

The San Francisco Waterfront:  
The Cultural Bond of the Dockers, c. the mid-sixties  
-- Their Stories of Work and Union. \*

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c. 2007

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\* This entry continues the article the opening pages of which were published in The Waterfront Writers -- the Literature of Work, (New York: Harper & Row, 1979), edited by Robert Carson, 198 pp.) under the title " . . . excerpts from 'A Rat's Eye View of history: Story - Telling on the San Francisco Waterfront. " Those excerpts are also appear on this web site as Article 6.

### Another Brief Word on the Stories Here Recounted

This paper, as with the one posted here as entry #6, presents the kind of stories the dockers of San Francisco commonly told about their work and union from their "big strike of '34" to the late sixties or so. \* Since such were often told as a number of dockers conversed, the setting and context in which the author heard them, as well as the "cast" of dockers involved, is also set out before they are presented. As might be supposed, each of these recountings derives from hurriedly scribbled notes jotted down on something like an unused bill of lading shortly after it was heard. Those notes, of course, were also fleshed out to some extent when the author typed up the story and sometimes still further when they had been responded to when later told to other groups of dockers.

While these recountings are therefore products of fact and fiction, they cannot be said to be untrue. They are, instead, amalgams of things that really did happen or surely seemed to have happened or certainly could have happened. And, indeed, it is also for these reasons that they illustrate the kind of story production and telling and swapping which San Francisco dockers enjoyed for many years. And hence they should also be read in the light of the author's articles on the work performed by those dockers and their evolving union. And if they are, they may be viewed - if, as through a glass, but darkly -- as parts of the social consciousness fashioned by those dockers from 1934 to c. 1970. And, by the same token, of course, the capacity of those dockers to fashion and tell such stories and their emergent desire to hear and to swap such stories must be viewed as social products of their work and its union setting. And over these years, as might well be supposed, this ever-evolving consciousness also began to embody their collective remembrance of a growing list of struggles waged by them in arenas off-the-job. And having sought by such struggles to live out their sense of fraternity with those who labored elsewhere, they also collectively fashioned a very public and ever-more widely respected moral character, as they also created meaningful biographies in a multitude of settings. It followed, too, of course, that they thus came to have a great many matters of purpose and moment to discuss and think about and hence, too, an ever-growing capacity and desire to tell and hear stories with social dimensions still wider. And since their storytelling and swapping was underwritten by a hard won and always informing awareness of the "good and the evil" which men may do or seek to do, the stories thus told came to be distinguish-

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\* Having posted entry #6 of this web site - ... excerpts from "A Rat's-Eye View of History: Story - Telling on the San Francisco Waterfront" -- I eventually returned to what by c. 1980 was posted there as entry #13 - "The San Francisco Waterfront: The Linguistic Bond of the Dockers - c. the Mid-Sixties -- Their Language of Sea and Ship. " Having realized in the interim that as of 1965 the language there set out had for many years been the linguistic bond of the union and community of the San Francisco dockers," I also realized that stories such as those of entry #6 had over those years been the most basic *cultural* bond of their union and community. And having also realized that each of those bonds -- being social products of the work they had performed prior to the container revolution -- had progressively atrophied as that revolution proceeded.

ed by a finely wrought sense of character and drama, of biography and history, and, hence, as well, a fine and economic sense of what they viewed as "passage". \*

Many of the stories thus fashioned were also disarmingly humorous since the storyteller often found "the human condition" to be a source of comradely amusement - if often, too, of comradely despair. At the same time, however, the humor thus engendered was frequently tinged with a melancholy irony since those thus depicted had, of course, also "moved on" in one way or another since the time in question. This being so, the pauses of sadness and loss which also come with the passage of time and hence of friends were often present, too. On the other hand, a full-blown humor rooted in "a moving on" - which is to say, a passage - might well be especially evident when a docker recounted how an element of his consciousness -- which had somehow been inherited and also somehow "false" - had at long last been shed, transformed, or transcended. And, indeed, for example, a comic genius often surfaced in an account of how a docker had learned that a preacher had been a hypocrite -- or, of course, worse -- or how a judge had not been possessed of any interest in justice at all.

Such observations regarding the stories recounted here may, evidently, be thus explained: the best of the San Francisco waterfront storytellers were widely said by the docker vets of "the big strike of '34" to have been those in their ranks who voiced the views and sentiments of the Wobblies -- the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). The prominence which those dockers thus enjoyed was rooted in two sets of circumstances. They had virtually always had an extraordinary number of jobs and hence a wealth of work-related experience prior to arriving on the docks. They also were heirs to the IWW storytelling tradition of "single-jack" organizing -- the tactic of setting out the wobbly view of the socio-economic and political-ethical universe inhabited by the worker by telling stories about the kind of folks often encountered therein. As might then be supposed, their stories rarely overtly expressed a political point of view. On the contrary, and having been told in the first person they almost always were disarmingly humorous in simply relating how the storyteller had been "the butt of the joke" while learning something about the work and / or the union or the wider world. And with that so, they also commonly ended on a friendly and unpretentious note such as this:- " . . . Boy - I *really* felt like a donkey!" And, thus, too, in a word, the Wobblies on the San Francisco waterfront had thereby raised the telling of such stories to a very entertaining and educational art well before the end of 1930's. Partly, then, by reason of their storytelling, virtually all of the San Francisco dockers had by the close of the fifties also fashioned -- or had otherwise come to possess -- a host of such stories. But having noted these things, it should also be noted that by the early sixties all of the '34 vets had retired or passed away.

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\* For the fashioning and the use of their notion of "passage", see entry # 13 on this web site:: The San Francisco Waterfront: The Linguistic Bond of the Dockers -- c. the Mid-Sixties -- Their Language of Sea and Ship.

The setting: A table in a small Chinese cafe just up from the front.

The cast: Some members of a nightside gang.

The event: Story telling during the mid-shift supper time of 11:00 PM to midnight.

The lines: A 1959 new-hire still being dispatched to work in the hold.

Well, a *whole* lot of things have happened down here, but I *sure* won't forget my first job. So -- that was as a sweeper over at the Grove Street Terminal. And *while* I can't remember his name and *never* so much as saw him, again, I got a *good* recollection of the old-timer I had for a boss . . . So -- a pretty big guy with years of hard work in his manner and face and hands. And, *actually*, too, the *picture* of the '34 strike. So -- black, 'frisco jeans and a hickory shirt under a West Coast stetson. And a big shock of steel-gray hair. And he must've had rheumatism - or maybe, of course, he'd been injured -- since as he walked he also kind of rocked around. But anyways -- and as I also saw rightaway, he *sure* got a kick out of things. So - with him taking my dispatch slip, he grinned me this: "Okay, young fella - *let's* get down to *my* office." And on our way to what turned out to be a chain-fenced and locked corral, this also passed between us: "Ever *done* any sweeping?" So - I said: "I sewpt a pool hall when I was a kid so I could play for free." And - with that - he came back with this: "It's *good* you got experience."

Well, anyway - and having entered the corral, he began what he grinned and called my "*orientation* for the day." So -- first of all -- he shared the corral with a cooper and a gearman who also used it to stash what they needed to do their work and their personal gear. So - along its fence to the right - and for doing their paper work - there also were three old and banged-up roll top desks. And to go with each of them there were matching swivel chairs and a straight back chair . And to their far side from the gate, they each had an open-fronted locker of wood in which you could see work and rain boots on the floor and wool shirts and jackets and sets of rain gear on hangers and pegs . And on the fence up front there was union stuff on a bulletin board and employer stuff on another one and a third with a girlie calendar and a map of the Pacific.

And with that he grinned and took a sip of his tea.

. . . Well, anyways -- and having pointed these things out, he took me to a bunch of brooms and shovels and mops hanging from a gear rack along the back fence. And as he broadly waved at that gear, he also grinned, "Tools of the trade." And then he tells me to get a push broom and a regular one and a short-handled shovel and mop. So, course, I started looking over what was closest to me. But as I was fixing to get a push broom, he raised his hand and said, "May I?" So, when I smiled, "Yeah, sure," he steps up to them brooms and starts to eye them really close. And then he took one and - having like found its balance point -

he kind of weighed it in his hand, but then shook his head and put it back. But, after three more tries at that, he smiled and said "This one's for you" as he leaned it against the fence . . . Well, course, with that, he done the same thing to get me the rest of my tools for the day. And he done all that, too, like he was a samurai picking a sword or a surgeon selecting a scalpel.

