and Smith, *Documents on the Russian Question* (New York: Workers Party, 1940).

2. “Work Stoppages Caused by Labor Management Disputes in 1945,” *Monthly Labor Review* (May 1946): 720; cited in Martin Glaberman, *Wartime Strikes* (Detroit: Bewick Editions, 1980), 36.

3. Irving Howe and B. J. Widick, *The UAW and Walter Reuther* (New York: Random House, 1949), 170. The Workers Party had degenerated so much at this point that we in the West Coast branch (and probably people in other branches as well) learned of our party’s disgraceful support for Reuther on this matter only with the publication of the Howe-Widick book.

4. Stan Weir, “A Requiem for Max Shachtman,” *Radical America* 7, no. 1 (1973): 69.

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1. Eric Hobsbawm, “National Unions on the Waterside,” in *Labouring Men* (New York: Basic Books, 1964), 241–71.

2. Maud Russell, *Men along the Shores* (New York: Brussel and Brussel, 1966), 1.

3. Charles B. Barnes, *The Longshoremen* (New York: Survey Research Associates and Russel Sage Foundation, 1915), 59.
4. National Academy of Sciences, Division of Engineering and Industrial Research, *San Francisco Port Study: Description and Analysis of Maritime Cargo Operations in a U.S. Port* (Washington, DC: National Research Council, 1964), 16–46.
5. Stanley L. Weir, “A Case Study in Bureaucracy: The ILWU,” *New Politics* (winter 1964): 23; idem, [No title], in Burton Hall, ed., *Autocracy and Insurgency in Organized Labor* (New York: Doubleday, 1972), 80.
6. National Academy of Sciences, *San Francisco Port Study*, 45–46.

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1. Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919–1939* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).
2. Vicki Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930–1950* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1987).
3. Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London and New York: Verso, 1996).
4. Michael Flagg, “Southland Drywall Hangers Hold Out in Hope of Nailing Down a Union,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 5, 1992, D5; Julie Farrem, “Drywallers Protest in Loma Linda,” *San Bernardino County Sun*, June 27, 1992, B8; Michael Flagg, “Unions Get a Wakeup Call as Drywallers Achieve an Unlikely Victory,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 8, 1992.
5. Miriam Ching Yoon Louie, *Sweatshop Warriors: Immigrant Women Workers Take on the Global Factory* (Boston: South End Press, 2001).
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7. Tram Nguyen, “Showdown in K-Town,” *Color Lines* 4, no. 1 (spring 2001).
8. Victor Hugo Viesca, “Straight Out of the Barrio: Ozomatli and the Importance of Place in the Formation of Chicano/a Popular Culture,” *Cultural Values* 4, no. 4 (October 2000): 445–73.
9. Scott McLemee, ed., *C. L. R. James and the “Negro Question”* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996), xxxii.

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# Index

- A. Philip Randolph Institute, 55  
Aarhus, Denmark, 147, 152, 154. *See also* International Harbor Workers Congress  
Abel, I. W., 298  
Abern, Martin, 21, 205  
Abner, Willoughby, 210, 363 n. 18  
Abzug, Bella, 315, 318  
Achebe, Chinua, xi  
Adams, Rhody, 358 n. 27  
Addes, George, 210, 291  
African Americans, 3–16, 17, 260, 290, 332, 333; C.L.R. James and 21–24. *See also* Racism  
Akagi, Betty, 190  
Akagi, Bill, 190–191  
Akagi, Paul, 190  
Alameda County CIO, 223  
Alaska Fishermen's Union Building (San Francisco), 120, 131, 257  
Alcohol, 17, 235  
Algeciras, Spain, 158  
Alma Street (Los Angeles), 349  
Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU), 310, 315  
American Booksellers Association (1979 Convention), 13  
American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), 55  
American Federation of Labor (AFL), 129, 281, 282, 287; Oakland Central Labor Council, 144  
American Federation of Labor–Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), 69, 70, 71, 145, 154, 180, 296, 305, 309, 310, 313  
American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), 194, 329  
American Federation of Teachers (AFT), 318, 329  
American Indian Movement, 317  
American Librarians Association, 329  
Americans for Democratic Action, 317  
Anaheim Street (Wilmington, California), 19  
Apollo Theatre, 356  
Arbitration, 80, 151  
Armenian Americans, 235  
Aronowitz, Stanley, 58  
Asian American immigrant workers, 332, 333, 354, 355  
Association for Union Democracy, 61, 64, 304  
Association of Western Pulp and Paper Workers (AWPPW), 309  
Atlanta, Georgia, 246  
Atleson, James B., 64, 358 n. 24  
Austin, Minnesota, 324–25. *See also* Hormel strike; P-9 strike  
Australia, 338, 340  
Australian dock strike (1998), 338–45, 350  
Austria, 281

