

Dock Workers

International Explorations in
Comparative Labour History,
1790-1970
Volume 1

Edited by

**Sam Davies, Colin J. Davis,
David de Vries,
Lex Heerma van Voss,
Lidewij Hesselink and
Klaus Weinbauer**



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PART ONE
Introduction



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CHAPTER ONE

Towards a comparative international history of dockers

Sam Davies and Klaus Weinbauer

Much research has already been carried out on the history of dockers in various parts of the world. Usually this work has been focused on individual ports, or sometimes on a number of ports within one set of national boundaries. In addition, most of these valuable case studies have been limited in their conceptual scope, with many of them being concerned primarily with aspects of industrial relations. This important occupational group has not, however, been considered in a comparative fashion on an international scale to any great extent. Nor have they been studied within a broad analytical framework, taking into account the post-1945 developments in the field of social history.

It was within this context that the idea of a research project on the international history of dockers was developed, out of which this collection of essays has been the result. The precise origins of this book go back to the spring of 1993. Following on from his own research into the history of Hamburg dockers, Klaus Weinbauer suggested that a comparative international perspective on the history of dock labourers needed to be developed. Weinbauer therefore proposed that a conference be organised at the *International Institute of Social History (IISH)* in Amsterdam, with the aim of drawing together as wide a range as possible (both in geographical and conceptual terms) of historians and social scientists working on the history of dock labour.

Although Marcel van der Linden of the *IISH* was sympathetic, this ambitious proposal could not initially be confirmed for financial reasons. Subsequently in October 1994 Sam Davies presented a paper at the *North American Labour History Conference*, following on from his research into the labour history of Liverpool. This paper, in a speculative fashion, also raised issues relating to a comparative international approach to the history of dock labour. Van der Linden was again interested in the concept, and revived Weinbauer's original proposal. He suggested that Weinbauer and Davies co-operate over its development. At the same time, David De Vries, who had been involved in research on Palestinian labour, also agreed that this was an interesting and potentially rewarding project, and joined the organising team. The *IISH* agreed to support the proposal in March 1995, and Lex Heerma van Voss joined the organisers, having been appointed as the co-ordinator for the *Institute*. In May 1995 US-based Colin Davis, who at that time was beginning to do comparative research on dockers in New York and London, was also invited to participate in the organisation of the conference.

Later that year, a research student at the *Institute* in Amsterdam, Lidewij Hesselink, was also asked to join the team.

In the first discussions the team did not talk much about comparative history. Rather, as a first step we decided to provide an overview of the state of international research on dock labour history. Because of the worldwide scale envisaged at the outset of this work, we thought that it would be too much to expect to come to an all-encompassing comparative study of dock labour. Many historians have tended to be more at home with detailed studies of particular localities or events, usually at the national or even sub-national level. This certainly applied to our project team as a whole, and for many of us this was really new territory. It was necessary, therefore, to go through a period of discussion and debate amongst ourselves to decide upon our method. We did not all start off at the same point, with the exact same prior knowledge and theoretical framework, or with similar assumptions as to how the project should proceed. The logistics of this stage of the process were themselves a problem, scattered as we were between five countries and three continents. Nevertheless, through e-mail, telephone and post, and occasional meetings of at least some of the group at international conferences, a method was constructed. We do not believe that the results of our efforts – the conference we organised and this publication which followed on from it – have provided a fully developed international comparative history of dockers. What we have done so far is only a beginning of a still incomplete project. Our title reflects this. These are international explorations in comparative history. To see how we got to this point, it would be useful now to make some general points about the practice of comparative history.

Comparative history

There are a number of key points that need to be borne in mind in seeking to write explicitly comparative history.¹ First, one cannot begin by taking one particular case as the norm, and then evaluating others to see how much they conform to, or are exceptions to, the norm. All examples under consideration must be of equal interest to the comparative historian at the start. Otherwise there is the danger that a pre-conceived framework based on the analysis of the 'normal' case will be imposed on all the others. In our project, therefore, we did not start with the assumption that any particular group of dockers (British or German, say, or European) were the prototype of all other dock labour forces. All dockers, wherever they were situated geographically and whenever they had been assembled chronologically, were to be of interest to us. Thus the first step in the