So, then with that, he went to the end of the rack so as to return with 55- gallon steel drum lashed by a rope to a hand truck. And having then leaned on its handles, he grinned me this: "So, here's your chariot your today. And with your tools in this here barrel, you'll be ready to roll . . . But before we get started, there's a couple of things you ought to know about sweeping. And, in fact, you might even call them the the hard and fast rules as to sweeping"

And then he addressed his tea again.

And having shifted his weight on the handles of the cart, he continued with this: " . . . Now, the *first* thing about sweeping is this: piles of dirt may look alike, but -- *fact* is -- they *ain't* alike. And with that so, the *second* thing about sweeping is this: it's *really* an art. And with that also so, there's *another* thing about it, too . . . As with *every* art, you just got to go *slow* when you're sweeping."

. . . Well, course, he ended that with a smile, but he also then smiled me this question: " . . . Now, you got *all* that?" So, naturally, too, I'm also grinning by then, so I kind of followed suit: "Yeah --I *sure* I do . . . I mean, I *never* thought about it like that, but I can *see* how sweeping's an art . . . And *maybe* even a *fine* art, too. since there's *more* than meets the eye."

. . . So, course, no surprise, but he was real pleased with that. And that being so, he came off of them handles and -- having rubbed and clapped h is hands -- broadly smiled me this: " . . . Well, *with* you looking at things like *that*, you're *sure* going to make a *mighty* fine sweeper . . . ! So, *let* me get my rig and we'll *get* to rolling, but *don't* forget: you *always* got go slow.

. . . Well, anyways, that man carried on in this *kind* of way *all* the day long, so it sure *sure* was a pleasure to work with him.

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The setting: A table in a waterfront cafe.

The cast: Some members of a gang: the boss, the two winch drivers, the two "frontmen", \* and three of four hold men.

The event: Lunch time conversation.

The lines:

The gang boss ( the "gaffer") - to the holdmen and in reference to four recent "new hires" dispatched to the gang that morning.

"How are the new men doing today?"

Holdman - who had been a new-hire five years before, i.e., in 1959.

They're doing okay. But with the general freight we've been getting, they hit it lucky since the ones yesterday *really* got a workout with that cotton we had.

Winch driver.

Well, cotton's one thing you *got* to learn since - *if* you don't - you *sure* will use your back.

The gaffer.

You got a point there, but no one knows cotton today like the old - timers did. And that's because most all of it is already going into containers at some mill in the boonies. So, as to cotton, you're right about using your head or back, but our big problem is our running out of it.

Second winch driver.

. . . Well, speaking of cotton, I must say that the little I know as to that kind of toting I got from a master - a brother James C. Washington -- who everyone called "Wash" . . . So, Wash got here from Galveston and went to work in the Kaiser yards halfway into the war. And when that ship building was over - at least, of course, for blacks - he like a lot of others got a permit to work on our docks.

. . . So, he sure got to be a good docker - and *always* was a good union man -- and as a part of all of that, he *really* could work cotton . . . And, as a part of that, he could *even* get a bale on end and *dance* to stow . . . And - as to that - he told me once that on the 4th of July black dockers and millponds would join the Galveston parade on a flatbed trailer all decked out in red, white, and blue so as to show the crowd *all* sorts of *tricks* with cotton bales . . . I mean, *can* you imagine: a *doing* of tricks with *cotton* bales! But, then, of course, too -- at least, after while -- I basically thought - that blacks doing that -- and *especially* on the 4th and all -- made *no* sense at all.

The first one, again.

. . . Well, I can imagine the tricks since quite few fellas from off of them plantations down south knew a whole lot about cotton. So - there was a guy named Sam Edwards. Now - far as I knew - Sam always worked out of the hiring hall and he *actually* shot for them East Bay cotton jobs which we used to get because they would last for a week or more . . . Well, anyway, the man had forearms like Popeye and because of that and what he knew about cotton he and his partner were always

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\* Such were stationed on the dock to secure or release each successive sling load to or from the hoisting gear.

hanging the hook on all the rest of us and - with that - were always just waiting their turn. And, *that* -- by the way -- was another thing about cotton down south . . . It was always piecework. And, so for a guy like Sam, the hook just *couldn't* go too fast.

The second, again.

Well, course, all of that was also true of most all the guys who came from the south *via* the Kaiser yards. But it's *also* true that a *steady* ten years of that kind of work would completely burn a guy out -- or, least, that's what I always heard.

And the first, once more.

*Touche*, fellow worker. *True*, again - sure true, again. And that's why cotton's a *real* funny thing and why a guy can learn a whole lot by even just *trying* to work it . . . I mean, its like a great *schoolmaster* - just *nothing* like to humble a man . . . And *just* because of that, one thing is for *sure* . . . When working it, you'll *get* to *know* yourself-- as you also get to know pretty good *whoever* you're working with.

The holdman.

. . . Yeah, well, maybe so, but I couldn't understand just why the hair lip we had yesterday never warmed up to how me and Mike were trying to help him and his partner . . . I mean, he and his partner just kept on trying to bull every bail into stow. So - they were doing their best, but he especially wanted no help or advice and he stayed that way, too, even after me and Mike said we'd be glad to lend them a hand.

First winchie.

Well, some guys are loners from out of a kind a pride - so, maybe that's how they both felt. But, least, for most, cotton will change that *really* fast . . . I mean -- lacking experience, at least -- there's just no way to just stay a loner with *cotton* on the menu -- and it *don't* take long to find that out.

Holdman.

So, *maybe* he found that out -- and maybe of course, he didn't. But I know that it sure didn't seem like he did. And he didn't even say anything as we got to quitting time - like, even "Take care" or a "See you".

The gaffer, again.

Well, I'd bet that was due to that lip. I mean, hair lips are always real loners -at least, that is, to start with. And that's because most every-one treats them as loners.

And having turned to the drivers, he continued with this.

... So - like, for example, you guys remember Tom Carver.

And, then , he spoke to all, again.

Now, there was a damn fine guy, but because his hair lip, no one knew that, but us dockers. So, he lived for years in an old hotel just off the front and didn't have no life at all, except on the job and, course, in the union. And, I *sure* mean, a damn good longshoreman and union man. And he *sure* would've made a damn good husband and father, too, but - I guess - no woman *ever* saw beyond that lip of his. And the funny thing was that he himself would joke about that lip, at least, of course, with us dockers. And he *even* had a favorite he'd tell ... So - as to that - a hair lip went into a bar and ordered a bourbon and water. ... And - with that - the barkeep came back with, a "Bourbon and water, coming up," but he spoke like he also had a hair lip, So, the hair lip says, 'Hey, son- of-a-bitch, you *making* fun of me?' But the barkeep, sounding, again, like a hair lip, says, "No, *old* bud -- I *talk* this way." But, then, in comes an Englishman who orders a gin and bitters. So - the barkeep comes back with a smile and a "Gin and bitters it is, my lord", but that also comes out with an English accent. So, course, the hair lip is rightaway *really* pissed and comes across with a , "Hey, *asshole* -- you're *making* fun of me, *again*! But the barkeep shook his head and like a hair lip came back with this: "Oh, no, *man* ... ! I'm *not* making fun of you - I'm *making* fun of *him*!"

And, course, with laughter all around, he got to his point, again.

Well, anyhow, old Tom would tell that story and, naturally, too, he'd have a hell of a time with his trying ... So, course, each time I also thought -- "Now, *that's* just something else!" ... And I'm also *damned* to this day if I know where that could happen -- *except* down here!

The second winch driver.

... And it also brings to mind another such story the guys would tell about Tom after he got elected to be the boss of the gang he'd been in for years ... So - it happened one morning that - after he had turned his gang to - he had to stay on the dock so as to phone the union. And when he finally got to his hatch his holdmen and some casuals were on the shelter deck building a runway so as to work a freezer box. Now, one of his winch drivers had been overseeing things, but as Tom had got to the coaming, that winchie had also shouted this to them: "And - *least*, shake a *leg*." Well - with that - one of the casuals, who happened to be a hair lip, got really pissed and so he also shouted back: 'We're *doing* the *best* we can ... So, *why* the *hell* don't you *dummy* up?' So - hearing that, Tom also shouted back: "So - we got us a *fucking* wise guy *today*!" And with the casual hearing that, he also shouted this back as he started up the ladder: 'Just *stay* where you *are*, you *son-of-a-bitch*.'