- Auto, Aircraft, and Agricultural  
Implement Workers Union CIO,  
190
- Automation, 68–72, 85, 86, 91–106, 338,  
339, 343. *See also* Containerization
- Azusa, California, 141
- Baker, John, 344
- Balboa Beach, California, 214
- Baldiez, Lideo, 30
- Baldwin, James, 3–16, 32, 33, 58, 349
- Baleares Islands, 158
- Banks, Hal, 242
- Barcelona, Spain, 158, 160
- Barnes, Charles B., 261, 365 n. 3
- Bars: Amelia's, 19; Club, 19; Focsle,  
19; Joe Keawe's, 19, 20; Minetta  
Tavern, 214; Oakland General  
Strike, 142; socialization in, 74;  
Tradewinds, 19, 329
- Beacon Street (San Pedro, California),  
19
- Bechtel Corporation, 310
- Bell, Daniel, 55
- Bell Wringer, The*, 64
- Beltran, Pete, 331
- Benet, George, 17, 29, 30
- Benson, Herman, 55, 61, 304, 358 n. 20
- Berkeley, California, 190, 212
- Bernstein, Harry, 365 n. 6
- Bettelheim, Bruno, 169
- Biafra Crisis, 15
- Bieber, Owen, 331
- Big Ben's Fish Grotto (San Francisco),  
136
- Bilbao, Spain, 157
- Birks, Robert E., 358 n. 27
- Black Revolutionary Union Move-  
ments, 319
- Blues for Mr. Charlie*, 13
- Bluestone, Irving, 85, 86
- "Bloody Thursday," 129, 177, 238. *See  
also* San Francisco General Strike
- "B" Men (ILWU), xiii, 9, 10, 11, 17,  
39–67, 183, 304, 350
- Bobtown, Pennsylvania, 300
- Boggs, Grace Lee, 21
- Bolsheviks, 228
- Bonaventure Hotel (Los Angeles), 14
- Booth, Heather, 318
- Boston, Massachusetts, 101, 103, 333
- Boyle, Kay, 58
- Boyle, W. A. "Tony," 300, 301, 302, 330.  
*See also* United Mine Workers  
Union
- Boys' Markets, 80
- Brazil, 7, 326
- Bread and Wine*, 32
- Bridges, Harry, xiii, 9, 10, 11, 40, 42, 43,  
45, 46–51, 54, 57, 59, 61, 62, 67, 69,  
70, 95, 96, 98, 102, 104, 129, 130, 132,  
176, 177, 183, 222, 297, 301–4, 306, 357  
fn 4, 358 nn. 13, 15, 20, 361 n. 2. *See  
also* International Longshoremen's  
and Warehousemen's Union
- Brisbane, Australia, 135
- British Columbia Seamen's Union, 243
- Brooklyn, New York, 260, 261
- Brown, Johnny, 317
- Brunwasser, Arthur, 55, 57, 59, 60, 65,  
359 fn. 28. *See also* Williams v. PMA
- Bryan, T. H., 357 n.3
- Budapest, Hungary, 199
- Buhle, Paul, 360 n. 31
- Burbridge, Thomas, 58
- Burdon, George, 300
- Burnham, James, 21
- Business unionism, 324–37, 343
- Business Week*, 193, 364 n. 2
- Cade, Gabriel, 137, 138, 146
- Cafeterio, Antonio S., 358 n. 27
- Callen, Kate, 73–75
- Calypto Restaurant (New York), 3, 4,  
5, 25
- Canary Islands, 152, 157, 162, 165
- Cannery Women, Cannery Lives*, 352
- Cannon, James P., 21, 205
- Cape Verde Islands, 7, 118
- Carey, James B., 299–300, 304. *See also*  
International Union of Electrical  
Workers

- Carter, James, 21, 52, 60, 61, 357 n. 5, 358 n. 18
- Carter, James U., 358 n. 27
- Carter, Timothy, 358 n. 27
- Cartwright, Books, 95
- Cary, Lorin Lee, 146, 360 n. 2, 362 n. 8
- Cates, Charlie, 128
- Center for the Studies of Metropolitan Problems, 73
- Champaign, Illinois, 12. *See also* University of Illinois
- Chapman, Abe "The Trigger," 308
- Chavez, Cesar, 178, 313, 314, 329. *See also* Chicanos; United Farm Workers Union
- Checkerboarding, 7, 243. *See also* National Maritime Union; Sailors Union of the Pacific
- Cheever, John, 9
- Cherry, Johnny J., 358 n. 27
- Chester, Eric, 208
- Chester, William, 48, 51, 52
- Chevrolet assembly plant (Oakland, California), 141, 145, 190, 245, 246, 247
- Chicago, Illinois, 168, 180, 218
- Chicago Tribune*, 29, 31
- Chicanos, 248, 324, 327, 329, 332
- China, 7, 85, 281
- Chiseling, 272
- Chrysler Corporation, 250, 295, 296
- Citizen Labor Energy Coalition, 318
- Citizen Soldier*, 333
- Citizens Utility Energy Coalition, 317
- Ciudad Zaragosa*, 157
- Clay Street (San Francisco), 131, 257
- Cleaver, Eldridge, 12, 13
- Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), 317, 332
- Cochran, Bert, 221
- Cockrel, Ken, 319
- Cohen, Lizabeth, 348, 352, 365 n. 1
- Cohen, Ray, 306
- Collyear case, 80
- Columbia Broadcasting System (CBS), 168, 180
- Columbia University, 169, 176
- Columbus Canada*, 340
- Commercial Street (San Francisco), 131
- Common Cause, 317
- Commonwealth Club, 179
- Communism, 7, 83, 176, 203, 220, 221–26, 222, 282, 286
- Communist Party (USA), 22, 83, 84, 201, 205, 209, 217, 221, 223, 224, 226, 282, 289, 290, 291, 292
- Concessions, 149, 150, 335
- Condon, Eddie, 214
- "Coney Island Uncle," 32
- Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), 89, 176, 243, 281, 282, 284, 285, 291, 292, 305, 348; California State Convention, 145, 148, 222; California Statewide Organization, 221
- Congress of Racial Equality, 10, 55
- Congress of South African Trade Unions, 334
- Conrad, Joseph, 133
- Containerization, xi, 48–67, 69, 73–75, 91–106, 338, 339, 343, 344. *See also* Automation
- Coordinadora, 147, 152, 154, 156, 160–63, 334, 342, 350
- Coos Bay, Oregon, 118, 141
- Coruna, Spain, 158
- Costello, Chips, 109, 113, 117, 118, 119, 121, 122, 125, 126, 130, 133, 138, 140, 141, 146, 147, 148
- Cote, Oliver, 29
- Crawford, Herman, 358 n. 27
- Cricket, 25
- Crowley maritime strike, 149
- C Street (Wilmington, California), 19
- Cultural Values*, 355
- Culture of unity, 348
- Curran, Joseph, 304
- Czechoslovakia, 204, 224, 292
- Dancing, 214, 236, 348; Balboa, 214; Lindy, 214

- Datsun, 99  
 Debs, Eugene Victor, 282  
 Delaney, Buford, 3, 4, 13  
 De Leon, Daniel, 282. *See also* Socialist Labor Party  
 Dellums, Ron, 314, 315, 316  
 Democratic Centralism, 231  
 Democratic Party, 290, 306, 314, 315, 316, 318, 319, 323; 1968 National Convention, 168, 180  
 Democratic Socialist Organizing Committee, (DSOC) 312, 314, 315  
 Denning, Michael, 352; 365 n. 3  
 Detroit, Michigan, 29, 153, 290, 295, 312  
*Detroit News*, 29  
 Deutscher, Isaac, 229  
 Dewey, John, 237  
 Diamond, Norm, xi  
 "Didn't It Rain?," 10  
 Dispatching, 267–71, 352  
 Dzerzhinsky, Feliks, 32  
 Dockworkers' International Organization of Solidarity (DIOS), 152  
 Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement, 319  
 Donohue, Ed, 316  
 Draper, Anne, 212  
 Draper, Hal, 58, 212, 219  
 Dress Up Danny, 347  
 Drywall strike (Southern California), 353; 365 n. 4  
 Dubai, 339, 340  
 Dungan, Eloise, 363 n. 9  
 Dunlap, Edgar J., 358 n. 27  
 Dunlop, John T., 310, 320  
 Du Pont Corporation, 310  
  
