

Encounter 6

Setting

On the center aisle of a cargo shed against which a coffee ship is being discharged.

Cast

A walking boss who had been on the front since the mid-1920s, who had been deeply involved in the union struggles of the 30s and 40s, and early 50s, and who was widely and affectionately viewed as "really quite a character."

Two young men, both with longish hair. They are wearing "Get Out of Viet Nam" buttons.

Event

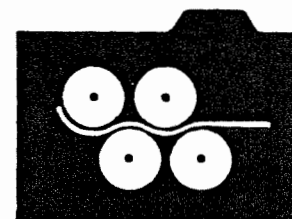
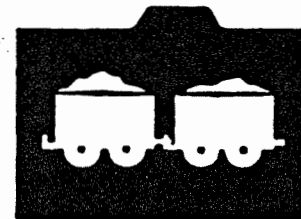
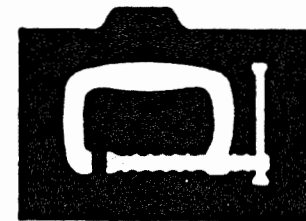
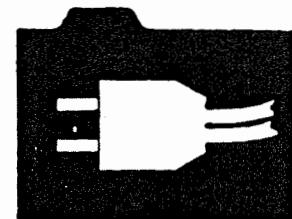
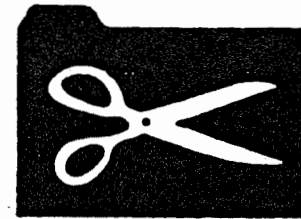
The walking boss is sauntering down the aisle. He pauses to speak to the two men who are dock-piling the sling-loaded coffee.

Walking boss (first with mock seriousness and then with a smile): Listen, fellow workers. We're going to finish a little bit early, so, I've been thinking. Why don't you guys get the girls, I'll get the grass, and let's go to Berkeley and lay down in front of a troop train?

One of the men (with a big grin, a glance at his partner, and a shake of his head): Take a fuckin' hike, you old goat.

Case Studies on the Labor Process

Edited by Andrew Zimbalist



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The San Francisco Waterfront: The Social Consequences of Industrial Modernization

Herb Mills

During the past fifteen years the maritime industry of the nation has undergone a major technological revolution. Change has been rapid and all-encompassing. Both the shoreside and the shipboard operations of the industry have been transformed by the changes which have occurred in its technical base. Indeed, the pace and dimensions of this revolution may be compared to those which distinguished the replacement of sail by steam.

While the economics of this industrial modernization have received a great deal of attention, its social consequences for seamen and longshoremen have been largely ignored. For example, the ways in which the new technology has changed the nature of longshore work and the social relations among those so employed have not been detailed. This essay will briefly explore such consequences by focusing on the San Francisco longshoremen. To that end, the baseline experience—what these men remember as “the good old days”—will be delineated first. Most men date the beginning of that period to the late 1930s because their union, the International Longshoremen’s and Warehousemen’s Union (ILWU), had by that time been effectively asserting its presence on the waterfront for several years. What is remembered as a “golden age” lasted into the 1960s, but from the mid-point of that decade the utilization of a new technology began increasingly to transform the nature and social setting of the work. By the early 1970s, that transformation had produced a universal and nostalgic remembrance of things passed or passing. These circumstances will be delineated in the concluding parts of the essay.

The present essay is based on a two-part paper which appeared in the July 1976 and April 1977 issues of *Urban Life* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, Inc.). A second two-part paper dealing with the ways in which the utilization of a new technology has affected the on-the-job relations of the San Francisco longshoremen and their employers has been published by the Institute for the Study of Social Change (Berkeley: University of California, 1978).

"The Good Old Days"

The General Conditions of Work and Job Satisfaction

During the golden era, most San Francisco longshoremen liked their work and the terms of their employment. Most were proud to be longshoremen and members of the ILWU. The structural basis for their occupational satisfaction and their sense of self-esteem and fraternity was provided by the nature of their work, the structure and terms of their employment, and the social relationships thereby engendered among them.

There were several sets of work-related circumstances which made it possible for the average San Francisco longshoreman of an earlier day to like his occupation. To begin with, the men who worked from the hiring hall could often work in one of nearly twenty different job categories on a day-to-day basis, while the volume and diversity of ship traffic also offered them a variety of discharge or loading operations and cargoes. A wide range of work locales was routinely available because the piers of the Embarcadero were numerous. There was nothing routine, then, about the work which the hall man could perform on a day-to-day basis or about his place of work.

Because of the wide variety of cargoes which each vessel typically loaded and discharged, there was also a very considerable fluctuation in the pace of shipboard work and, for the most part, of dock work. The changing deck configuration of the vessel also meant that the cycle of work, the movement of the cargo hook back and forth between the ship and the dock, was subject to frequent interruption. By the same token, the work was only rarely distinguished by an unrelieved monotony.

Because of the differing cargoes and operational circumstances, there was also great variation in the difficulty of the work performed, particularly in the hold of the vessel.* This was another source of considerable satisfaction. Indeed, within the limits of the usual variety, pace, and cycle of the operations, the least attractive cargoes and most demanding work were for the

* The hold of a vessel is the area below the weather deck (or main deck) which is designed to accommodate cargo. The hold is divided into "hatches" by watertight bulkheads. On a general cargo vessel, cargo is hoisted to and from each hatch by ship's gear, i.e., an arrangement of booms and winches.

most part "gobbled up," at least by those who were not severely "taxed" by it. The common posture, which of course reflected a prevailing social view of longshoring as "man's work," was "I don't give a damn what the cargo is."

The variety of work options available to the men was greatly extended by quite exceptional opportunities for mobility within the industry and the final (if temporary) "safety valve" of not working as a longshoreman at all. To begin with, a hall man could at any time join one of the "gangs" which had an opening in his job category or, if he were willing, in a job category requiring less seniority than he possessed. By contract, a gang was a regularly constituted group of job categories, i.e., a "gang boss,"* two winch drivers, six hold men (later reduced to four), six dock men (later reduced to two), and a dock lift driver. The gang was dispatched as a unit, and since this was done by telephone, they saved an hour or more a day and a lot of driving by going directly from home to the job. Frequently, a man joined a gang so as to drive to work with a neighbor or to work regularly with one or more friends or relatives. On the other hand, a gang man did not have the opportunity of "shooting for" a particular job or pier, nor, as a rule, of working in a job category other than his own. Having joined a gang, he was obliged to remain in it for at least thirty days.

Men had the additional option of working the day or night shift. They could generally work in another port on a temporary visitor status. As a rule, a transfer to another port could also be arranged. A leave of absence could routinely be secured, but even without one a man maintained his contractual right to employment simply by working one day out of thirty.