And after a pause for a sip of joe, he continued with this.

... Well , anyways, all of that happened so fast that no one was

able to get to Tom to tell him the guy was a hair lip, too - and, naturally, too, the casual didn't know about him. So: Tom was kind of sparing around as the casual got off the ladder and started to head for him. But when they both finally saw the truth, they shook their heads and kind of shrugged and then they started laugh and got to a hugging and slapping of back. And then they walked to the bow of the ship and didn't get back until the morning coffee break.

And with another sip, he also thus continued.

... And it also was said that *all* of the guys felt *kind* of good and kind of *bad* - and *all* at the *very* same time.

The gaffer.

Well, that's because it's like the one he used to tell -- it *really* is a humdinger."

A second hold man.

And *ain't* you also *both* saying that hair lips are loners -- *until* you get to know them?

The gaffer.

Yeah, well - I guess so. Or - *least*, that's what I'm saying.

The first hold man.

But you still *ain't* said just *how* you get to know them.

The gaffer.

God *damn* it, Joe ... ! You *do* that like with *anyone* -- by *working* with them, -- at *least*, for a bit.

The second winch driver.

*Excepting* - maybe on cotton.

The gaffer.

Okay ... so, it could best on something other than cotton -- at least, the first time.

First hold man.

But *that's* just the point I was making ... There *weren't* no working with him at *all*!

The gaffer.

... Well, *then*, just do me favor ... Just *wait* until next time ...  
And wait until then -- *even* if it's cotton then, too

The holdman.

*Okay - Okay ... ! So - let's just wait. And -- in the meanwhile --  
let's also change the subject.*

The second winch driver - with a shake of his head and big smile.

*No problem there -- old bud.*

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The setting:

A large table in a cafe at the head of a pier.

The cast:

Nine members of a gang: the gaffer, two winch drivers, the dockside forklift driver, two frontmen, and three holdmen who were new hires in 1959.

The event:

Conversation over breakfast before turning to at 8 a.m.

The lines:

The winch driver:

Any you see On the Waterfront last night?

One of the holdmen:

I watched it a while, but I was nodding by ten, so I hit the hay.

A second holdman:

I let it go - *what* for seeing *it* *upteen* times ... So - me and the wife -  
who *must've* seen it three or four times -- went to visit her mother.

The winch driver:

You see it, John?

The third holdman:

... Matter of fact, I *did* with my boy *because* he wanted to see it. So, me and the wife let him stay up. But *now* - I'm sure - he's *really* got some screwy ideas -- you know, *as to unions -- and, of course, both waterfronts.*

And having begun on a stack of cakes, he continued with this.

... Now, course, I *knew* that could happen since, fact is, that movie is *sure* anti-worker -- *as well as anti-union* -- but he wanted to see it, so we did.

The winch driver:

Yeah, well ... I *really* asked *because* of it being as you say ... I mean, it got made when the powers that be were fixing to toss the East Coast dockers out of the A. F. of L ... And - in fact, it was part of the package Joe McCarthy had long served up ... And, *course*, the fact is, too, that TV and Hollywood -- and the papers and magazines - were *all* supposed to be spreading a *lot* of real screwy ideas ... And, with *all* of that *sure* being so, you and your wife may now have to do some *corrective* education.!

The holdman:

... Yeah, well -- I'm sure we will.

The other winch driver:

... Refresh my memory, John ... How *old* is your boy?

The holdman:

He's ten ... And now he really wants to know about the front and the union ... So, I've had him down to the hall and, course, we talk union and work a lot. But he'd like to see some ships and docks and the work itself. And he asked of that, again, when we were watching the tube last night, but I guess you can't take your kids *even* on to a dock - let alone a ship.

The gaffer:

That's *right*, you *can't* -- *not* no more. But *even* into the fifties, *everyone* did that once in a while on a *Sunday* afternoon - *and* as a *family* outing ... ! And *while* we fought the employers a lot, when it came to such outings we were more like a family ... Now, I don't really mean "one big happy family", since there always was an edge or two. But there was a mutual respect that came from our years of working together to get the job properly done. And because of that, for example, company superintendents would lots of times make a point of taking you and your kids to the bridge of a ship being worked. And that they would do so the kids could safely get a pretty good look at the work being done and also stand at the telegraph and binnacle, at the radar screen and map table, and, of course, the wheel. But for a long time now, insurance companies have said a flat "no" to families on the dock or ships and, course., our employers of today just couldn't care less ... But anyways, once in a while on a weekend, I'd bring my family or part of it down because I figured

it would be best if they knew what I did for a living. And I guess it was, too, since I remember one time when my daughter Sarah spotted a seaman up in the rigging in front of the house. And, fact is, I'll tell you of that since it might help you and your boy.

Having sipped his coffee and lighted a smoke, he then continued with this.

... Okay ... So -- we get aboard and we're standing on the weather deck just forward the house and little Sarah, who was maybe six or seven, spots this seaman, like I say, aloft in the rigging. And, with that, she says to me, "Is he a sailor, Papa?" -- to which I said, Yes, Sarah -- he is. And that's what we call "working 'aloft". And since she knew that I had sailed, she then said, "And did you do that, too?" So I said, "Yes, Sarah -- I did ... And, matter of fact, when I was young and sailing and there was work 'aloft, I was a Johnny-on-the-spot since I actually liked being up there. And, then, I said, too, that working 'aloft when you're at sea is *also* something else, again ... So, then she says, "You mean, when you were on the ocean?" -- to which, of course, I said a "yes". And after another sip and a wipe of his mustache with the back of his hand, he, of course, continued again.

... So then she says, "Do longshoremen work 'aloft?" So, naturally, I told her "no". But then I went on to say, "And, truth to tell, I'm *really* glad we don't." And to that she said, "You wouldn't like it anymore?, so I says, "That's right, Sarah - I wouldn't like it a bit. And, fact is, there's nothing in the world that could get me up there now, but that's partly because of me getting older. And then, for Christ sake, she looked right at me and said, "Do people change like that when they get older?" ... Well, course, by this time, I'm damn near out answers, of course, so I says, "Yes, Sarah -- *least* they do if they've got any sense."

And having begun to put out his smoke, he shook his head as he asked this question.

But, then, you know what she said?"

And with his smoke out and another sip of coffee, he, again, shook his head, as he said this.

... Well, she looked up at that seaman, again, as she also said, " ... But he looks like he's getting old." ... So - I says to her, "I guess he has no choice." But, *then*, for sure, I'm *really* out of answers when she finally asked, "Why doesn't he have a choice?"

And, then, while directly looking at John, he finished up with this.

Well, you know, its funny, but I can't remember what I then said, except, of course, that it was about how he and the rest of the crew didn't have a union. So, just remember, John, that we've all struck out with the bases loaded.

The frontman::

... Well, having come off a long lost family farm -- or should I say, "a family dust bowl", I never did go to sea. And I sure am glad about my never

working aloft. And, fact is, I got me a hard and fast rule . . . Sod busters from South Dakota should never go aloft, but I would suppose that some have done that what for having no choice. But this also reminds me of when I first came to the front. So -- let me serve one up.

And, with that - and having placed his plate on an adjoining table and with a sip of his coffee, he began with this.