 East Los Angeles, xi, 4, 30, 138, 214, 217, 235, 246, 286, 348  
 East Oakland Chevrolet Plant (California), xii, 8, 141, 190; 245, 246, 350; docks 121  
 Edgerton, William, 192, 364 n. 1  
 Edwards, Blue, 347  
 Edwards, William Davis, 48  
 Egypt, 192–93  
 Eisenhower, Milton, 168  
 El Salvador, 158  
 Emeryville, California, 145  
 Empire Mill (Oregon), 141  
 Emporium, 81  
 England, 21, 22, 281, 341  
 Environmentalists for Full Employment, 315  
*Eric Hoffer: An American Odyssey*, 167  
 Erkkila, Reino, 50  
 Ernst, Richard, 42, 59, 60, 62  
 Ervin, Sam, 170, 171  
*Esquire Magazine*, 9  
 European Harbor Workers, 147  
 Evenson, Morris, 307  
  
 Farallon Islands, 124  
 Farmer, James, 318  
 Farrem, Julie, 365 n. 4  
 Filipinos and Filipino Americans, 242, 329, 332, 334  
 Fine, Sidney, 362 n. 8  
 Fink books, 238  
 Fink halls, 157, 177, 258, 261  
 Finland, 21, 281  
 Finnish Americans, 288  
 Finnish Brotherhood Hall (Berkeley, California), 118  
 First National City Bank, 310  
 Flagg, Michael, 365 n. 4  
 Fleeton, Roger W., 358 n. 27  
 Flint, Michigan, 29  
*Fontamara*, 32  
 Ford assembly plant (Richmond, California), 145  
 Ford Motor Company, 276, 295, 296  
 Fountain, Percy, 358 n. 27  
 Fourteenth Street (New York), 214  
 Fowles, John, 32  
 France, 223, 281  
 Franco, Francisco, 160, 161  
 Fraser, Don, 316, 317  
 Fraser, Douglas, 82, 310–23  
 Freeman, Joshua, 360 n. 7  
 Fremantle, Australia, 341  
 Fremont, California, 330, 331

- Friends of the Earth, 313  
 Frisco jeans, xii, 17  
 Fritchman, Stephen, 363 n. 10  
*From Here to Eternity*, 32  
 Furuseth, Andrew, 128, 130, 132, 287.  
     *See also* International Seamen's  
     Union  
  
 Galileo Hotel (San Francisco), 138  
 Garfield High School (Los Angeles),  
     xi, 5  
 Gdansk, Poland, 26, 27  
 Geeter, Oliver, 358 n. 27  
 General Electric (GE), 300, 310  
 General Motors (GM), 29, 70, 85, 86,  
     88, 141, 146, 153, 247, 250, 291, 294,  
     295, 296, 310, 311, 315, 322, 328, 330,  
     331, 333  
 General Workers' Union (UGT), 152,  
     158  
 Germany, 203, 224, 281, 292  
 Germer, Adolph, 146  
 Georgakas, Dan, 58  
 Gersuny, Carl, 275  
 Giannino, Frank, 358 n. 27  
 Gibraltar, 158  
 Gide, André, 32  
 Gilson, Donald, 53  
 Glaberman, Martin, 364 n. 2  
 Gladstein, Richard, 59  
*Glass Key, The*, 25  
 Gleason, Thomas W., 297  
 Goethe, Johan, 32  
*Going Away*, 32  
 Gold, Herbert, 55  
 Goldberg, Joseph P., 103, 361 n. 3  
 Golden Gate Bridge, 124, 136  
 Golden Gate Park (San Francisco), 172  
 Golden, Philip, 360 n. 2  
 Goldman, Albert, 32, 33  
 González, Felipe, 155  
 Gordon, Sidney, 53, 54, 357 n. 8  
*Go Tell It on the Mountain*, 8, 9. *See*  
     *also* Baldwin, James  
 Granger, Gideon, 194, 195  
 Graphic Arts International Union, 316  
  
 Graves, Ellis, 358 n. 27  
 Green, Archie, 30  
 Green, James, 358 n. 27  
 Green, Lloyd, 308  
 Greenberg, Clement, 32, 78, 360 n. 1  
 Greenspun, Ron, 14  
 Greenwich Village, 3, 4, 5, 6, 25, 353  
 Guaranteed Annual Income (GAI), 101  
 Guido, Luis, 254  
 Gums, Ethan, 52, 347; 358 n. 27  
  
 Habeas Corpus, 187–89  
 Haiti, 194, 195  
 Hall, Burton, 64, 65, 358 n. 25  
 Hall, Robert, 61  
 Hamper, Ben, 29  
*Hanapepe*, 109–48  
 Harbor City, California, 19  
 Harer, Asher, 62  
 Harlem, 4, 356  
*Harp of Burma, The*, 32  
 Harrington, Michael, 55, 315, 364 n. 3  
 Harris, Judge George B., 55, 57, 59, 61,  
     62, 63, 358 n. 17  
*Harry Bridges: The Rise and Fall of*  
     *Radical Labor in the United States*,  
     58, 59  
 Haskell, Gordon, 55, 61, 358 n. 20  
 Hastings Department Store (Oakland,  
     California), 142, 143, 144. *See also*  
     Oakland General Strike  
 Hatch seniority, 94  
 Hawaii, 7, 20, 93, 98, 115, 142, 288  
 Hawkins, Ulysses, 358 n. 27  
 Hawthorne experiment, 85  
 Hayakawa, S. I., 169  
 Hayden, Tom, 318  
 Hayes, Fred, 358 n. 27  
 Haywood, Big Bill, 250. *See also*  
     Industrial Workers of the World  
 Heater, Gabriel, 143  
 Hebert, Mack, 358 n. 27  
 Heisler, Francis, 55, 57  
 Helstein, Ralph, 305  
 Henderson, Harry, 360 n. 3  
 Hentoff, Nat, 55