In summary, then, the occupational satisfaction of the San Francisco longshoremen was partly a consequence of his options vis-à-vis the nature, time, and place of his labor. These options also quite generally underwrote a sense of individual worth and personal autonomy. It was with good reason that this most assuredly hard-working man could declare: "I really like the freedom of working on the front."

* The "boss" was a member of the local and elected to his station (as he is to this day) by the members of his gang. As a rule, he had spent many years with the gang prior to his election.

The Institutional and Social Roots of Community

The occupational satisfaction that the San Francisco longshoremen enjoyed was rooted, too, in the pride and sense of camaraderie they gained from their union with one another. By the late 1930s, most of them were fiercely proud of their membership in the ILWU. They were routinely proud (if not always satisfied) with the wages, hours, and conditions they had won. Most were proud of the union's lengthening history of progressive militancy on public issues and in community affairs.

This pride was more than justified. It sprang from a collective and vivid remembrance of what had gone before, a widely shared and deep appreciation of what was by then enjoyed, and a lively understanding of how things had been changed. For decades, life for a San Francisco longshoreman had been as difficult, as dangerous, as unrewarding, and as socially stigmatized as that of any waterfront worker in the world. The old Barbary Coast had richly deserved its worldwide reputation as a degrading social maelstrom within which brutal exploitation was enforced by violence and corruption. By the late 1930s, however, the waterfront had been transformed. It was now the domain of men who by long and bitter struggle had won a far better life for themselves. In that struggle, and as its social bedrock, they had forged a clean and democratic union through which they had also made important contributions to the struggle of many other workers. Thus, in what was truly a remarkable chapter in U. S. labor history, the men of the San Francisco waterfront had won a dignity which had long been sought and long denied.

Most American trade unions have at least upon occasion been distinguished by some sense of community, if only at an ideological level. However, the sense of community which began to surface among the San Francisco longshoremen during the early 1930s was destined for a unique longevity and elaboration. By the end of that decade, that sense of community had become extraordinarily rich, both in form and content, because it was rooted in the social relationships which had by then been produced among the men by (1) the manner in which their work was allocated among them, (2) the contact they routinely had with one another both on and off the job. Having delineated these two relationships, the discussion will then move to the

third set of circumstances that underwrote the emergence, articulation, and stability of this community: the nature and structure of the work its members performed.

The central demand of the long and bitter West Coast longshore strike of 1934 focused on the "shape-up"—the practice of hiring men from among those who showed up each morning at one or another of the pierheads. The union sought and won a "hiring hall," jointly administered by the union and the employers through a "labor relations committee." The reasons for this demand were simple enough: the shape-up was riddled with favoritism, discrimination, corruption, and payoffs. Once on the job, its victims were relentlessly subjected to an exhausting and dangerous speed-up enforced by capricious and arbitrary firings. By contrast, the hiring hall meant the preferential dispatch of union members. While promoting membership directly, this also reduced the number of firings simply because anyone fired was almost always replaced by another union member. As an institution, the hiring hall incorporated a number of job categories, agreed to by the parties and jointly maintained on the basis of seniority promotions. Within this framework, the "low-man-out" system of job dispatch was fundamental. At each dispatch, the man in each category who had worked the least number of hours during the calendar quarter—the "low-man"—had first claim on any job available in his category. The sequence of dispatch then proceeded on the basis of the next "low-man" exercising his right to select a job from those remaining. As for the gangs, their dispatch was based on a similar "low-gang-out" system. This dispatch system not only precluded favoritism, discrimination, and payoffs, but it also tended to equalize the income of the men in each category and that of the gang men. An equalization of work opportunity and income between the categories was sought, too, by attending to the number of men in each category. On the other hand, an equalization between the hall men and gang men was largely maintained by the men exercising their option of working out of the hall or with a gang. With respect to the on-going equity of these systems, this was sought by an annual election by and from the rank and file of the union side of both the labor relations committee and the promotions committee. An annual election of dispatchers by and from the ranks also insured a day-to-day honesty and fairness in the dispatch itself.

This centralized and scheduled dispatch meant that over a period of time the hall men became very well acquainted, an acquaintance reinforced when they were dispatched to the same gang, ship, or dock. Since hall men were dispatched "to fill out the gangs" with needed men, acquaintances between them and the gang men again developed over time. Men of different gangs likewise became acquainted by being dispatched to the same ship and, not infrequently, were assigned to opposite ends of the same hatch. With the passage of time, then, the average man developed at least a nodding acquaintance with all of his union brothers, and had become very well acquainted with a substantial number of them. These acquaintances frequently became real and lasting friendships over breakfast at the many waterfront cafés, at the "coffee break," over a deck of cards at lunch, and when the men were "sent to supper" prior to finishing a vessel (a practice that continued until 1966). Then, too, there were those who were not adverse to having a drink or two following the completion of their shift.

Within this setting, endless conversation ensued. This often drifted to work and union matters, but there was a fondness for such diverse topics as "women," baseball and football, fishing and hunting, gambling and horse racing, "capitalistic exploitation" and the "profit motive," facism, and, of course, the Great Depression—that unforgettable fountain of experience from which all had been obliged to drink. Conversation continued on the job because there was little machine noise either on the dock or aboard ship and because the pace and cycle of the work permitted it. As a result, there emerged a quite extraordinary world of discussion, reflection, and debate and, by the same token, a sense of fraternity which was widely shared and frequently made manifest. It followed that there were two sets of circumstances in which a man would invariably terminate an on-the-job discussion or even refuse to begin one: when he felt a man he was working with was intentionally failing to do his part, or was refusing to work in a safe and sensible manner. To put the matter simply, one did not converse with a man who failed to reflect a sense of pride and community in accomplishing the work at hand. At this point, then, the discussion comes full circle: the nature and structure of the work was such that it could give rise to a community and brotherhood of men who took pride in its performance.

*Pride and Community
as the Social Product of Work*

Conventional longshore work is distinguished by widely varying and ever changing operational circumstances. New and challenging problems and difficulties are constantly posed, especially for the hold men. Since such work cannot be subjected to direct and continuous supervision, the efficiency with which it is performed is essentially a function of the initiative the individual longshoreman is willing to assume and the willingness of the men to innovate cooperatively. Indeed, since it is in no way "routine," an efficient performance of such work requires a radical and broadly defined decentralization of initiative. Given a continuous demand for initiative, experience, innovative skill, and ingenuity, conventional longshore work allows the men simultaneously to take pride in their work and to express their sense of brotherhood with one another. Because of these circumstances and the social organization that distinguished the industry during the "good old days," it also followed that the community and union of the San Francisco longshoremen was made a concrete and vibrant social reality as their work proceeded.