¹ For an excellent discussion of the comparative method, see Breuilly, J., *Labour and Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century Europe: Essays in Comparative History*, (Manchester, 1992), pp. 1–25, 273–95; the rest of the book is a brilliant example of the method in practice. See also Haupt, H.-G. and Kocka, J., (eds), *Geschichte und Vergleich. Ansätze und Ergebnisse International Vergleichender Geschichtsschreibung*, (Frankfurt/Main and New York, 1996), and the debates in the journal *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 34, (1994) and 35, (1995).

process of exploring the comparative history of dockers was to invite contributions from as wide a range of historians across the world as possible. To an extent we were successful in this aim, as the variety of locations dealt with in these essays shows, but we are also aware of significant gaps in the coverage achieved – South America, southern Africa and large swathes of Asia are notable by their absence, for instance.

The second principle of comparative history to be considered is that the instances under examination must be amenable to being analysed using the same methods. Superficially similar events or categories may in fact be defined and investigated by historians in dissimilar ways, and are therefore not directly comparable. It is necessary to start with some general questions that are not derived from one particular case, and to construct a general framework within which the different examples can be described and examined, before the comparative analysis can be advanced. This general framework was developed for our project over an extended period. Klaus Weinbauer wrote a draft of this framework in which he put forward a structured series of questions and themes related to the history of dockers,² which in turn were discussed and evaluated by the other members of the team. By April 1996 a 'framework document' had been agreed upon. All contributors were then asked to write reports based on this framework, covering the port or ports of which they had specialised knowledge. It is important to realise that we were not asking the contributors to simply reproduce material that had been published previously, but to deliver reports that were specifically geared to answering the general questions in the framework. The central sections of the framework document, with extraneous organisational instructions excluded, are now shown here.

Framework document: comparative international history of dock labour, c. 1790–1970s

Workers who loaded and unloaded ships have formed a distinctive occupational group over the past two centuries. As trade expanded with the international development of capitalist production, so the numbers of dock labourers increased and became concentrated in the major ports of the world. A variety of case studies of these workers in different parts of the globe and at various historical stages have already been provided by labour historians, sociologists, anthropologists, etc. The aim of this project is to go beyond these individual studies and develop a genuinely comparative international perspective over a long historical time-span. At the same time, it is also intended that the project will not be limited to a narrow, institutionally-based 'labour history', but instead will be conceptually open and wide-

² Klaus Weinbauer would like to thank Frank Broeze (Univ. of Western Australia) for his critique and suggestions on the first draft of this document.

ranging. The framework document enclosed indicates in more detail the proposed range of issues to be covered by the project.

We are asking you to participate in this project, and as a first step to submit proposals for a 'port report'. These reports should be brief overviews of particular ports, drawn up as far as possible along similar lines. It should be noted that the framework document is a guide to how the individual reports should be structured. The intention is to generate reports which are reasonably comparable, rather than a wide range of disparately-structured case studies. On the other hand, it is not the case that participants are expected to respond to every single element of the framework document – obviously different areas may be stressed more or less by different contributors, time-scales may differ for different ports, availability of sources may restrict coverage of some areas, etc. Nevertheless, participants should attempt to structure their reports as far as possible according to the framework document.

Introductory remarks

Many historians would agree with the assertion that dockers have been an especially militant and strike-prone group of workers. Up to now this fact has led many historians and social scientists to concentrate their research primarily on dock strikes and trade unions. For the purpose of meeting the standards of modern social history this can only be a first step, however. Taking dock workers (male and female) as a focal point and using a broad social and historical perspective, it is important to analyse their everyday life (including the divisions of sex and gender, race and class, the working, housing and family conditions) and their political articulations and strikes, as well as the economic structures and organisations that influenced their working and living conditions. In doing this it is important not only to look at the 'casual age' of dockwork but also to include the very important earlier artisanal phase, and to mark the transition from one period to the other.

Bearing in mind the most recent studies on dock labour history, two things should be remembered; first, not to automatically equate the well-known industrial militancy of dock labourers with political radicalism (this means, in the first instance, to separate shop-floor actions from political actions, and then to ask under what conditions shop-floor actions turn into, or use, political activities); second, to recognize the vital importance of the differences between three major sub-divisions of dock workers, the highly skilled artisans, the casuals, and the regular or permanently employed dockers.