- Herman, James, 62, 318  
*Her Side of It*, 32  
 Hickory shirts, 17  
 Highspar, Slim, 199  
 Hilo, Hawaii, 98  
 Hill, Herbert, 55  
 Hill, Norman, 55  
 Hitchcock, George, 225  
 Hitler, Adolf, 143, 281, 286, 289  
 Hobsbawm, Eric, 74, 104, 258, 361 n. 8,  
 364 n. 1  
 Hoffa, Jimmy, 306–7  
 Hoffer, Eric, 95, 167–84, 349, 362 n. 2,  
 363 n. 9, 363 nn. 14, 20, 23  
 Holland, Josiah Gilbert, 170  
 Holtgrave, R. R., 40–43  
 Homosexuality, 5, 12  
 Hong Kong, 340  
 Honolulu, Hawai'i, 121  
 Hook, Sidney, 223  
 Hooks, Benjamin, 313  
 Hoover, Herbert, 207, 282  
 Hormel strike, 150, 324  
 Hotel Albert (New York), 214  
 Howe, Irving, 204, 208, 211, 364 n. 3  
 Hudson, Conway T., 358 n. 27  
 Hughes, Arthur Jackie, 52, 358 n. 27  
 Humor, 17–20  
 Humphrey, Hubert, 316  
 Hungarian Revolution, 199, 200, 203,  
 224  
 Hungarian Writers' Union, 199  
 Hungary, 199, 200, 201, 203, 225, 281,  
 292  
 Hunter's Point (San Francisco), 9  
 Hurst, Willie, 52, 58, 59, 358 n. 27
- IBM Workers United, 333  
*Ideology and Popular Protest*, 336  
*Impact*, 345  
 Imperial, Henry, 358 n. 27  
 Inchaurregui, Reynaldo, 27  
 Independent Skilled Trades Council,  
 64  
 Independent Socialist Club, 212  
 Independent Socialist Forum, 225
- Independent Socialist League (ISL),  
 56, 201, 205, 211, 219, 224, 239, 364  
 n. 3  
 Industrial Workers of the World  
 (IWW), xii, 118, 238, 239, 282, 287.  
*See also* Haywood, Big Bill  
 Informal work groups, 28, 235–55  
 Institute for Policy Studies, 318  
 International Association of  
 Machinists (IAM), 68, 290, 305–6.  
*See also* Wimpisinger, William  
 International Brotherhood of  
 Electrical Workers, 290, 300  
 International Brotherhood of Painters,  
 307–8; Local 4 (IBP), 307. *See also*  
 Wilson, Dow  
 International Brotherhood of Team-  
 sters (IBT), 104, 105, 246, 247, 290,  
 306–7, 310; Local 107 (IBT), 306–7  
 International Harbor Workers  
 Congress, 154, 162. *See also* Aarhus;  
 Denmark  
 International Harvester, 145  
 International Longshoremen's  
 Association (ILA), 94, 104, 259,  
 297–98, 361 n. 2  
 International Longshoremen's and  
 Warehousemen's Union (ILWU),  
 xiii, 7, 9, 11, 39, 40, 43, 44, 45, 48, 49,  
 50, 52, 53, 54, 57, 59, 61, 62, 63, 66,  
 69, 70, 95, 96, 97, 98, 100, 102, 104,  
 143, 152, 176, 177, 256, 257, 273, 290,  
 297, 301–4, 332, 349, 350, 357 nn. 4, 7,  
 8, 361 n. 2, 365 n. 5; Local 10 (San  
 Francisco), 40, 41, 42, 44, 47, 49,  
 50, 51, 57, 58, 62, 66, 183, 223, 273,  
 303; Local 13 (Los Angeles), 47,  
 61, 304. *See also* Bridges, Harry  
 International Seamen's Union (ISU),  
 128, 130, 131, 132. *See also* Furuseth,  
 Andrew  
 International Skilled Trade Council,  
 330  
 International Socialists, 212  
 International Transport Workers  
 Federation, 339

- International Union of Electrical Workers, 299, 300. *See also* Carey, James
- Irish Americans, 260
- Ironworkers Local 627 (San Diego), 26
- Islands*, 32
- Isserman, Maurice, 208
- Istanbul, Turkey, 13, 16
- Italian Americans, 260
- Italy, 64, 192, 223
- Jackson, James, 194
- Jackson, Mahalia, 10
- Jacobs, Paul, 55
- Jacobson, Julius, 55
- Jacobson, Phyllis, 58
- Jacoby, Russell, 208
- James, C. L. R., 4, 21–25, 32, 33, 208, 349, 350, 356, 364 n. 1, 365 n. 9. *See also* Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways, Minty Alley; Third Camp; Workers Party
- Japan, 71, 99, 102, 326, 340, 341
- Jebel Ali, Dubai, 339
- Jenkins, Dave, 145
- Jenkins, Willie, Jr., 52, 358 n. 27
- Jennings, Ed, 360 n. 6
- Jennings, James, 299–300
- Jewel Companies, Inc., 310
- John Birch society, 10
- Johnson, Charles, 358 n. 27
- Johnson, Lawrence, 358 n. 27
- Johnson, Lyndon, 168, 178, 180, 297, 305
- Johnston, Curt, 61
- Joint Coast Labor Relations Committee (JCLRC), 54, 59, 256. *See also* International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union; Pacific Maritime Association
- Joint Port Labor Relations Committee (JPLRC), 39, 40, 42, 44, 53, 54, 58, 60, 63. *See also* International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union; Pacific Maritime Association
- Jones, James, 32
- Jones, Tom, 317
- Jones, William, 358, n. 27
- Journals of Andre Gide, The*, 32
- Kafka, Franz, 16
- Kahn, Mark L., 361 n. 3
- Kahns Department Store (Oakland, California), 142, 143, 144. *See also* Oakland General Strike
- Kajima Corporation, 354
- Kanakas, 98
- Kawabata, Yasunari, 32
- Kearney, James, 41, 42, 43, 44, 50, 54, 58, 62
- Keawe, Doris, 20
- Keawe, Joe, 20
- Keawe, Joe, Jr., 20
- Kennedy, Anthony, 63
- Kennedy, Melvin, 358 n. 27
- Kennedy, Robert, 168
- Kennedy, Ted, 313
- Kenton, Stan, 214
- Kerr, Clark, 60
- Khrushchev, Nikita, 224
- King, Coretta Scott, 10, 13, 14, 16
- King, Martin Luther, Jr. 55
- Kirk, Grayson, 169, 180
- Kirkland, Lane, 310
- Knei-Paz, Baruch, 229
- Knight, O.A. "Jack," 300
- Kobe, Japan, 341
- Kochis, Steve "Cadillac," 300
- KOR (Committee for Workers Defense), 227, 228
- Korean Immigrant Worker Advocates, 355
- Kotlowitz, Alex, 29, 30
- Kovacs, Bicycle, 95, 347
- Kremlin, 22
- Ku Klux Klan, 242
- Kuzyn, Bill, 200
- Labor Action*, 22, 224, 240. *See also* Workers' Party
- Labor and Communism*, 221