Further, due to the nature of their work, each dock, winch, and hold man worked as partner with another man. Within the gangs, partnerships were typically maintained for years, and partnerships between hall men also had great stability. These relationships went a long way toward generating an unquestioned willingness to contribute to the performance of the work. Indeed, to work cooperatively with one's partner was an imperative embedded in the work and its social setting. It was simply axiomatic. By the same token, it was the partnership that constituted the basic sociopsychological unit through which the forces of pride and community were generated on the job.

A vessel which was to discharge and load general cargo was usually on berth for at least a week. Having arrived alongside the dock, its mooring lines were taken and secured by "linesmen." The crew secured the rat guards, the gangway, and a safety net beneath the gangway. Had they not already done so, they then unshipped and raised the cargo booms (from the boom rests to which they are secured while at sea) and let go the battens securing the hatch tarpaulins. The vessel was thus readied for a longshore operation.

The gang men began arriving at the pier sometime after 7:00 A.M. They went to a nearby café for coffee and often breakfast. Meanwhile, each gang boss got his hatch assignment from his operational supervisor, the ship "walking boss."* The walking boss, or "walker," then informed the gang bosses as to the nature of the cargo, its place of stow, any unusual circumstances, and the number of days the job was expected to last. The gang boss in turn passed this information on to his gang, usually over morning coffee or breakfast. The hall men, who had begun to be dispatched to the gangs and to the ship or dock walkers at 6:30 A.M., begin to drift in. Greetings were exchanged. Conversations were begun; others were resumed. There was a lot of catching up to do.

Toward 7:45 A.M., the men began to move toward the pierhead. The dock workers, who had been dispatched directly to the dock walker, now received their assignments, as did the late arrivals to the gangs or ship walker. The day began in earnest when at 8:00 A.M. the ship walker hollered, "O.K. men, let's go."

As the shipboard men streamed onto the vessel, the dock men for the gangs raised the doors of the cargo shed. They then proceeded to locate and ready the gear and dock equipment that would be required. Having cleared their work area of any debris and having constructed a suitable seat (or "house") for themselves, they stood ready to secure the "save-all."† Meanwhile, and on the basis of the information given them by the clerk with whom they worked, the other dockworkers "set up" for the palletizing and de-palletizing of cargo.

Having ascended the gangway, the shipboard men of each gang proceeded to rig the gear of their hatch. To facilitate this, half of the hold men rigged the inshore boom, while the other half rigged the one offshore. Except when operational circumstances might otherwise dictate, this inshore/offshore division of the hold men continued throughout the job. The hatch boards and strongbacks (or "pontoons") were then removed and safely stowed on the offshore weather deck or on the dock. Having

* The walking bosses "walk" the ships and docks to supervise the work. Up until 1948, the walkers were also members of the longshore local, but in that year they were separately chartered by the ILWU.

† This is a cargo net that is slung between the dock and a vessel so as to prevent either a worker or cargo from falling into the water.

thus "uncovered" the hatch, the hold men were ready to go below.

Frequently, the cargo to be discharged from the shelter deck (or upper 'tween) had been loaded up to the hatch covers. In that event, the hold men—having clambered over the edge of the hatch—began the discharge by building that cargo into loads (pallet, sling, or net) and sending them ashore. They continued to "dig down" until they reached the shelter deck itself. Next they cleared the "square," the deck area beneath the hatch covers. With that done, they began the discharge of cargo stowed in the "wings," the areas beneath the deck above. To do this, an important skill almost always came into play. This was the construction of a safe and suitable flooring over which the cargo could be moved from stow to the square and then hoisted ashore. The decision as to which of the available cargo-moving devices was best for this purpose was largely based on the nature of the cargo and its stow.

Once finished with the cargo to be discharged from the shelter deck, a loading operation might commence. As a rule, however, the men again uncovered to begin the discharge of cargoes from the lower 'tween deck. Frequently, this required re-rigging the gear. The operational circumstances encountered in the lower 'tween deck were a variation on those on the shelter deck, as was the subsequent uncovering and discharge of the "lower hold." On most vessels, the descent of the hold men into the hatches aft of the midship house (superstructure) continued beyond the lower hold into the "deep tanks." Since these tanks are separated from one another by the "shaft alley," i.e., by the "alley" of the propeller shaft, they always afforded very restricted access. For this reason, they also posed certain operational problems.

The work of the winch driver, who controlled the movement of the cargo hook and loads from his station above the hatch, became increasingly demanding as the hold men descended into the vessel. Considerable experience and skill was required because there were different types of winches, each with several designs. To a lesser degree, the same was true of the standing gear of the vessels. Then, too, the state of repair and general condition of the winches and gear varied tremendously. In any event, great responsibility always rested with the winch driver simply because each move of the cargo hook could endanger one or more of the men with whom he worked.

As a rule, a wide variety of cargoes occasioned a constantly

changing set of operational circumstances. To begin with, there was usually a considerable amount of "general freight," i.e., all sorts of differently sized crates and packages of varying weights shipped by manufacturing firms, freight forwarders, or individuals. Larger crated shipments of such variously sized and weighted items as machines and machine parts, furniture, glassware, dishes and ceramics, sports equipment, clothing, and relatively exotic or "specialty" food products were frequently encountered. Still larger and variously packaged shipments of all sorts of food—from 25-pound boxes of Norwegian sardines to 100-pound cartons of New Zealand frozen meats to 750-pound barrels of Greek olives—were frequent, as were shipments of wine, beer, liquor, cheeses, teas, coconut and tapioca, tropical fruits, candy, cookies, speciality desserts, and a wide variety of canned goods. A host of industrial products—from ingots of copper, to sheet and bar steel, pipe and rails, steel pellets, corrugated metals, and fencing—were common, as were such baled goods as cotton, rubber, rags, gunnies, jute, pulp, and paper. The number of sacked or bagged goods was legion—cement, flour, wheat, barley, coffee, and all sorts of nuts and dried fruit—and there were deck-loads of lumber and/or logs, creosote pilings, utility poles, and railway ties, farm and construction equipment, and all sorts of commercial vehicles. Then there were the offensive sacks of cargo that were worked at penalty rates: animal bones and meat scraps, blood and bone meal, fish meal, coal, lime, phosphates and nitrates, lamp black, and soda ash.

While this is only a partial list, the task was always the same: to move the cargo to or from the dock and to or from its place of stow. To effect the first of these movements, a wide variety of pallet boards, scows, nets, slings, bridles, and hooks were used. For moving to and from stow, flooring of some sort was frequently necessary. To that end, the hold men might order a variety of heavily constructed skids, ramps, or "runways" from the dock. It was often necessary, however, to construct a floor from dunnage and plyboard. Once there was flooring, a four-wheeled hand truck, upon which pallet loads could be landed or built, was often used. On occasion a device called a gravity roller might be used instead. This is a rectangular steel frame (of approximately 1' by 12' dimensions) between whose longer sides are fixed a number of parallel steel rollers. Thus it can be rolled across flooring with a pallet of cargo atop it. In an area where the

construction of flooring was especially difficult or impossible, a gravity roller could be turned "face-up" and elevated so as to span the area, secured in place, and then cargo rolled piece-by-piece across its face.