. . . Okay . . . So -- to get started -- there were in them days quite a few old timers and some who weren't so old who's front teeth were missing -- or some, at least, were missing . . . I mean, you couldn't help but notice. So -- when I got here, I rightaway figured that I was working with a whole lot of pugs who had been in the ring or were still in the ring or, at the least -- come Saturday night -- were bar room pugilists. But then a gaffer explained it to me . . . So, as to that, me and my partner had got this job and one of our two winch driven, who had some teeth missing in front, was coming down with a lot of pain, so he had to replace himself to go to a dentist. Well, with me being new to the front, this gaffer took the trouble and time to tell me this: a man with missing front teeth had nearly always sailed canvas . . . I mean, it was like some missing front teeth was a sure sign of that. And that was because when working 'aloft a man would hold on with his teeth whenever he needed both hands. And that he did by biting into a rope which lay atop the spar he was working while standing on the one that was slung below it. And then that gaffer told me that in the 20's -- or maybe even earlier -- canvas sailors put up a great big struggle against their having to do that. And in that struggle they also had this slogan: "One hand for the ship and one for the man" or "A hand for the Master and one for yourself" or -- according to an old-time canvas sailor who I later met in a cafe - the slogan for some was , "One and one".

The holdman:

. . . Well, that's a darn good story, so I'll sure pass it on to the boy.

The frontman:

" . . . Yeah, well - wait until you hear the punch line -- which I'm only just getting to . . . So - a a few years later - I was in the barber shop I always went to I came across a magazine picture that had a man doing just like that gaffer had said. So - with me and that barber being good friends, he let me tear that picture out so I could show the wife and kids . . . I mean, I wanted them to see it since it looked like that sailor was actually enjoying himself . . . Well, anyways, John -- here's my point:-- if all that a person had to go on was a seeing of that picture, they'd also be having some screwy ideas as to going to sea . . . I mean, it's funny how some can dress up the toil and pain of somebody else . . . So, I told my family all of this -and you know what happened?

The holdman:

. . . What happened?

The frontman:

Well, with a thumbtack, my boy put that picture up on his bedroom wall and then he made a sign for it . . . And you know what it said?"

The dock lift driver:

Oh, for *Christ* sake, Gordon . . . ! *How* the hell would a man *know* that?

The frontman:

Well -- he *could* guess!

The holdman:

"Okay, Gordon . . . I would guess this:- "*Look, ma, -- no hands*"

The frontman to the lift driver lift driver - as he nodded and scowled a frown:  
*You see that . . . ? He guessed it . . . ! That's exactly what his sign said. . . .*  
But, see, brother John, the important thing was this: *I really thought he saw the point."*

The second frontman -- with a smile and laugh:

. . . In other words, John, you need this sign above your TV: "*Never believe all that you see.*"

The holdman -- with a quick smile and laugh:

*Yeah - right . . . ! I'll make one and get it up tonight!*

The second frontman -- as he moved his chair closer to the table:

*Yeah - right . . . !* But speaking of working aloft, I was working the number one hatch of the WILSON when a seaman fell from out of her foremast rigging . . . Now, every old-timer remembers that, but for the youth at this table, I should say first that - on his way down - he somehow bounced off some gear so as to then hit the coaming, from which he then fell clear to the deck of the lower hold . . . I mean, he must have fell a hundred and fifty feet - or maybe even more - since number one on the WILSON - and, of course, too, of the ROOSEVELT -- were really something else.

. . . Well, anyways, the WILSON had only just come from a yard and her number one was empty of freight. And she also came from a yard with her hatches fully uncovered and all her booms raised from their saddles. In other words, we only had to rig the gear before we went below. So - even with that really long climb, we were ready to go by maybe eight-twenty. And, so, too, we were just standing clear when that seaman fell. But, truth to tell, all that I really remember is my hearing a scream -- or I guess you could call it a wail - and someone in the hold shouting out a "*Jesus Christ*"! And then there was this thud -- you know, like, *right* in front of me and my partner and also *right* on the bottom.

And having then sipped his coffee, he continued with this.

. . . Well, I'd only been on the front for maybe three or four months-- and maybe being new and all had something to do with this. But, anyways - all of this happened over ten years ago and I still can't get it out of my head . . . So - I remember just standing there as I was thinking that I should do something. But, rightaway, two old timers got to the man . . . And having got him on his back and kind of straightened out, one of them took his jacket off and covered his face and shoulders . . . And having actually kind of knelt down he also kind of tucked him in . . . And then he crossed himself.

Having then paused for another sip, he went on to this.

. . . Well, anyway, them old-timers knew, of course, that the rest of us were new to the front . . . So -- when the one who did the tucking in got done with doing that, he got up and says to us, " . . . Go up the ladder, fellas . . . There's nothing you can do." And then he said that he and his partner would stay with the man and get him ashore.

The first winch driver.

. . . But *what* was he doing *up* in the rigging . . . And, course, *too* -- at least, now days -- we're not supposed to work at *all* when a sailor is in the rigging above us."

The frontman.

. . . Well, again, being new, I then didn't know even enough to think of those things So - *all* I knew - and *ever* did know - is that the ship said that he was coining down when he somehow lost his hold. But to finish with this, we started up, but a couple of us also threw up before we hit the ladder and the rest of us felt like we was next."

Another holdman.

And the ship was knocked off?

The frontman.

Yeah -- right. And everyone went home . . . And, fact is, that's when I found out that we don't keep working if a docker gets killed. But, here, of course, we also went home with a sailor getting killed . . . Well, anyhow, guys always say that we do that to honor the dead and I know that's partly it . . . But I also know that you just don't have the stomach for working -- and for making some stupid employer some dough -- after a man's been killed.

The third holdman:

Well, *all* that's true, *Lord* knows . . . But, at the same time, it don't always take a man getting killed to make you feel that way. And I say that because I was on that Maersk Lines ship when that brother who was lashing fell off the ship to the dock. So - that was on the night side and just before I came on days so as to join this gang . . . Well, anyways - and when we got to him, all we

knew was that he had landed on his head and that blood was coming out of his mouth and ears. So, naturally, too, everyone just stopped when they found that out. But after an ambulance has come and gone, here's this superintendent - whose name I don't remember - who starts running around trying to get us to go back to work. So -- when the business agent, - who was Nelson -- found that out, he *really* blew up . . . I mean, there he was, trying to get all the dope and checking with the hospital - and looking for someone who knew the brother's family and would go with him to break the news - and here's this son-of-a-bitch trying to get us to go to work.

The first winch driver.

So, what did Nelson do?

The holdman

Well, when he found out what I just said, he rightaway said, "Fuck it, guys --just go home.

The second holdman.

. . . But it also didn't end there, Pete . . . I mean, according to the bulletin the employer then charged you guys with an illegal work stoppage because the brother didn't die.

The third holdman:

*Yeah - that's true - they did . . . But it's also true that the union told them to shove it -- and that charge was finally dropped . . . But - you're right - that sure was cold because you really can't focus on the work at hand after a guy has really been hurt.*

The second holdman -- with a glance at his watch:

. . . Jesus Christ . . . I'm *sure* glad we had breakfast *since* you guys *sure* made my day. But, I would now vote for adjourning, for going to work, and for trying to find something more pleasant to talk about.

The gaffer.

*You're absolutely right, fellow worker . . . ! Too much of such talk ain't good for a man. And with that so -- here endth the lesson -- agreed . . . ?*

All of the other dockers in chorus:

Agreed and amen! / So be it! / I'll drink to that!

\* \* \*

The setting: a waterfront cafe

The event: lunch at a large round table.

The cast: Some members of a dayside gang.

The lines:

A winch driver -- holding up a portion of the morning Chronicle:

... You guys seen this item ... ? It says there's a whole lot of stealing by us transport workers -- you know, by all of us ... Teamsters, railroaders, warehouse folks and on the docks ... But I think that's just bull shit ... And I know it's B. S. as far as we're concerned ... And I also know - as you do, too - that these fucking hypocrites *never* write of the white collar theft uptown.

A holdman:

I read it and what you say is true. But it's also true that no one writes of all the theft by bosses and owners either. And that is also different from the white collar office boy who's stealing pencils and paper to give to his kids for their school work. And that's because, the bosses and owners legally steal from all who they employ.

The winchie:

Well, shit, man, that's *exactly* what *free* enterprise is *actually* all about . . . You're *free* to feather your nest by screwing your workers or *anyone* else who you can get a hold of ... So -- it's just like drinking ... I mean, the papers are *always* reporting on booze and the working people. But the *linchpin* of the system we got is the three *martini* lunch. And *everyone* is always beating their gums about "worker productivity", but the "productivity" of *every* boss and owner *always* comes down to *how* good they are at their *screwing* of folks ... I mean, they produce by screwing those who work for them or anyone else they can. But its funny how those parasites always get away with their bad mouthing of those who are doing the work.