- Labor Education (University of Illinois), 12  
*Labor Law for the Rank and Filer*, 30  
 Labor Management Group, 310–13  
*Labor Notes*, 151  
 Lacy, Louis T., 358 n. 27  
 Ladd, Alan, 25  
 Laney College (Oakland, California), 146  
 Langford, James, 358 n. 27  
 Larrowe, Charles, 58, 59, 358 nn. 14, 15, 16, 20  
 Lasch, Christopher, 180, 363 n. 17  
 Las Palmas, 155, 162  
 Lawrence, Samuel, 361 n. 4  
 Lawson, John Howard, 225  
 Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, 316  
 Leggett, John T., 358 n. 27  
 Lenin, V. I., 23, 228  
 Leninist party, 216, 228. *See also* Vanguard party  
 Lenin Shipyard (Gdansk, Poland), 26, 27  
 Leonard, Norman, 54  
 Levinson, Harold, 361 nn. 3, 5  
 Lewis, John L., 71, 83, 146, 210, 281, 282, 300, 301. *See also* Congress of Industrial Organizations, United Mine Workers  
 Lichtenstein, Nelson, 88, 360 n. 7  
*Life* magazine, 168, 305, 362 n. 1  
 Lighter Aboard Ship Operations (LASH), 99, 103  
 Lillard, Richard, 237  
 Lincoln Mills, 80  
 Linden, Dick, 145  
 Liverpool, England, 140, 341  
 Lomita, California, 19  
 Long Beach, California, 340  
*Long Beach Press-Telegram*, 29, 31  
 Long Beach State University (California), 31  
 Longshore Jobs Defense Committee (LJDC), 11, 52, 53, 55, 57, 66  
 Longshoremen for Christ, 74  
*Longshoring on the San Francisco Waterfront*, 29  
*Lord Jim*, 133  
 Lordstown, Ohio, 70, 71, 88. *See also* General Motors, United Auto Workers  
 Los Angeles, 64, 217, 235, 354, 355  
 Los Angeles Junior College, 237  
 Los Angeles port, 47, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 105, 157, 165, 261, 306  
*Los Angeles Times*, 31  
 Lothailer, Eileen, 31  
 Louie, Miriam Ching Yoon, 365 n. 5  
 L'Ouverture, Toussaint, 194  
 Love, Cleo, 52, 54, 358 n. 27  
 Low-man-out system, 178, 263–66, 351, 352  
 Lucas Flour, 80  
 Luddism, 76–90, 104, 193  
 Lundeberg, Harry, 5, 7, 131, 132, 142, 143, 148, 238, 242. *See also* Sailors' Union of the Pacific  
 Luppi, Mario V., 64, 358 n. 27  
 Lynch, Roberta, 318  
 Lynd, Staughton, 30, 58, 69, 358 n. 25, 359 nn. 29, 30  
 MacDougal Street (New York), 3, 214  
*Machinist's Semi-Automated Life*, A, 29, 31  
 Mack Truck, 331  
 Maersk vessels, 158  
 Mage, Shane, 212  
 Malaquais, Jean, 32  
 Mallorca, Spain, 162  
 Malraux, Andre, 32  
 Mandatory overtime, 81  
 Manjo's waterfront cafe (San Francisco), 9  
*Man's Fate*, 32  
 Mansfield, Ohio, 29, 296  
 Maria, Belen, 162  
 Marine Cooks and Stewards union (MC&S), 7, 109, 120, 125  
 Marine Firemen, Oilers, Watertenders

- and Wipers (MFOW&W), 7, 109, 120, 125
- Mariners, Renegades, and Castaways*, 25. *See also* James, C. L. R.
- Maritime Federation of the Pacific, 125, 132
- Market Street (San Francisco), 129
- Marseilles, France, 105
- Marshall, Robert, 48
- Martin, Homer, 284
- Mary*, 32
- Marx, Karl, 240
- Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), 31, 76
- Matson Navigation Corporation, 45, 98
- Maud, Oklahoma, 199, 253
- May, Paul, 358 n. 27
- May First Movement, 334
- Mazey, Emil, 210
- McCarthy period, 23, 59, 84, 185, 223, 248, 256
- McClellan, John, 168, 169, 171, 172
- McDonald, David, 298, 299, 304
- McKinney, Ernest Rice, 194
- McLemee, Scott, 365, n. 9
- Means, Russell, 317
- Meany, George, 180, 296, 297, 306, 309, 310, 313. *See also* American Federation of Labor
- Mechanization and modernization agreement (M&M), 46, 60, 61, 95, 96, 97, 301. *See also* Bridges, Harry; International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union
- Melbourne, Australia, 135, 339, 340
- Melman, Seymour, 68
- Melvin, Anthony, Jr., 358 n. 27
- Mensheviks, 228
- Merchant Marine, xii, 237
- Meredith, Burgess, 13
- Merrit, Willie C., 358 n. 27
- Mexico, 326, 333, 339
- Michigan auto workers, 71
- Michigan State University, 58
- Miles, Robert, 29, 30, 31
- Militant, The*, 240
- Miller, Arnold, 316
- Miller, Henry, 4
- Miller Lecture Series, 12. *See also* University of Illinois
- Miners for Democracy, 330
- Minetta Tavern, 214
- Minneapolis General Strike, 281, 290
- Minty Alley*, 25. (*See also* James, C.L.R.)
- Mission Street (San Francisco), 129
- Missouri Sharecroppers' strike, 21
- Mobil Oil, 310
- Molokan Americans, 237
- Morris, George, 290
- Morrissey, James, 304
- Morse, Wayne, 60
- Mother and Son*, 32
- Muhammad Speaks*, 10, 13
- Murray, Philip, 210, 222, 292
- National Academy of Sciences, 45, 69, 365 n. 4, 6
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), 55, 313
- National Black Workers Alliance of IBM Employees, 333
- National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence, 168
- National Confederation of Workers (CNT) (Spain), 156
- National Council of La Raza, 316
- National Education Association, 329
- National Institute of Mental Health, 30, 73
- National Labor Relations Act (NLRA), 41, 80
- National Labor Relations Board (NLRB), 55, 80, 83, 242, 309, 354, 357 n. 11
- National Law Center of the National Lawyers Guild, 64
- National Longshoremen's Board, 130, 256
- National Maritime Union (NMU), 5, 6, 7, 83, 140, 242, 288, 289, 290, 304-5