For many years, sacked goods were simply "belly-packed." When discharging, each hold man would in turn remove a sack from stow and carry it to where a load could be built and then sent ashore. The circle was reversed when loading.

When it came to moving heavy cargo, it was common to place a number of wooden rollers (some 6" in diameter by 3' long) beneath the cargo so that it could be "man-handled" to or from stow. For still heavier cargo, rollers and such block-and-tackle set-ups as might be required, together with the motive power of the ship's gear itself, were employed. When baled cargo, such as hemp or sisal, could be directly discharged from stow by the use of hooks, the ship's gear was again used for motive power. This was also true of the discharge of sacked goods such as coffee that might be built into sling loads near their place of stow, dragged to the square, and then hoisted to the dock.

In this connection, the longshoreman's basic hand-held tool, the cargo hook, must be mentioned. In the movement of most cargoes, this tool—of which there were many styles and designs—was frequently essential. This was true both on the dock and in the hold. As might be supposed, the crowbar was another hand tool which got a lot of use, especially in the hold.

In both loading and discharge, the manner in which the hold men proceeded was determined in part by the configuration of the deck being worked and in part by the presence of structural members and stanchions. The stowage plan of the vessel was equally important, i.e., the location of the particular areas to which or from which San Francisco cargoes, as distinct from those of other ports-of-call, were to be moved. Within these parameters, however, the loading of cargoes was typically the most challenging simply because a "tight stow" was necessary: for one thing, a tight stow and the utilization of all available space meant greater tonnage and greater profit. At the same time, a tight and proper stow of the cargo was essential to the safety of the vessel. A shifting of cargo while at sea could pose serious operational difficulties, if not, indeed, grave danger.

To effect a tight and economical stow, the hold men frequently had to work within the constraints of the sheer and declivity of the deck. When odd-sized and variously weighted

cargo was being handled, "an eye for the work"—the ability to visually judge where a particular piece of cargo might best be fitted into the stow so as to safely and properly maintain its "face" while following the stowage plan—became particularly important. The use of dunnage as a means of preventing shifting was important, too, but became particularly so as the men proceeded "to go up with the cargo," i.e., to stack cargo atop cargo. As the final step, the men would request the lightest of the available cargoes for "topping off," the piece-by-piece, hand-handled stowing of cargo just beneath the decking above. The final end: "A proper stow. One you can take a picture of."

With the wings of the hatch fully loaded, heavy cargo was usually loaded to the square simply because the winch driver could generally land it pretty much in stow. Occasionally the two sets of gear standing at opposite ends of the hatch would be required to handle a lengthy and/or especially heavy piece. In that event, the cargo might be independently slung by each set of gear or the two sets might be "frisco'd" together into one hoisting unit. In either case, the men of the two gangs working the hatch worked together. Most vessels also had "jumbo" gear standing at the hatch just forward of the midship house, and occasionally this would have to be unshipped and rigged so as to load or discharge a still heavier item. As a rule, cargo was again placed atop cargo, frequently to the full height of the hatch. This accomplished, the men would climb to the deck above and proceed to "cover up."

Once the shelter deck had been covered up, the men went on to load and secure the deck cargoes, usually the largest, if not the heaviest, of cargoes simply because the weather deck and/or its hatch covers offered the largest area of open deck and because the cargoes could be directly landed in stow. This usually required either a re-rigging of gear or a rigging of the inshore boom into a "swinging boom."

Having finished with the deck cargoes, the men sent the watercan ashore, together with such tools as they had been using. They then let go the save-all, sent it ashore, and "winged in the gear," i.e., let go the guys and preventers and hauled in the booms until they were standing above the hatch. With that, they headed for the gangway.

Frequently as many as ten gangs (of some sixteen to twenty men each), plus the necessary dock workers, worked a general cargo vessel. With a proper allocation of the shipboard men, all

of the hatches were generally finished at about the same time. As the last of the gangs finished up, tugs were positioned against the vessel. The pilot, who would take the vessel through the Golden Gate and into the open sea, appeared on the bridge. Linesmen stationed themselves abreast the bits to which the mooring lines had been secured.

As the gangs came down the gangway, the dock men would be closing the doors of the cargo shed. With the men ashore, the crew hauled in the gangway and slackened the mooring lines. As the vessel cleared the dock, the men poured onto the Embarcadero. By the time they reached their automobiles or the trolley stop, the vessel had moved into the "stream" and had headed for sea.

Modern Longshore Operations

Compared to the work just described, modern longshoring is utterly routine. As a result of the integration of standardized cargo units, a vessel designed for those units, and the hoisting gear and/or dock equipment necessary to move them to and from stow, there is little variation in operational circumstances. Since each unit can be loaded to a predetermined place of stow, or discharged to a predetermined place of dock storage, operations can be completely planned (and computer simulated) before the vessel arrives. With all subsequent shipboard and dock work then sequenced, the need for initiative, innovation, and ingenuity is eliminated, while the range of skills and experience which routinely come into play is dramatically narrowed. By the same token, circumstances that require a collective and truly cooperative approach on the part of the men are all but unknown. It follows too that the work can be closely and continuously supervised and subjected to an on-going audit and review.

Since the operational situation and the concrete tasks are essentially unchanging, modern longshore work is universally viewed by the men as dull and monotonous—at least as compared to conventional longshoring. It is neither as interesting nor as challenging. The new technology eliminates the variety of work and the problems to be solved. The cargo unit is always the same. The movement of those units to and from the vessel is always the same. The shipboard work is always the same. Thus

the operational circumstances that for many years allowed the San Francisco longshoreman to enjoy his work, to take pride in its performance, and to thereby express his sense of community and union with his fellow workers have been virtually eliminated by a new technology.