A frontman:

And, course, fact is, too, that bosses and owners really work hard at their screwing of folks. In other words -- and in the system we got - you can make *your* money - and money, too, for *others*, of course - by working hard at screwing folks.

The winchie::

Well, that's exactly right. And those who do that kind of stealing have got a theory and name for it, too. They call it "the accumulation of capital." And under that theory its legal, too . . . And, fact is, it's more than only just legal since those who do it also claim to be helping *everyone* else by getting dough together. But, yet and still, and just because of that, old Charlie West --

God rest his weary soul -- told me once that "*property is theft*". And he told me, too, that he once read a book that started with a saying and then went on to prove it. And because of that, he said it was the boss who was stealing from the worker each day by making his money off him. Well, anyway, and because of that, he also said that he had sworn to steal -- you know, *some* kind of item from the boss he had everyday he went to work . . . I mean, that was his way to *even* the score. So -- he was each day your *model* pack rat . . . And because of that, too, he didn't even care *what* it was he stole. So - he'd take a shackle -- or a length of rope -- or a dozen nails - so as to *just take something*. And because of that, I also got to thinking that he would have to have a regular kind of *warehouse* just to store it all . . . But, then, I found out that he also brought *near everything back* . . . ! Yeah . . . *Really* . . . ! Now - that I found out when we bumped into each other one morning at what was called the New Deal Cafe -- which then was across from Pier 27 where we both had a job for the day. So, we had coffee and shot the breeze, but on our way to the gate he said he had to get something from his pickup . . . So, I should say, too, that I *sure* remember that pickup, It was a '37 Ford and ran like a *fine* Swiss watch. And that was because Charlie was one of the *very* best of our *many* shade tree mechanics . . . And, fact is, he spent a lot of his lunchtime breaks working on somebody's car - and *never* took a dime for it, *either* . . . Well, anyways, I waited for him at the gate, but when he got there, he wasn't carrying anything. So I asked him what he had got. And with that, he smiled me this: "Just a small shackle -- which I now got in my coat pocket." So, I says, "So - what's with the shackle?" And he says, "I took it yesterday, but what do I need with a shackle?" . . . So, course, that, too, got this from me, " . . . You mean to say,, you're *taking* it back?" And having smiled a "Yeah", he also said , "I *expropriated* it, but *now* I'm taking it back since I have no use for it and *don't* know anyone who does . . . But, *maybe* you want it." So, I said, that I didn't, but thanked him for asking. And, with that, he also smiled me this: "Well, that's okay, too, *since* it *really* belongs to the people . . ." Well, anyways , old brother Charlie, like most of our really *noteworthy* thieves, has long since passed, but there he was - lugging a shackle back to the boss since it *really* belonged to the people."

The holdman.:

But, wait a minute, John . . . What do you mean, "our really *noteworthy* thieves?" . . . I mean, we *ain't* had no *noteworthy* thieves since - fact is - it's *all* been as *chicken shit* as what you been talking about."

The winchie:

But it was *exactly* "a chicken shit shackle" which made Charlie "*noteworthy*" . . . In other words, if someone pulls off a *big* and a *fancy* heist, that maybe is "news" and maybe the papers will pick it up, but "*big*" and "*fancy*" sure don't make a heist "*noteworthy*" . . . On the other hand, Charlie and his shackle - and, *especially*, his bringing back - sure was "*really noteworthy*" since it had really *class*.

The holdman:

But *just* because it was "chicken shit", don't mean it had *class*."

The winchie:

" . . . Yeah, well - fair enough, I guess. But Charlie had class since he really had *style* . . . I mean, here he's doing his stealing while he's thinking "expropriation" . . . And he's also stealing what he don't *need* or *want* -- but he's also bringing it back because it belongs to the people . . . Now, *god damn* it, that's *really* noteworthy since its got *class* and a whole lot of *style*.

The lift driver:

Well, speaking "class" and "style" in the stealing department, I'll tell you about a caper that had sure a bit of both. Seems that two of the brothers got a hold job unloading frozen salmon when it came in at Pier 45. So, after the job was set up, one of them said that he had get a fish. But, since they weighed some thirty pounds or more, his partner wanted to know just how he's going to manage that . . . Well, as it turned out, the guy had a plan. So - as soon as they started to send fish ashore, he set a nice one aside so as to let it thaw. And at noon, he made a run to his rig and came back with a rod and reel, a pail for his bait, a seine to catch some bait, and a gunny sack -- all of which he stashed with a pal working out on the dock

. . . Well, I guess you see the plan. So - just before quitting time, he goes ashore and his partner sends him his fish and into the sack it goes. And then with his partner taking his rod and reel and his pail and seine, they head for the gate . . . But just when they got to the pier office, the terminal manager came out of the door . . . So, what happened then . . . ? Well, the manager smiled them this: "'So -- *how's* the fishing today? . . ." And as they kept on stepping, the mastermind raised up his sack and smiled him this: , "*Pretty* darn good . . . got this one off the end of the pier and got it on anchovies. !" And then it was out the gate with fish for supper and gumbo the following day.

The second frontman:

Now, that was a pretty neat caper but since I'm no expert, I just can't say if it had class or style or what. But, being noteworthy for sure, it's a story that should be remembered and told. And - least, to me, the same is also so about all the sipping and scoffing we used do on the whiskey ships.

And as he continued, he also turned to the older men.

. . . I mean, *every* old-timer knows that the first thing we'd do on those ships was to set up a bar and a small buffet. But, yet and still and all day long, there also was a lot of class since no one ever went goofy with an opening of and a wasting of either the eats or the drink.

And having surveyed the most recently hired, he continued with this.

. . . And, believe me, we had *everything* on them ships . . . The best of booze and wines and beers . . . And then there was all sorts of eats that you don't *even* see -- *let alone, buy* -- at least, in the stores where I shop. So -- for example, cans of grasshoppers - as well as of bees - all dipped in chocolate . . . and cans of all sorts of fish and seafood like shrimp and squid and seaweed . . .

and cans and bottles of olives and pickles and peppers . . . of beef and chicken and pork . . . and packages of crackers and biscuits and breads . . . and also, of course, of cookies and cakes and pies. So -- I also mean real fancy grub -- you know, which you *wouldn't* be buying *even* if you saw it . . . But, as I say, too, there wasn't no ripping around or tearing things apart. And, in fact, it was all real orderly. And most the time, too, one of the crew or a mate would also help us out. They'd tell you what there was and also where it was. And when the mate was an older guy, he'd lots of times even set out what he thought we ought to try. So, I guess they just figured that a good spread was only just part of part of the tariff -- and that with it provided, there would be no trouble or damage or waste. And, in fact, too, we never abused such arrangements . . . In other words, everyone was always real respectful of the ship and the crew and the cargo . . . But I also remember one day when a young mate come down the ladder while we were setting up and asked what was going on . . . Well, hearing that, the gaffer really lit into him . . . I mean, he said in no uncertain terms that he was interrupting a union meeting and that he had no business there. And then he said that, if he didn't get out the hatch, we'd walk off the ship and hold our meeting on the pier. So -- *up* the ladder he went and we never saw him or any other crew member for the rest of the all day. But, like I say, there was no abuse and the men never made pigs of themselves and the cargo sure as hell always moved.

A second hold man:

Well, I *only* just worked the *last* of the *true* whiskey ships as containers were coming in. But working them was also sure just something *else* because the old-timers *knew* all of their cargoes so good . . . I mean -- since they'd been working them ships for years, they would introduce you to goodies and booze you never had even heard about. So -- I can remember them telling me of *this* and *that* and *how* I should try some of *this* and some of *that* and then laugh and say, "And *while* you're learning what's good in this world, *always* remember this saying of old: 'there's *nothing* too good for the *working class*'" . . . But this reminds me, too, of a down-in-the-hold partnership of two *real* old-timers which ended up in a hell of a row over the wine they were going to have with some conger eel. Now - *course*, as for *me* - I *never* had heard of such eel. But *there* they were -- like, *really* beat up by all the hard work which they had done together for years - and *arguing* over that! . . . So, one of us 1959 hires tried to settle them down by saying they should open two wines. But, then, they *both* got mad at him since - as they *both* said - that *wouldn't* be right in *no* kind of way -- it being so *wasteful* and all . . . And it *also* got to be something else since they *each* could have *wrote* a book about *all* of the goodies and *all* booze that you could work aboard them ships . . . But they also *finally* settled it, too, with what us new hires also saw as a *whole* lot of class . . . So - *what* do I mean by that? Well - it came to an end when they agreed that when it came to deciding such a question, *seniority* should by *right* prevail.