- National Organization for Women (NOW), 313
- National Rank and File Against Concessions (NRFAC), 335
- National Steel and Shipyard Company (NASSCO), 26–28
- National Union of Farm Workers, 317–18
- Necktie Charlie, 95, 347
- Neptune Jade*, 340, 341
- Nereu, Frank, 358 n. 27
- Nereu, Manuel, 64, 358 n. 27
- New American Movement, 314, 318
- New Democratic Coalition, 314
- “New Directions” caucus (United Auto Workers), 324
- New International, The*, 240
- New Joe’s (San Francisco), 136
- New Otani Hotel (Los Angeles), 354, 355
- Newport News, Virginia, 102
- Newton, Huey P., 15
- New York, 100, 103, 218, 230, 259–61, 263, 304, 330, 332, 353, 356
- New Yorker*, 167, 177
- New York Times*, 168, 206, 214
- New York Times Magazine*, 13
- Nguyen, Victor, 361 n. 10
- Nicaragua, 158, 162
- Nicolas, Albert, 214
- Night Shift In a Pickle Factory*, 29
- Ninth Street (New York), 214
- Nisby, Thomas, 358 n. 27
- Nobody Knows My Name*, 32. *See also* Baldwin, James
- Norfolk, Virginia, 289
- Norris-LaGuardia Act, 80
- North Beach (San Francisco), 115, 118, 138, 141, 353
- Oakland, California, 102, 115, 142, 143, 201, 340; city council, 145; 1986 teachers’ strike 334; Oakland Voters League, 145
- Oakland Auditorium, 143
- Oakland General Strike, 142–48, 200, 223, 350
- O’Brien, Marjorie, 3
- Ohio, 301
- Oil, Gas, and Atomic Workers union, 300
- Operating Engineers Union, 104, 317
- Orange County, California, 19
- Ory, Kid, 214
- Osborne, Seldon 62, 177, 178
- Other America, The*, 55
- Our Political Tasks*, 228, 229
- Ozomatli, 355
- Pacific Maritime Association (PMA), 39–44, 47, 50, 52–54, 57, 59–63, 66, 95, 98, 101, 178, 256, 257, 301, 350, 357 n. 4, 11; 358 n. 12
- Packard, Steve, 30
- Paid Guarantee Plan (PGP), 101, 102
- Palmer, Willie D., 358 n. 27
- Panacoast, William, 29
- Panama Canal, 102, 140
- Papua, New Guinea, 340
- Papyrus Strike, 192–93
- Paris, 199
- Pasajes, Spain, 158
- Passionate State of Mind, The*, 167
- Patrick Stevedore Company, 340, 341
- Pearl Harbor, 214, 286, 287
- Pennsylvania, 300
- Perez, Joe, 42
- Phillips, George Harwood, 360 n. 8
- Pierpont, Robert Joseph, 55
- Pier 24 (San Francisco), 40, 41
- Pier 39 (San Francisco), 351
- Pilcher, William, 93; 360 n. 1
- Place in Colusa, A*, 29
- Plant, T.G., 256, 257
- Plumbers and Pipefitters union, 310
- P-9 strike, (Austin, Minnesota), 324–25, 331. *See also* Hormel strike
- Point Richmond, California, 242, 244
- Poland, 5, 21, 158, 224, 227, 292, 334, 350
- Polaroid, 85