As was suggested earlier, a very rich, day-to-day social contact underwrote the maintenance of community and union among the San Francisco longshoremen for many years. There were several main arenas for that social intercourse. The hiring hall had an extremely important social dimension. Hundreds of men were present for the early morning or late afternoon job dispatch. The hall was also a natural gathering place throughout the day and into early evening. Conversations which ensued were frequently "recessed" and thereafter "reconvened" at one of the many nearby cafés or bars. The Embarcadero piers were also surrounded by cafés and bars, missions and storefront churches, clothing and surplus stores. There were gun shops and pawn shops, recreation centers and locker rooms, corner groceries, inexpensive hotels and flop houses, boarding houses and rooming houses. There were movie houses that never closed. Liquor stores, smoke shops, pinball parlors, and pool halls abounded. One could always find a card game, a bookie, or a floating crap game. One could always find a companion, a new political tract or leaflet, a place to drop a crab pot or wet a line, or simply a place from which to watch the passing parade and the waters of the bay in solitude. In a word, the social setting of the work and union life of the San Francisco longshoreman was richly varied and exceptionally vibrant. The relationships they had with one another by reason of their work and union were necessarily strengthened and deepened by the experiences and activities that setting afforded them. Life along the Embarcadero also broadened their horizons: the seamen who were "on the beach" had sailed under every flag and to every corner of the earth.

On the ships and piers, as has been noted, men who were working as a unit could converse as the work proceeded. Then too, the distances between the men on a given ship and dock were never very great. Most vessels were 350 to 450 feet in length. The C-4 of World War II was "big"—some 550 feet. As for the piers and sheds, the average was perhaps 700 feet long. One would therefore know who was working a ship or pier within an hour or so of starting time. Since there was considerable

fluctuation in the pace of work and a frequent shifting of men about the vessel and dock, those who were not working together could also seek each other out for at least a brief exchange. Because of this coming and going, brief salutations—which were almost invariably laced with good-natured banter—were frequent.

These social dimensions of the working and union life of the men have been eliminated by the new technology. To begin with, the modern facilities are scattered around the bay on previously vacant or landfill sites because the acreage required by the new technology is up to ten times as great as the five to ten acres afforded by the "finger piers" of the old waterfront. These facilities, which are ever more widely dispersed, are therefore not surrounded by the kind of neighborhood which distinguished the Embarcadero.* Indeed, unless one has packed a lunch or is willing to buy from either a coffee truck ("roach coach" or "ptomaine wagon") or a vending machine, a drive "into town" is necessary at lunch time. The opportunities for socializing that the men enjoyed for so long have been dramatically lessened. At the same time, those employed against a vessel at a modern facility are isolated from those who are otherwise employed there because the physical layout of these sprawling developments is dictated, of course, by the basic operational division of labor. Indeed, these men are also isolated from those who may be working a second vessel because at these facilities ships are moored "bow to stern" and because the modern vessels routinely exceed 850 feet in length.

While the new technology has thus effected a quite general "diaspora" of the San Francisco longshore community and an extraordinary routinization of its work, the work force on a modern operation is also "atomized." Thus, to begin with and as will presently be detailed, much of the work associated with a

* Due to this industrial dispersion and sprawl, most of the Embarcadero piers have fallen idle. By the same token, the neighborhoods which were supported by those abandoned piers have simply vanished. For the most part, the areas adjacent to the old waterfront are now dotted with high-cost apartment complexes, fashionable commercial and financial centers, and expensive hotels, restaurants, bars, boutiques, and shopping malls. Since the same is true of the area adjacent to the hiring hall and since the work is also increasingly distant from the hall, the question of "moving on" is presently being discussed by the men.

modern operation is performed in near isolation by individual men. At the same time, such groupings of men as are employed are much smaller than those required in a conventional operation. In brief, a modern division of longshore labor is distinguished by individual and small group tasks that can be performed in relative isolation and with a minimum of communication and cooperative activity.

The Unit of Cargo

The most widely publicized of the modern cargo units is the "container."* This is a rigid, steel-framed, oblong box which is

* In many respects, the most modern of cargo units is not the container, but the barge which is carried by the "lighter aboard ship" or "LASH" vessels. These barges have a tonnage capacity of 415 (short) tons. Cargo is loaded through watertight, folding hatch covers. The 54 barges which a LASH ship can carry are on- and off-loaded at the vessel's stern by an on-board crane that nearly spans the vessel rail to rail. This huge crane also travels between the stern of the vessel and a point just forward the midship so as to stow and unstow the barges. Most LASH barges are themselves loaded and discharged of cargo at the dock of a specially constructed "lighter station." This dock fronts on a sheltered channel which leads to the open waters of San Francisco Bay and the dock to which the LASH vessels are moored for loading and discharge.

The freight which can be carried by these barges extends from the largest of containers, through the smaller, odd-sized and expendable wooden "van-packs," to hand-handled and unitized cargoes, and to all manners of bulk and general cargoes (from buses to rails). Indeed, the LASH barge can accommodate a mix of cargoes similar to that which can be loaded to a hatch of a general cargo vessel. Much of the cargo handled at the lighter station is unitized. In that event, the operation can often be performed by a single man operating an overhead, cantilevered (and extremely versatile) crane which travels along the dock. As a rule, however, one or two men are aboard the barge so as to assist the crane operator even when unitized or some similarly standardized cargo is being worked. Naturally, a mix of cargoes is not at all uncommon, but this crane cannot handle containers or most van packs, or, of course, such things as buses or bulk cargoes. Such freight must be loaded and discharged by other dock equipment. When cargoes must be hand-handled in some manner, four men are assigned to the barge. Four men will also work a mix of cargo. As might then be supposed, the work of the barge men often approximates that which is performed by the hold men in a conventional operation. On the other hand, the box-like configuration of the barge means that few of the problems posed by a ship's hold will be encountered. Then, too, there are no structural members or stanchions to worry about, nor is the flooring anything but excellent. The versatility of the dock crane also precludes many of the problematic circumstances which are not

between 20 and 40 feet in length. A wide variety of cargoes can be "stuffed" (as we say) into a container, secured against shifting, and sealed. In this way, nearly twenty-five tons of cargo can be moved as a unit through differing modes of transport. After being "unstuffed" at its destination, the container can be used again.

The container has had a revolutionary impact on the entire transportation industry because it can be stuffed and unstuffed at any location serviced by the trucking equipment and/or the hoisting and rail equipment that can move it when loaded. It thereby eliminates the otherwise recurrent need to "handle" the cargo as it is moved from shipper to consignee via the available modes of transport. Indeed, in a fully "intermodal" container system, a container can be moved in any sequence by truck, rail, plane, or ship, but the cargo itself will be handled by only the shipper and consignee. By eliminating the historic technological interfaces of the transport industry, this system essentially makes the work of freight handling, consolidation, and forwarding redundant.