The second front man:

But what you're also talking about different kinds of class . . . I mean, it takes class to *even* talk of conger eel. And it *sure* takes class to argue about the wine you ought to have with it. And it *also* takes a kind of class to *finally* invoke *seniority* . . . But what I'm saying is this: there was a lot of class because

there was no *waste* of cargo at *all* and the cargo kept moving.

A second holdman:

Well, I don't know . . . I mean, *maybe* it *only* just takes a lot of working of whiskey ships for a docker to talk about eels and of the wine to have with them . . . But all of them ships are now long gone and all good eats and all good booze and wine and beer is in a locked container, so none of it will ever be for the likes of us."

The gaffer:

. . . Well, it sure is true that what also just got called the "reaL" whiskey ships are gone, but some good stuff still comes in. So - like, for example, I heard last week that gang 24 worked some real good booze. But there's also a difference, too, since a lot of the younger brothers ain't interested in the stuff that we really hoped we'd have to work. we used to really lay for . . . I mean, I even heard that one of the business agents got a new hire off a charge that he broached some cookie bags by saying he lives in Berkeley and *only* just eats organic *health* food.

1st Dock man:

Hey -- that's *pretty* good . . . ! In other words, ship *all* the cookies you want, but *don't* be shipping yogurt or sprouts.

A new hire:

But what do you mean by "broached?"

The gaffer:

Well, that can be like I just mentioned. So - for example - it can happen when a docker has torn apart a bag or a box or a carton so as to be able to steal something he can eat. And if you eat right on-the-job whatever that might be, the charge is raised to "pilfering". And you will be charged with pilfering, too, if -- having hidden an item of cargo either on your person or in your gear - you try, but fail to sneak passed a guard at the gate. And you can also "broach" a crate to see if there's something you might decide to try to steal -- be it something to eat or otherwise. But if you so decide and that discovered at the gate, you'll be charged with pilfering.

The second holdman:

So -- maybe some younger guys don't go for good booze or other good stuff because they know nothing about it. And maybe that's so what for their not having worked any whiskey ships at all . . . I mean, I myself I didn't know squat about good cigars up to when I was eighteen or so and a pal gave me one when he and his wife had a kid. And, course, too, there's a world of difference between good stuff and what average folks always get. So - maybe we don't like it, but the rich get the best . . . Good eats , good booze, and good cigars.

The first front man:

... And *don't* forget the *classy* dames!

Hold man:

... Yeah, well- maybe so ... But I'm also saying it *really* takes dough to keep yourself full - and also healthy and trim - and *all* at the *very* same time.

Second frontman:

... But we *ain't* talking of that ... We're talking of *stealing* - and what there *is* - or *sure* can be - about *helping* yourself to something ... So - like, me and a former partner were once loading pies to a container at Pier 32. And I tried to stay away from them pies and I maybe would have, too, but my partner finally says, " ... Oh. *fuck* it, *let's* have us a chocolate-cream pie ... So - he got one out and took a bit, but with it pretty frozen, he set it aside to thaw ... Well - truth to tell - I got to thinking about that pie ... And, fact is, my fucking head was full of that pie for more than thirty minutes ... So - *here's* a *grown* man just *spending* his time like that ... ! Well, anyway, I *finally* broke down and had me a couple of bites ... But *then* my partner said he didn't want *any* more ... So - that was also *really* the *shits* since he was guy who started it all -- but I was the guy who ate *all* the rest ... So - I *guess* I did that since - least, for me - there's something about a pie that's only just laying there -- and especially when you've started on it.

The winchie::

But, you got to admit, that it's a lot harder, too, if the pie you're talking about is part of some cargo on the front ... I mean, I can stay away from pies and such a damn sight easier when I'm at home than I can down here. And that *really* isn't because I'm paying for the stuff at home. So -- I'd be real surprised if in one sitting you'd eat a whole pie at home ... I mean - fact is - there's something about a stealing of things. And if you're doing it legal, too, you'll even get a medal for it. But, you won't be getting a medal for stealing a chocolate cream pie or - far as that goes - any of the stuff that we could maybe steal. And - course, fact is -- a guy could lose his union book and be drummed out of the industry. And who would be doing the drumming ... ? The guy who owned the pies the stevedore company, and their employer rep. And while he was headed for the poor house, they'd be headed for the bank.

The gaffer - as he glanced at his watch:

"Well, there, again, too, are some really good points ... But, for now, fellow workers, we'd best be heading for the ship since lunch time has come and gone.

And, course, with that, there was smiling chorus of: You're *right*, old bud ... *Sure* was a pleasure ... Okay - *let's* hit it ... and other such remarks.

This is a story which got told when members of a longshore gang were swapping tales of union and work over lunch at a pierhead cafe.

The story teller -- a winch driver for the gang:

... Well, due to our union and work, we all have had chances to get involved in things that were *really* worth doing. And with that, we all have stories which we have told - and, on occasion, will tell again to family and friends and dockers and others. But I would guess, too, that each of us could also tell a story or two - or *maybe* even a whole lot more - of our having failed to get involved --or, at the least, as fully involved as we could have been - in a union or work event which really became *truly* historic.

So - as for such a story from me - I assume that most of you know that some years ago there was a work stoppage when after lunch it was learned that twenty-four members of a Pakistani crew on a Dutch vessel -- with, of course, too, Dutch officers - wanted to depart the ship and be flown home at its owner expense because their rations had *always* been short -- and *even* often partly spoiled -- and because their on-duty hours *every* day of the week were *never* less than sixteen, and also because the officers had resorted to confinement -- and *even* restraint -- in response to their complaints. And they *also* had reported that "a *very* young and *first-time-at-sea* deck sailor had died and been buried at sea due to medical neglect." Well, course, with all that, the union was called by the gang stewards working the ship. And with the officers briefly discussing what they had thus learned, they called the stewards back with this as the local's opening move. The officers would head for the ship after its president called the ship and its owner to say that the dockers would stop their work until these matters had been resolved by the ship and the local officers, while its -secretary - treasurer would also so advise our international officer and further suggest to them that the ship and its owner should also be told that -- if these matters were not so resolved and at the owner's expense by reimbursing the local --- those who wanted to be flown home would be fed and berthed at a YMCA on the waterfront and flown home in coach. So -- with the stewards passing this on to all the dockers working the ship, the gang for which me and my partner had got a hold job and the other two gangs on the ship went ashore to see and hear what would then come down.

Well - once on the dock, we all headed for a lunch room up at the head of the pier in which a dozen dockers or so had already assembled. And, thus at two tables cards had already been brought out and whist was being played, while at a couple of others guys were glancing at old sporting sections of the Chron or Examiner, or quietly talking or dozing off with their noggins on folded arms. And, course, too, as we walked up the pier, we also had tipped out hats to small groups of dockers who were lounging and conversing - while others were snoozing -- on dock-stored coffee bags ... Well, anyway --and with two tables having been pushed together, our gang got settled around them. And with that, the gaffer started our talking with this: 'Well, with life as it is in Pakistan,

hese poor devils are *really* between a rock and hard place." And, then, with that, the talk went something like this.

One of the winch drivers:

And it's the same the world over, too, since *all* of the so-called "seafaring nations" are getting Pakistani crews -- or Chinese or Burmese - or Thai or Indian or Filipino - *just* more and more and *all* the time . . . But, course, too, them countries still got their old sea schools so that's where it still gets officers . . . In other words, they sure got a *new* system going.

Well, that got this from his partner:

. . . And did you notice their shoes? . . . I mean, you can always tell how a worker is doing by what he's got on his feet . . . So -- the *heels* will be just *all* run down and the stitching will *all* be loose. And, then -- like these guys -- they'll *never* have more than *wore* out street shoes -- which, *course*, at sea, are *just* something else!