- Pomerantz, Roy, 313  
 Pontiac, Michigan, 296  
 Port Avila, California, 244  
 Port Hueneme, California, 96  
 Portland, Oregon, 101, 157, 258, 261,  
 306, 309  
 Portugal, 115  
 Portuguese Americans, 245, 246  
 Primary work groups, 24, 28, 342  
 Prinkipo, Turkey, 205  
 Probast, Jack, 3  
 Professional Air Traffic Controllers  
 Organization (PATCO), 327  
*Prophet Armed, The*, 229  
 Provost, Leroy J., 358 n. 27  
*Puente*, 333
- “Quality of Work Life” experiments,  
 79, 85, 86, 329
- Queensland, Australia, 344  
 Quick, Robert T., 305
- Racism, 3–16, 84, 242, 246, 253; in  
 Sailors’ Union of the Pacific, 5, 8  
 Ramses III, 192  
*Random Lengths*, 194  
 Rank and File Caucus (UAW), 210, 211,  
 291  
 Rank and file networks, 149–52  
 Rank and file revolts, 78, 84, 249,  
 294–309  
 Rarick, Ronald, 298  
 Rashid, Dubai, 339  
 Raskin, Marcus, 318  
 Rauh, Joseph L., Jr., 316  
 Rawick, George, 186  
 Reagan, Ronald, 178, 326  
*Rebel, The*, 309  
 Reed, Edward, 358 n. 27  
 Rehmus, Charles, 361 n. 3  
 Reinhold, Laurence, 194  
 Reno, Nevada, 103, 104  
*Resistor*, 333  
 Retail Clerks Local 1265 (Oakland,  
 California). *See Oakland General  
 Strike* 144
- Reuther, Roy, 291  
 Reuther, Victor, 210, 290, 291, 360 n. 1  
 Reuther, Walter, xii, 82, 141, 210, 249,  
 250, 290, 291, 294, 295, 296, 297, 305,  
 306, 316, 319, 322, 364 n. 3. *See also*  
 United Auto Workers
- Ribicoff, Abraham, 173–76  
 Richards, Jeremiah, 358 n. 27  
 Richardson, Louis J., 358 n. 27  
 Richmond, California, 118, 145  
 Rilke, Rainer Maria, 32  
 Roberts, Albert W., 358 n. 27  
 Robertson, James, 212  
 Robinson, Randall, 347  
 Robinson, Walter, 358 n. 27  
 Rohatch, Robert, 62  
 Rohatyn, Felix, 328  
 Roll On–Roll Off Ships (Ro-Ro), 99,  
 103  
 Roosevelt, Franklin Delano, 93, 110,  
 130, 223, 285, 286  
 Rosenberg, Harold, 360 n. 2  
 Roth, Phillip, 9  
 Rotterdam, Netherlands, 206  
 Rudd, Mark, 176  
 Rude, George, 336  
 Ruiz, Vicki, 352, 365 n. 2  
 Russell, Maud, 364 n. 2  
 Russia, 22, 23, 83, 204, 208, 211, 219,  
 223, 225, 230, 240, 281, 285, 290  
 Rustin, Bayard, 55, 57
- Sadlowski, Ed, 316  
 Safeway Stores, 247  
 Sailors’ Union of the Pacific (SUP),  
 xii, 4, 5, 7, 30, 51, 109, 120, 122, 125,  
 128, 129, 139, 140, 142, 238, 239, 240,  
 241, 242, 243, 287, 290, 361 n. 1; coast  
 committee of, 7, 8, 243. *See also*  
 Lundeberg, Harry
- St. Sure, Paul, 40, 54  
 Salas, Miguel, 27  
 Samoans, 7  
 San Diego, 26, 27, 96, 258  
 San Francisco, 7, 17, 30, 31, 39, 55, 93,  
 96, 97, 98, 100, 101, 102, 115, 119, 128,

- 136, 148, 167, 169, 181, 199, 263, 264.  
265, 306, 349, 353
- San Francisco General Strike, 93,  
129–30, 177, 281, 283
- San Francisco Port Study*, 69
- San Francisco Review of Books*, 31
- San Francisco State University, 9
- San Pedro, California, xii, 17, 19, 29,  
30, 95, 98, 128, 239, 258, 346, 361 n. 9
- Santa Cruz, California, 145, 148, 222
- Saunders, Reginald, 358 n. 27
- Saudi Arabia, 64
- Savage, Thomas, 32
- Savio, Mario, 145, 176
- Saxton Fellowship, 8
- Schlipf, Paul, 145, 146, 223, 362 n. 7
- Seafarers International Union, 241, 310
- Sea Land company, 98
- Seattle, Washington, 97, 101, 157, 158,  
261, 306, 332
- See, Carolyn, 32, 33
- Seider, Maynard, 31
- Selden, Dave, 318
- Selznick, Phillip, 55
- Service Employees International  
Union (SEIU), 313, 329
- Sevareid, Eric, 167, 168, 173, 180, 362 n. 2
- Sewell, William, 361 n. 10
- Shachtman, Max, 21, 23, 201–7, 239,  
244, 349, 364 nn. 3, 1, 4. *See also*  
Independent Socialist League;  
Workers Party
- Shachtmanites, 6, 13, 21, 22, 23, 201,  
208, 211, 212, 229
- Shaiken, Harley, 68
- Shape-up, 259–61, 351; 358 n. 14
- Sharron, Mark, 3, 9
- Shaw, Sam, 360 n. 3
- Sheridan Square, 8
- Shipley, Catherine, 6
- Shipyards, 26–28
- Shirley, Reverend William, 55
- Siemiller, P. L., 305
- Sigal, Clancy, 32, 33, 58, 358 n. 16
- Silas, Tommie, 42, 43, 62
- Silone, Ignazio, 32
- Singapore, 326, 340
- Singlejack Books, xiii, 29–31, 34
- Sixth Avenue (New York), 214
- Slayton, Willie, 4–5
- Slevin, John, 237
- Slingloads, 48, 94, 283, 351, 352
- Small Press Book Club, 30, 95
- Smeal, Eleanor, 313
- Social and Political Thought of Leon  
Trotsky, The*, 229
- Socialist Labor Party, 282
- Socialist Party, 209, 212, 282, 364 n. 3
- Socialist Workers Party (SWP), 21–23,  
208, 209, 211, 217, 229
- Socialist Workers Party of Spain  
(PSOE), 155, 158
- Solidarity (Poland), 26–28, 158, 227,  
228, 334, 350
- Solidarity House, 153, 319, 331
- Soromengo, Blackie (Soromenho),  
109, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121,  
122, 125, 126, 127, 130, 133, 138, 139,  
140, 146, 147, 148
- Soul on Ice*, 12
- South Africa, 311, 334
- Soviet Union 201, 204, 211, 225, 228,  
281, 349. *See also* Russia
- Spain, 152–63, 211, 281, 335, 342, 350
- Sparks, Nevada, 103, 104, 351
- Spear Street (San Francisco), 129
- Stalin, Joseph, 21, 23, 143, 203, 204, 205,  
211, 223, 224, 231, 290
- Standard Oil, 241
- Stanford University, 9
- State capitalism, 22
- Steelmill Blues*, 30
- Steel Workers Trilogy*, 80
- Sterling, Max, 32, 33
- Stettin, Saul, 315
- “Story for Teddy, A,” 32
- Stout, Frank, 62
- Straughter, Alfred, 358 n. 27
- Student rebellions, 12, 88, 168–84, 212
- Summers, Clyde, 360 n. 2
- Surfing, 214, 236, 244, 348
- Sutter’s Mill, California, 141