Despite these circumstances, some containers are stuffed and unstuffed by San Francisco longshoremen. While this work is a functional equivalent to conventional hold work, it is much less challenging. As compared to shipboard areas of stow, any container is small. It is free of structural members and stanchions. It invariably offers something that is rare aboard ship—an excellent, even-surfaced, flooring. Its box-like configuration also eliminates the substantial problems posed by the molded curvature and sheer of the hold and sometimes its declivity. Because of the dimensions of that configuration, none of the skills and experience that routinely produce a tight and economic shipboard stow are required. Then, too, there is, of course, no hoisting of cargo or rigging of gear, and no uncovering: the cargo is simply moved to and from the container—if not, indeed, its place of stow—by lift truck. As compared, then, to a shipboard operation, the nature, "flow," and organization of such work is utterly routine. By the same token, its performance can also be much more closely supervised and monitored.

infrequently encountered in a conventional shipboard hoisting operation. While, then, a considerable variety of cargo is frequently handled in these operations, the challenge is never that of conventional shipboard work for either the men aboard the barge or the crane operator.

To and from Shipside

Once a container ship is ready to be worked, the operators of the dock equipment (e.g., tractors, straddle trucks, and fork lifts or "pickers") begin shuttling back and forth between the "hook" and the container yard with inbound and outbound containers.* The hook is a towering, cantilevered crane that can travel the length of the dock on an enormous, four-legged pedestal. In many operations as many as three such cranes are used simultaneously to hoist containers to and from stow. Four to six dock equipment operators usually work "against" each crane. Throughout the shift they are simply told by radio or computer printout where to pick up or place their next container. There is no occasion for initiative or innovation on their part; nor is there any on-going operational need for their employers to in any way consult with them. Since their work is performed in the isolation of an operator's cab, they also have no operational need and little opportunity to converse with one another or with anyone else.

The Hoisting Operation

A container operation begins with the crane operator positioning his gear abreast the first row of containers to be worked. The crane boom is extended over the width of the vessel and the final adjustments in positioning are made. As the operator proceeds to test the fail-safe devices and limit switches, the men who will be stationed on the dock ready such shipboard and dock gear as

* Another operation in which a variety of strads, pickers, lifts, and tractors may be used is the "roll-on/roll-off" or "RO/RO" type of operation. RO/RO vessels are loaded and discharged via one or more ramps (either ship or dock mounted) which span the distance between the vessel and the dock and a series of internal deck ramps like those of a multistoried parking lot. These ramps permit the operators of the dock equipment to move the cargo directly from the dock to its place of stow and vice versa. Since the decks of these vessels resemble the flight and hanger decks of an aircraft carrier, they can carry a unique variety of cargo. They are especially unique, however, in their flexible, below-deck capacity for heavy, lengthy, and large-volumed cargoes (e.g., prefabricated steel structures). Large-volumed cargoes which can be driven or rolled to and from their place of stow (e.g., self-propelled hauling equipment which is used in strip-mining operations) may also be uniquely accommodated. Because of the variety of equipment which may be used, the variety of cargo, and the changing configuration of the decks, such operations can challenge the skill and experience of the machine operator, but his physical and operational isolation is comparable to that experienced on a container operation.

will be needed. The dock equipment drivers begin to warm their engines. The lights, brakes, parking brake, air and hydraulic systems, horns, and warning devices are tested. Meanwhile, the men dispatched to the vessel go aboard and move to the first containers to be discharged, letting go such lashing and other fasteners as have secured the containers against shifting at sea. With that done, the hoisting operation and "merry-go-round" of dock equipment begins. As the work proceeds, the shipboard men move in preplanned sequences to the remaining containers, again for the purpose of letting-go lashings. Needless to say, the crane operators follow behind, but the details are necessarily communicated to them via "squawk box." The shipboard men then double back behind the cranes to lash the newly loaded containers.

As compared to the driving of conventional shipboard winches, the work of a crane driver in any modern operation is routine. There are no unusual circumstances. There is no rigging and re-rigging of the gear. The hoist is always the same. There is no need for initiative and innovation. The range of experience and skill is by comparison very narrow. There are no hold men endangered as the gear is activated, nor is there any need for a "lasher" or dock man to be in any way endangered during a hoist. That only happens when there is a speed-up and containers travel over the men. There is no need for the communication and cooperation that is essential in conventional operations. This work is performed essentially in total isolation, and for the most part without interruption. Indeed, and because of the climb involved, most crane drivers will not come down from their cabs at "coffee break," or even at lunch time, if they have packed a lunch from home and there are heavy rains.

Shipboard Work

The only longshore work aboard a containership is that of securing and letting-go the lashings and placing and removing the heavy steel "cones" which prevent shifting at sea. Twelve to eighteen lashers are usually dispatched to such a ship, but the men work in groups of two. Each two-man "gang" works in near isolation from the others, as well as from the crane operators and machine operators on the dock. Indeed, because of the beam and freeboard of the vessels in question and because they also work either in front of the crane or behind it, the lashers are even isolated from such dock men as may be employed.

Lashing is quite arduous. Heavy wire rope lashings and turnbuckles (or other fasteners) must be dragged about the deck. As a rule, the lashings must also be hoisted to and from the topmost deck-loaded containers, which are generally stacked at least three feet high. Often enough, they are four high. This means the men stationed atop them are working 27 to 35 feet above the weatherdeck, a dangerous spot, especially at night and in heavy winds and rain. In most operations, the cones must also be hoisted and lowered. Lashing is also completely routine. It presents no challenge to one's experience, skill, or innovative abilities. However, it may at least be intermittent simply because it is only rarely necessary to lash or unlash the containers stowed below decks.*

The Modernization of Employment

As a result of the West Coast longshore strike of 1934 and the cataclysmic San Francisco general strike that erupted out of it, the hiring hall became *the* central institution of the longshore industry; it was, indeed, *the* union, because it was the means whereby the reality of union could be fashioned and maintained by men who had sought to structure and divide their work on a

* The shipboard work of loading and discharging LASH barges is essentially the same as that just described, but the lashings and turnbuckles used are substantially heavier. Since the barges are stacked two high atop the hatch covers of the weather deck, the "top men" work 30 feet above the deck. However, there is no need to handle cones because the barges are themselves constructed with such fittings. As for the containers which are also carried by LASH vessels, they are worked as described in the text.

Lashings aboard a RO/RO vessel typically offers some variety and a fluctuating pace and cycle because of the differing cargoes and deck configurations. Since most of the cargo units cannot be stacked, it is also less arduous and dangerous than that performed against containers and barges. On the other hand, the men are constantly subjected to very high noise levels from the ship's ventilating system and the various machines which shuttle back and forth to the dock. Because of the noise and the amount of traffic, the men have typically likened the situation to that of working "in the middle of a god-damned Los Angeles freeway at rush hour." After a series of work stoppages and arbitrations resulting from these conditions, an arbitrator ruled that the employer had to provide earmuffs for the men. However, since a very substantial percentage of the accidents which occur result from "a breakdown in communication," many consider this "a remedy worse than the disease" and refuse to wear such "protective equipment."

fair and equal basis and who, through great strife and conflict, had won the right to do so. It was both the institutional and social bedrock of their profoundly egalitarian community and union with one another.