And that prompted this from the gaffer:

You got a good point, fellow worker, but you *forgot* to mention their *laces*. And, *fact* is, *they* - like, *lots* of workers - *ain't* even got decent laces. So, that, for example, you always can see on the picket lines of the Delano strikers . . . But - *even* so, the average U. S. working stiff - let alone, us dockers - is sporting a damn good set of boots - with *another* pair or two back home.

And that in turn got this from the second winch driver:

What you guys are saying puts me in mind of a job I caught last winter over at 9th Ave when it was cold as hell -- at least, that is, by our standards. So, course, us winch driver were all bundled up, but there we were, still *freezing* our butts . . . So -- what happened? . . . Well, four of the Indian crew came on deck to do some paint chipping . . . Now, *who* in hell would tell somebody to get to a chipping of paint when it's cold hell and there's near a gale? . . . But, course, *there* they were . . . And there they were, too, in nothing but them pajamas they wear - and *would* you believe, *sandals* and *no* socks? . . . So - I, for one - *really* felt damn funny since - like everyone else -- I'd also been yapping about the cold . . . And, fact is, I *even* told my wife all this *since* us dockers march around like a *damn* tough bunch. But, then, these four are out on deck in their usual garb and going about their business. And, *man*, they had dignity, too . . . I mean - *even* with us in all our gear, they only just got to and stayed with their chipping' . . . So - it *really* was embarrassing and *none* of us felt like talking.

To which a front man responded with this:

Well, it's different, now - and, as John says, also worse - since the crews are more and more Oriental - or "*Asian*", I *guess*, is proper now .

But, anyway, I can remember when I first got hip to stuff like this . . . So - that was just after the war when I was eighteen and on the beach at my "home, sweet home" in Brooklyn, after my first tanker trip . . . Well, anyway, an older buddy of mine -- who had sailed tankers during the war and who had sure helped me to get seaman papers -- took me aboard a Spanish ship tied up at a pier on the West Side. And that he did since he had heard that the bosun on that ship was a Spanish friend of his who he had met in Spain during the civil war. So - we faked it as dockers and got aboard and, sure enough, his friend was on the offshore side of the hatch just in front of the house. Well, he spotted my buddy right away, too, but he played it cool and he right away started forward. And, so, course, too, in a minute or two - we did the same inshore. And when we got to hatch number one, he was leaning against its inshore rail.

. . . Now - while I'm looking into that hatch to have some kind of cover, they talked a few minutes, but then my buddy called me on over so as to introduce us. So, here's a guy who's fifty or so and stocky and muscled and weathered who also sported the mustache of a Latin lover or rebel. And - in fact - he looked like one of the good guys in the movie "For Whom the Bell Tolls." But, anyway, they then talked some more, but mostly in Spanish - which I didn't know and still don't know - so I leaned on the rail to watch the guys on the dock. But then I thought I ought to say something. So - having had a look at the rust bucket we were on and with a pause in their talking, I shook my head and asked him, this: "Is this vessel seaworthy, Carlos?" And with that he raised his brows and shook his head, then looked around and smiled this: ". . . Franco says it is."

. . . Well, this story telling was then cut short as one of our two dayside business agents entered the room to tell us that the prez and secretary and the other day business agent were going to board the vessel to make it known to those of the crew who wanted to leave for home that they and the onsite dockers would be their escort as they packed up and came ashore. And then he brought us up to date as to what the union was doing. So - first of all - and when the international called the ship and the owner they also had said -- if the local was not reimbursed or if upon their arriving at home any of the departing crew were punished in anyway, all of the ships of the owner's fleet would pay a heavy price in all of their ports-of-call. And then he said that the office staff of the local was reserving twenty-one single room at the Y and also making arrangements to honor our new union brothers that night with a banquet at the Y, which -- hopefully -- would feature some Pakistani favorites for an evening meal. And, meanwhile, too, the international's office staff would get the air and ground reservations which would get them home. And the international officers and their staffs were making call to various contacts in the House of Labor so as to get advised as to labor reps in Pakistan and India who might possibly help by keeping an eye on things. And the international president was calling the union attorney, the State Department, the Departments of Labor and Commerce, and the president of the U. S. west coast association of waterfront employers. And with that, he said his report was finished and he was going to move on to what he was also detailed to do: to arrange for the transport of twenty-one crewmen to the Y with, of course, all of their gear.

Now, with this all reported, the business agent asked for hands from those who had a van and would be free to so transport two or maybe three of the crew. So - I raised my hand and - pretty soon - I got his nod and also got on the list which he had started to keep. And having so responded to what he also then announced had been eleven hands, he said he would take five more so as to play things safe. And with done, he said that those who were on his list should go get their vans and -- best as they could -- park eight of them in line to each of the sides of the entrance to the pier. So -- with that, I was at my van in five minute or so. But having started to roll, I was also eyeing a flat rear tire in a matter of seconds -- and doing so, too, while having a rim with no spare tire. So, course, with that, I hoofed it back to the dock and - having spoke of my luck to the business agent and then to the guys I'd been working with, one of them said he'd take me and my rim to get a tire and help to get it on my van. So -- that's what then happened. But with a new tire finally in place and the flat one in the back of my rig,, I had a second one mounted and both of them placed in front to best insure my steering control

... Well, anyway, I then missed out on *all* of the rest -- and got this moral to sure keep in mind ... Every now and again -- and from being in our union -- you'll have a chance to do some real good ... So: you always got to be fully prepared to do what you may get a chance to do ... And in this case, that meant I should've got a spare as soon as I was lacking one, but I kept putting that off hoping for a real good sale - - and half price on a second one ... And, course, fact is, we all have at least one pair of good boots- -- if *only* because of our safety code rule requiring footgear with steel-toe protection, but lots of us are running on tires with a lot of wear.

## ADDENDUM

### THE POET BROWN

As might perhaps be supposed, the ongoing circumstances which routinely presented the docker with storytelling materials, would also sometimes inspire a docker to poetry. Evidently, however, and perhaps because of the more formally crafted and more unchanging nature of a poet's product, poems were commonly written down or even typed. They might then be brought out and discussed, for example, over a meal. And having perhaps been packed by their author, so as on occasion to be retrieved and recited, many such renderings no doubt eventually disappeared into a footlocker or the chest of drawers of a waterfront hotel room. On the other hand, a modest and handwritten anthology of a docker poet has survived by reason of its having come into the possession of the union library. This collection, which was discovered by Ms. Carol Schwartz, the union librarian, was the product of "P. Brown." The author, evidently, was a Peter or Pieter Brown, a Dutchman who evidently "jumped ship" in San Francisco during the late 20's. It is of interest, of course, partly because of the

various settings and historical dimensions of the poet's canvas. It is also interesting because it comes from the early and formative years of the present union of West Coast dockers.

In an effort to establish the poet's identity and sometimes his meaning, the present author sent copies to several retired San Francisco dockers. They agreed that they were the work of "Pete Brown." One of those consulted was Mr. Henry Schmidt, a charter member of Local 10 and several times its president. Brother Schmidt was also kind enough to send the following -- and, for him, very typical -- letter:

Dear Herb:

Herewith a translation or rather my observations of the Pieter Bruin poems. Conclusion would be a still better word. I'll do my best to do the job, but not the typing. You will find the letter XXXX is often used for you know what. The expert typist FAY (Ms. Schmidt -- HM) is absent in Los Angeles visiting grandchildren.

There is no question that Brown was a Hollander. One can tell by his spelling of certain words. It should be pointed out, however, that he had some schooling in English. Please note that he spelled Labour with a U. I don't recall ever having a conversation with Pieter about his youth. Chances are that he began going to sea at an early age and when the ship got to S .F. or some other USA port he jumped ship - as they say. . .

On one of the pages Brown points out that it was Friday night -- the Dutch word Vrijday - the Dutch always write the letter Y thus: ij - please note that B. always places the dots over the letter Y or ij as is the custom in Dutch. The Fryday appears two times on the same page.