- Swados, Harvey, 13, 32, 33, 55, 58  
 Sweden, 340  
 Sydney, Australia, 344
- Tadich's Grill, 136  
 Taft-Hartley Act, 41, 80, 83, 97, 210,  
 297, 300, 357 n.4  
 Taiwan, 326, 341  
 Teamsters for a Democratic Union,  
 64, 359 n. 28  
 Teamster Union Rank and File, 330  
 Technology Bill of Rights, 68  
 Telecommunications Workers  
 (Australia) 344  
 Telegraph Avenue (Oakland, Cali-  
 fornia), 142  
 Telephone workers, 330  
 Television, 19, 26, 167, 346, 347  
*Temper of Our Time, The*, 167  
 Tenerife, Spain, 157, 160  
 Thau, Irving, 55, 57  
 Thebes, 192  
 Theriault, Reg, 29, 30, 31  
 Third Camp, 22, 23. *See also* James,  
 C. L. R., Shachtman, Max  
 Thomas, Norman, 55, 58, 287, 364  
 n. 3  
 Thomas, R. J., 210, 291. *See also* United  
 Auto Workers Union  
 Tivoli (San Francisco), 136  
 Tobin, Pat, 49  
 Tolliver, Theodore, 358 n. 27  
 Tompkins, Calvin, 167, 177, 363 n. 17,  
 22, 24  
 Trade Union Action and Democracy  
 (TUAD), 335  
 Trinidad, 25, 350  
 Trotsky, Leon, 23, 203, 205, 206, 207,  
 218, 228, 229  
 Trotsky, Natalia, 205  
 Trotskyism, 4, 5, 6, 21, 23, 24, 205, 221,  
 224, 231, 243, 290  
*True Believer, The*, 167, 172, 179, 181  
 Tulin, Roger, 29, 31  
 Turin, Italy, 192  
 Turkey, 205
- Turner, Steve, 29  
*Two Souls of Socialism, The*, 212
- UAW and Walter Reuther, The*, 211  
*UAW Washington Report*, 85, 312, 360  
 n. 5  
*Union Democracy in Action*, 304  
 Union Square (New York), 214  
 Union Women's Alliance To Gain  
 Equality, 64  
 United Auto Workers (UAW), xii, 51,  
 70, 82, 83, 85, 86, 141, 153, 201, 210,  
 246, 283, 284, 290, 291, 294–97, 300,  
 311, 319, 320, 331; Local 76 (UAW),  
 141, 143, 145; Local 527 (UAW), 296;  
 Local 645 (UAW), 333. *See also*  
 Fraser, Douglas; Reuther, Walter;  
 Woodcock, Leonard  
 United Electrical Workers (UE), 290,  
 291, 292, 300, 360 n. 4  
 United Farm Workers union (UFW),  
 313, 329. *See also* Chavez, Cesar  
 United Food and Commercial  
 Workers (UFCW) union, 324  
 United Mine Workers union (UMW),  
 300, 301, 302, 316. *See also* Bayle,  
 W. A. "Tony"; Lewis, John L.  
 United Packinghouse Workers union  
 (UPW), 304–5  
 United papermakers and paper-  
 workers, 307  
 United Rubber Workers union, 300  
 United States Court of Appeals, Ninth  
 Circuit, 55, 57, 62, 63, 64, 360 n. 31  
 United States Department of Labor,  
 103  
 United States Maritime Adminis-  
 tration, 103  
 United States Senate Permanent  
 Subcommittee on Investigations of  
 the Committee on Government  
 Operations, 168–177, 363 n. 3  
 United States Shipping Board, 261  
 United States Steel, 301, 310  
 United States Supreme Court, 14, 56,  
 57, 64, 65, 80, 81

- United Steelworkers union, 298–99, 310. *See also* Abel, I. W.; McDonald, David
- University of California, Berkeley, 9, 136, 145, 167, 174, 175, 176, 363 n. 19
- University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), xii, 214, 237, 286
- University of Chicago, 192
- University of Illinois, xiii, 12, 13, 30, 73, 350, 360 n. 1
- University Place (New York), 214
- Urbana, Illinois, 12
- USA Today*, 30
- Vaca v. Sipes*, 56
- Valencia, Spain, 158
- Vancouver, Canada, 341
- Vanguard party 23, 185–86, 199–207, 208–13, 216–31
- Van Nuys, California, 331, 333
- Vera Cruz, Mexico, 340
- Veres, Peter, 364 n. 1
- Vickery, Howard L., 362 n. 4
- Viesca, Victor Hugo, 355, 365 n. 8
- Vietnam War, 168
- Vultee Aircraft Strike, 287
- Wald, Alan, 208
- Walentynowicz, Anna, 26
- Wall Street Journal*, 29, 30
- War Diary*, 32
- War Shipping Administration (WSA), 113
- Washington, DC, 27, 128, 194
- Watsonville, California, 324, 332
- Watts, Rowland, 55
- Weekend in Dinlock*, 32
- Weinberg, Jack, 145
- Weir, Kim (Hari Simran), 34
- Weir, Laurie, 34
- Weir, Mary Knox, xiii, 9, 12, 13, 202, 246
- Weisberger, Morris, 7
- Westgard Co-Op, 237
- West Indians, 4
- West Virginia, 246, 301, 329
- What Is to Be Done?*, 228
- Whitehead, Willie J., 358 n. 27
- Widick, B. J., 211, 364 n.3
- Wildcat strikes, 88, 89
- Williams, Connie, 3, 4, 9, 10, 25
- Williams, George R., 358 nn. 27
- Williams v. PMA*, 39–69, 357 nn. 6, 9, 10; 358 nn. 12, 21, 22, 26
- Wilmington (California), 17, 19, 101
- Wilson, Dow, 307–9
- Wimpisinger, William, 68, 69
- Winters, Arthur, 52, 358 n. 27
- Wisconsin State Historical Society, 146
- Wohlforth, Tim, 211, 212, 213
- Woodcock, Leonard, 70, 71, 82, 319, 322. *See also* United Auto Workers Union
- Woods, Henry, 141
- Worker–intellectual alliances, 26, 77, 89–90, 185–86, 227–31
- Workers Defense League (WDL), 55
- Workers Party, xi, 5, 6, 9, 21, 22, 23, 24, 208–11, 214, 215, 216, 217, 219, 224, 229, 230, 244, 289, 349. *See also* Independent Socialist League; James, C. L. R.; Shachtman, Max
- Yanow, Hal, 43, 51, 62
- Year in the Life of a Factory, A*, 31
- Yokohama, Japan, 341
- Zoot suit, 236

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