The social roots and bonds of that community and union have been very much weakened by the nature, structure, layout, and dispersion of modern longshore work. They were also rent asunder, however, once the employer secured the contractual right to remove men from the hiring hall by offering steady machine operator work (and a monthly pay guarantee) to those he chose. This occurred with the ratification of the industry's second five-year "Mechanization and Modernization" ("M & M") agreement (1966-1971). As the San Francisco employers began to exercise this right, a complex, bitter, and sometimes explosive division arose among the men. How this happened is a long and complex story that can only be touched on here.

The New Technology: Myths and Images

In the late 1950s, the employers began relentlessly to argue the following generality on behalf of technological change: "You can't hold back progress. You just can't fight the machine." In the absence of anything to the contrary from the union leadership, this view of things became common coin among San Francisco longshoremen. Indeed, by the time the first M & M agreement (1961-1966) was submitted to the membership for discussion and vote, it was championed by the international leadership of the union.

Following a very handy ratification of that contract, the employers began to argue that a stable group of operators was required for safe and efficient crane work. Within a year, that argument led to a "Crane Supplement" to the contract. A man who had been promoted to "crane driver" (i.e., jointly trained, certified, promoted, and dispatched) could henceforth be steadily employed by a single employer for the sole purpose of driving cranes. He would in return receive a monthly pay guarantee from that employer.

Having thus "modernized" the terms under which a crane driver might be employed, the employers turned their attention to securing a more inclusive right—that of employing "a stable core of key men as machine operators." To that end, they began to argue that "the equipment and machinery of the coming era of modern longshoring will be too sophisticated to be properly operated by hall men who might occasionally be dispatched to

such work from a rotational skill board." An efficient and safe operation required steadily employed men. Overall efficiency, the argument continued, would be greatly increased by machine operators who were thoroughly familiar with the entire operation and its physical setting. Further, the cost of the new technology meant that the choice of operator "simply could not be left to chance."

After the barrage of argument laid down for the first M & M and its supplement, it appeared to many men that the employers had a good case. The new machines and ships—or at least the images that were studiously and tirelessly projected of them—did seem more "complex" and "complicated" than those of conventional longshoring. It also seemed to follow that the employers' interest in having a stable group of (what had to be billed as) very well trained, highly skilled, and extremely versatile machine operators was reasonable.

Since these views, too, came to be voiced by the leadership of the international, they became especially current among men who had been on the San Francisco waterfront since the 1930s. There was good reason for that "loyalty factor": the lives of these men had literally been transformed during the tenure of that leadership. Then too, the old timers, who up through the ratification of the second M & M constituted a full three-quarters of the membership of the San Francisco local, had a direct and lively interest in the basic quid pro quo of the industry's "mechanization and modernization" plan, an earlier and financially attractive retirement. It was primarily from that quarter that one could hear reference to the "unskilled work of old-style longshoring" and the "skilled work of modern operations."

The employer's campaign for this "modernization of employment" bore fruit in Section 9.43 of the second M & M:

. . . the Employers shall be entitled to employ steady, skilled mechanical or powered equipment operators without limit as to numbers or length of time in steady employment. . . . The employer shall be entitled to assign and shift such steady men to all equipment for which, in the opinion of the employer, they are qualified.

While this provision occasioned a rather pervasive anxiety and some opposition, most San Francisco longshoremen were reassured when the negotiators explained that the employers had simply been afforded the right *to ask* men to "go steady." No one had to accept such an invitation; nor could the local be forced to provide such men. It was both possible and comforting to imagine that "maybe they'll never get their steady men."

As their vote was destined to indicate, a great majority of the men were on balance satisfied with the second M & M. There was a substantial wage hike, heavily "front-loaded" into the first year, and a substantial increase in pension benefits. Presumably retirements would counterbalance the loss of work opportunities that might result from new machines and operations. Indeed, the union negotiators had for this reason even agreed to drop the weekly pay guarantee that the first M & M had included as insurance against underemployment. As for the concern generated by the length of the contract, that was largely defused by a certain posturing: "If this contract doesn't work out, we've got the muscle to tear it up." In a word, there were some gains and many reassurances.

The New Technology: "It's No Big Thing"

The struggle against 9.43 was largely carried on by younger men who had recently entered the industry. Their struggle was rooted in a very fundamental circumstance—they were in no way intimidated by the new machinery. As compared to the "old timers," they had been socially conditioned to be comfortable with machinery. Their view was simply this: any piece of machinery obviously requires a competent and reliable operator, but the operation of modern equipment is "no big thing." This consciousness was concretely reinforced and made increasingly current by a particular operational circumstance. When the port was busy, employers were obliged to "supplement" their 9.43 men by hiring skilled hall men to drive the new machines. This simply contradicted the elitist rationale that had been manufactured on behalf of 9.43. While the struggle could therefore be broadened and deepened, it also became increasingly bitter—the operation of such equipment was reserved for 9.43 men when work was slack because they were receiving a monthly pay guarantee. The struggle was intensified, too, as hall men were promoted to the winch/crane categories to replace retirees. In time, these men also knew that driving conventional gear required greater experience, knowledge, and skill than did the operation of container cranes. That work was also much more demanding in that the on-going safety of the hold men, as well as those on deck and on the dock, was in the hands of the winch driver. Indeed, by 1968 a common view (which, perhaps for emphasis, was chauvinistic) had emerged: "Your grandmother could drive the biggest container crane in the world." Much the same thing happened as hall men were promoted to the lift categories and thereby gained experience with the dock equip-

ment operated by 9.43 men. Most of these men had previously worked in the "skilled hold man" category, which frequently involved the operation of lift machines (of varying capacities) in the hold of the vessel. They invariably concluded that such work demanded much more skill, experience, and ingenuity than "simply running between a crane and the yard with one of these new pieces of equipment."

The employers' carefully sown and cultivated myth regarding the introduction of "highly sophisticated" equipment which required an elite corps of operators was thus eroded away. To put the matter briefly: the men were learning in concrete terms that there is no necessary correlation between the size, capacity, or cost of a piece of machinery and the skill and experience that are required to operate it efficiently and safely. Indeed, the mechanization and modernization of their industry was teaching them that the skills and experience required may in fact be inversely related to such factors. By the same token, the rationale for Section 9.43 was increasingly seen as simply a rationale for injustice.