#### A Stevedore Gang

Look at the word They - see the dots over the Y, and that old country way of writing the capital T. Also capital A's are as they are taught in Europe

The page having to do with 'Mighty Pacific Ocean'. Note the spelling of the word LAWYERS. Find the lower case j in the middle - here it is necessary to point out that in the Dutch language the letter j is pronounced as the Americans say the letter y. The name Jan is pronounced Yon. Kan U dat begrijpen?? Two lawjers on that page. B. did not fail to place the dots on the poverty & propoerty & plenty.

Genoeg Genoeg Enough, but I almost forgot to point to the letter H in the word Hook. See how a European writes that H.

B was right "We threw our chains away, but he did not live long enough to live the better life without those chains. I don't recall when he died, but am almost sure he did not live to get a pension, so he must have left us prior to 1952???

How sadly is the course of life adjusted  
that where sweet roses bloom  
sharp thorns abound.

I did not compose this. It is a stanza from an Opera:

The trumpeter of Sackingen by ???  
Have Carol look it up  
Fraternal greetings en tot ziens

(signed) Henry

How about returning this copy to me?  
My daughter wants to read & study it.  
Fay will want to read it also.

Thanks  
(signed) H

As was just suggested, the canvas of the poet could be a good deal larger than that of the typical dockside or shipboard storyteller. Thus, to begin with, "O Mighty Pacific Ocean" may best be cited first.

I'm sitting in my window space  
Looking out over the Pacific Ocean  
Where crab boats riding the waves  
In a perpetual motion  
And breakers sing their weary song  
of centuries so old.  
oo might Pacific Ocean  
How was the people living  
Some 1000 years ago?  
Did you have brain trusts?  
Bankers and lawyers of might?  
And men whom owned all the land and money?  
And was given every right  
Oh tell me, O mighty,  
Was there poverty, crime, and despair?  
And did you have, too, some 1000 years ago, a forgotten man  
there?  
I stay in my window and wait for your answer  
And send your message to brain trust, banker and lawyer as told  
No matter how sharp, no matter how bold.  
Here is my answer, so spoke the old Ocean,  
Clean your slate of debts, without any caution  
And start the wheel of industry rolling along  
Do away with poverty, crime and despair.  
It wasn't 1000 years ago there  
But only prosperity and laughter  
And plenty to eat for us all  
And truly if my friend dear  
Believe it or not, there were  
Always two chickens for every pot  
And plenty of milk and of honey  
With work in abundance, as much as you did want,  
But never did I hear, just only lately,  
That there ever was a forgotten man in this land  
So brain trusts, bankers and lawyers of might  
Take the old oceans advice.  
Let the workers make this country again a real paradise  
And no matter O sick men, how much land and money  
You might own, you can take nothing along  
When you go to your eternal home.

P. Brown

Elsewhere, the dimensions are smaller and the interest more sharply and poignantly focused. And, thus, we have this.

### Our Investment

We were boys, just twenty-one  
When we started working on the beach  
With shoulders square and muscles strong  
And rosie colors on our cheeks.  
Our step was snappy, our movements quick,  
We had health in abundance, were never sick  
And in return for these priceless gifts  
We were paid in dollars, just enough to have  
On our investment.

Fourteen years went by in slavery and pain  
Standing on the sidewalk  
Waiting, waiting for jobs in wind and rain  
No longer are our shoulders square  
Gone is our snapping step  
They opened plenty of bootleg joints  
To revive our dying pep  
The color of our checks are gone  
Our spirit is also  
They call us bastards, they call us scum  
We, the useful workers, was called a bum  
We gave our health, we gave our strength  
And in return for these priceless gifts  
We were paid in dollars just enough to live  
On our investment

But on a historical day in May \*  
We broke and threw our chains away  
We picketed, stevedores, seamen, side by side  
On sunny days, and chilly nights  
Our clothes were old, our shoes were worn  
What did it matter, a finer thing was born  
The spirit of men, for a right to live  
For decency, respect, and for some happiness  
Then a storm broke loose, of slander and lies  
That our masters invested millions were their cries  
Yes, from our health and from our strength,  
And in return for these priceless gifts  
We were paid in dollars, just enough to live  
On our investment.

In these dark and trying times  
With days of bloodshed, terror, and loss of lives  
Behold, a little ship was sailing  
Sailing toward victory .  
With a crew of fifty of the Joint Strike Committee  
Then the lookout shouted, rocks in sight

They're rocks of gold, they look so bright  
 A soft command came from the Bridges \*  
 Steady, steady, steady, as she goes  
 In unity and solidarity my boys  
 So we gave their health, some gave their lives  
 Let's not forget these priceless gifts  
 That you, O' Brothers, might better live  
 On their investment.

Just another year went by my brothers  
 Not in chains of slavery and pain  
 You did not stand on the sidewalk  
 Waiting, waiting for jobs in wind and rain  
 But be mighty careful, we like to say  
 Do your duty to protect the ILA \*\*  
 The masters are still waiting  
 To take away your gains  
 To put you back in irons  
 Let's hope they wait in vain  
 O guard your great investment  
 Of hall and Union both \*\*\*  
 And remember well these priceless gifts  
 Of Sperry and Nick Bordoise ^  
 And their investment.

While the events thus remembered were, indeed, historic, routine occurrences on the San Francisco front could also be placed in a thoughtful setting.

#### The Workers with the Hook

Bright in the early morning light  
 A mighty army is marching to the waterfront  
 They are the workers with the hook.

\* Harry Bridges, a San Francisco docker, was elected chairman of the Joint Maritime Strike Committee which was formed when the seafaring unions also went on strike shortly after May 9.

\*\* The charge is to protect the International Longshoremen's Association. In 1937 the West Coast dockers left the ILA, an affiliate of the AF of L, to form the ILWU and thereafter join the newly formed CIO. Having then elected Bridges as their International President, he continued to be so elected until his retirement in 1977.

\*\*\* The central demand of the '34 strike was for a hiring hall, jointly financed and administered by the employers and union, to replace "the shape up", i.e., the "Standing on the sidewalk / Waiting, waiting for jobs in wind and rain" with a rotational and therefore, too, an equalized job dispatch made by elected union dispatchers. And as a result, the West Coast dockers for many years would often say: "The union is the hiring hall."

^ The deaths of Howard Sperry, a docker, and Nick Bordoise, a marine cook, from gun shot wounds inflicted by the San Francisco police partly underwrote the eruption of the General Strike already mentioned. The date of their murder, July 5, 1934 is still remembered and annually memorialized by the West Coast dockers as "Bloody Thursday".



## Our Famous Water Can

In swings the can  
Our famous water can  
Into the hatch she dips  
She is painted from the outside bright,  
But from the inside, brrr she stinks  
Steam out your can  
That famous water can.  
She might spread a disease  
To everyone who uses the can  
These men aren't beasts!

But then the day of work is done  
Out swings that famous water can  
From the hold of ships  
Another coat of paint outside  
Again she is looking fresh and bright  
But from the inside, brrr there comes a smell  
Steam out your can, steam out your can!!  
You know she stinks like hell.

And, finally, of course, there were struggles yet to be waged and won.

## O Throw the Rascals Out

It is Friday night, the clock strikes eight  
And every union delegate  
Is seated in the Labor Temple  
It is a colorful assemblage  
Along the walls on every chair  
The Rank and File was also there  
Some whistled, some applaud  
So Brothers Vanderheur and Kolberg \*  
Shouted loud  
O Throw Them out, O throw them out.  
we are getting old and rusty  
Gosh darn it, my poor head is bursting  
We can't stand all this terrible noise  
So spoke Brother Kolberg  
With his golden voice

---

\* Vanderheur, the head of the city's union of streetcar operators, was also the head of the San Francisco Labor Council. Kolberg was a member of the San Francisco longshore local. He is remembered as "a good speaker, who often took the deck and got elected to a number of offices." He is also remembered as a member of "the dirty dozen", a group which sought to keep an office of the International Longshoremen Association (ILA) open after the West Coast dockers withdrew from it so as to join the CIO as the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen Union (ILWU). The Kolberg group also had the distinction of referring to the ILA as the "I love America" union and to the CIO as the "Communist International Organization". The debt on these matters is, again, to Brother Schmidt.

We close the doors on Friday night  
The rank and file has here no right  
We are the masters have not a doubt  
O throw, O throw, these rascals out.

Brown

An episode in the Labor Temple -- 1934.