As these things occurred, the employers increasingly rested their case on the notion that steady machine operators were necessary for a safe but productive operation. The 9.43 man was said to be more productive because he was intimately familiar with the overall operation and the facility within which it was carried on. The "productivity figures" to "prove" this point were of two kinds: (1) the average number of crane hoists the 9.43 men made each hour, as compared to the average of the hall crane operators, and (2) the average number of moves they made each hour to and from the hook, as compared to the hall lift drivers. As it happened, these figures were usually presented in a comprehensive and convincing manner, and many men came to believe them. On the other hand, most men also came to believe that "If the average 9.43 man can have a better showing than the hall man, that's because he's willing to go along with a speed-up and risk the safety of other guys." Thus, in the nation's second most hazardous industry, a new watchword emerged: "Keep your eyes open around that guy, he's nine point four three." As for the employers, they presently stopped citing such figures and shelved their arguments about needing steady men to insure efficiency and the safety of others.

Within this framework, the relationships between the men who had accepted an invitation "to go nine point four three" and those who had refused became particularly strained. That was especially true when the 9.43 man was younger and possessed less seniority. Older men who had never been asked to go steady

faced another sort of circumstance. Some felt insulted or discriminated against because they were "just as good on those machines as anybody else." Most were quick to add, however, that the real insult was to be asked. That meant the employer thought you were the kind of man who would accept: "The employers know I'm just too good a union man to go steady." In any event, as the employers invited *real* men (and old acquaintances) to that station, few men felt that the abilities of those selected were in any way superior to many others. Indeed, since the skills of longshoring were so widely shared and since the men were so widely acquainted, *any* selection would have been viewed as arbitrary. There simply was nothing like a technological elite among them.

The Men and Their Union

As these views and understandings spread, the inflationary spiral which an escalating Vietnam war imposed upon the nation caught up with them. By 1968 their wage gains had been wiped out. By then, the "container revolution" was also there for all to see. Indeed, the greatly accelerated pace of that revolution was largely occasioned by the fueling of the tragic and immoral adventure of Vietnam. As work fell off, anxiety mounted. There were a full three years to go with a contract which in nearly 200 pages made no mention of a "container."*

Given these developments, the functioning of Section 9.43 rapidly became the source of an all-pervasive instability within the San Francisco industry. By late 1967 there were over 150 such men; by 1968 their number had swelled to nearly 300, or about 10 percent of the work force. In the spring of 1968, the on-the-job struggle against "going nine point four three" had also been dramatically escalated and made visible through leaflets. Indeed, the men and local union officers had by then been occasionally warned by the industry arbitrator about the use of "coercion" against the steady men.

The community and union of San Francisco longshoremen were thus threatened with collapse. Section 9.43 and its adjudication through the grievance machinery negated the otherwise

* In an effort to get "at least some of the container work" there was a series of "wildcat" work stoppages in San Francisco and Los Angeles during the fall of 1968. These actions precipitated the negotiation of a "Container Freight Station Supplement" to the contract. For a variety of reasons, the most central of which was a court action which gutted the jurisdictional provisions of the supplement, little such work ever materialized.

“sacred” contractual principles of rotational job dispatch, seniority, joint training and skill certification, and joint promotion. It also undercut the “one man, one job” principle of restricting a man’s work to the job category in which he had been dispatched. Finally, and because the relevant contract language was not sufficiently precise, union efforts to use the grievance machinery for equalizing the work opportunity of the skilled hall men and the 9.43 men were unsuccessful. In short, this modernization of the terms of employment totally undermined the basic principles of the hiring hall. It therefore represented not merely a very broad and fundamental departure from the historically relevant contractual and institutional past, but a break with something still more fundamental—the profoundly egalitarian sense of justice which the hiring hall had concretely institutionalized.

With respect to the social relationships that came to exist among the San Francisco longshoremen by reason of Section 9.43, it is, of course, important to remember that the bonds of community and union were being quite generally atrophied by the use of the new technology. Within this evolving social framework, however, the circumstances of the 9.43 men were extreme. For the most part they avoided union meetings and activity. They seldom came to the hiring hall or the union offices. They lost touch with old friends and acquaintances. At best, they were only slightly acquainted with the newer men. Because of the nature of their work, they could not assist either shipboard or dock men. They could only “produce” for their employer and by so doing perhaps subject those men to a speed-up and/or an unsafe working condition.

Given these circumstances, and the collapse of any creditable rationale for 9.43, it was increasingly understood that after many years the San Francisco longshore industry was again distinguished by a shape-up. By the same token, 9.43 was increasingly viewed as having introduced a “cancer” into the local: “It’s cancer. It’s the cancer of wanting to make more money than anybody else. It’s the cancer of looking to the employer for your future and not the union. It’s a cancer because for every 9.43 man on the job, there’s three or four other men trying to get that job. It’s the cancer of a shape-up and with it the employers are out to destroy the hiring hall and break the union.”

It followed that for most San Francisco longshoremen the slogan “No 9.43” largely underwrote what was destined to occur at the end of the contract—the longest maritime strike in the history of the nation. Indeed, the strike of 1971–1972 was widely viewed as essentially a replay of 1934 because the manner

of assigning and distributing work was central. In their first major strike statement the men expressed themselves as follows:

We are being asked to accept a set of demands which would destroy the system of job dispatch which has always prevented discrimination and favoritism, while insuring an equal work opportunity to all of us. Since these demands seriously jeopardize our immediate economic welfare and long-term job security while threatening *the very existence of our union*, they are in fact a *basic issue in our strike!!!*

While the very complex story of the strike cannot be entered into here, it must be noted that it ended with no modification of Section 9.43.

It was not until the present contract (1978–1981) that certain changes in that provision were negotiated. The San Francisco men who were working under 9.43 at the time of ratification were to periodically return to the hiring hall dispatch system for at least 30 days. During that period, they would be replaced by newly trained men, again on a steady basis. Unlike in the past, the new men would be trained, if not selected, on a seniority basis. In this way, the work in question would be rotated and more widely shared. Accordingly, those who supported this modification could argue that “a lot of new men will now get a crack at this work.” They could also argue that “a lot of men who haven’t been in the hall for years will come back to the fold.” There was, however, a lot of skepticism: “All we’ve done here is double the number of steady men. We’ve just given the steady man a partner. We haven’t done shit for the hall man or the hall, but that’s where they’ve got us and that’s where they’ve had us for a good long time.” This quite typically elicited a response of the following order: “Well, maybe so, man, but at least this is something. After twelve long years, it’s at least a step in the right direction.”

The present contract, like all since 1934, is a coastwide contract. It was voted up by a coastwide majority of longshoremen (and ship clerks) in a secret referendum (5495 to 2474). But having noted this, it should also be noted that it contains separate provisions for steady machine operators in both Los Angeles and Seattle. As it happens, this represents a complete departure from over forty years of practice. For many San Francisco men, the cure of three “formulas” for the employment of steady machine operators was worse than the disease. To those men, the prospect of an emergent competition between locals of these ports and hence a further splitting of the union’s coastwide unity was still another very good reason for voting against the contract.