TOWARDS A COMPARATIVE HISTORY

As an aid to making international comparisons, these preliminary observations should always be remembered (or questioned) when discussing the list of points offered below as a framework for the individual port reports. It would also be helpful to focus the analysis around the years 1790–1850–1890–1920–1940–1965.

Guidelines for the port reports

Length of reports: 25 pages (c. 7,500 words) excluding notes, maps, appendices etc.

1. Introduction (Historiography, methodology, sources)

2. The maritime labour market, dock labour, and the culture of dock work

2.1 What type of labourers dominated dock labour (how long, if at all, were they highly-skilled and exclusive artisans, when/why did dock work become dominated by casual labourers, when/why was there a turn towards more permanent employment, how many labourers worked in the port)?

2.2 How did labour market organisation change and how did power relations develop between workers, contractors, foremen, guilds and unions, the state and the employers (who controlled the hiring; did wars or other factors give an important impulse for these changes)?

2.3 Where did dock workers come from (social structure; occupational, religious, racial and ethnic backgrounds; age structure; gender divisions etc.)? How did race and ethnicity determine occupational segregation? Did such constructs encourage or discourage group solidarity? Did employers use racial and ethnic differences to control the work force?

2.4 How did the working conditions of dock workers change (handling of goods, tools, gang size, accident rate, etc.)?

2.5 What technological innovations affected the labour process (big sailing ships, iron ships, steam/oil firing, steam winches, electric cranes, elevators, fork lift trucks, containers, scientific management, rationalisation etc.)? Did these changes affect labour efficiency, and what attitudes did the workers have towards technological changes/rationalisation?

2.6 How did wages (both money and real wages) develop?

2.7 How can the culture of work of dock labourers be characterised (work ethic, work rules, job demarcation, mobility etc.)?

3. *Housing, living and workers' culture in the port city*

3.1 What was the structure of the port city (economic and occupational structure, transportation and communication systems, class and other social divisions etc.)? What was the influence of port enlargement on the city and on its business structure?

3.2 How did dock labour influence the city and/or the local economy and how did the size and business structures of port firms and employers' organisations change over time?

3.3 How can the life and atmosphere of the waterfront neighbourhoods be characterised (social and sexual composition, racial and ethnic composition, household structure, family life, role of women, social control and discrimination, communication networks, leisure activities etc.)? What factors created closely-knit communities? When and why did such communities begin to erode? What events and policies led to the reconstruction of these often overcrowded working-class quarters? Did racial or ethnic segregation in waterfront districts create hostility within the labour-force, or was such animosity overcome at work?

3.4 What other key factors may have affected dockers' lives? For instance, what role did police forces play as instruments of public control? How did they manage law and order in dockside areas (crime, prostitution, alcoholism, strike control etc.)? What kind of workers' culture developed in dock labour (slang, songs, masculinity, violence, drinking, pilfering, race relations, religion etc.)? This could also include language and discourse analysis, and the description of the images of dock labour in the arts (cinema, literature, theatre, poetry, etc.).

4. *The government and dock labour*

4.1 What was the role of government as employer (how far were state firms and shipping lines able to influence the industrial relations and the economic structure in the port industry, etc.)?

4.2 What role did government play as supporter of the employers?

4.3 What role did government play as arbitrator?

4.4 Did government control of dock labour (e.g. through Labour Boards) have a significant effect on industrial relations? Was such governmental action welcomed, or resisted, by unions and/or rank and file?

4.5 What was government involvement in social insurance/relief for dock labourers (structure and functioning of social insurance or relief systems and their institutions etc.)?

4.6 Did these institutions (mutual aid and governmental) play a major role in formalising industrial conflicts and strike control in dock labour?

5. The labour movement: social conflict, strikes, trade unions, political organisations and political parties

5.1 What were the typical strike patterns (incl. informal conflicts) of the different branches and different phases (artisanal, casual, more regular employment) of dock work?

5.2 What changes in strike activity accompanied the demise of the artisanal phase of dock work and the following turn to casual labour?

5.3 What types of organisations (guilds, trade unions etc.) were founded/supported by the different branches/groups of dock labourers (origins and organisational developments; social and occupational recruitment; role of racial and gender discrimination; influence of the political environment, political parties and older traditions)?

5.4 Was it the case, as some historians have argued, that the casuals tended to support syndicalist or communist unions, while the permanent men gave their support more to social-democratic unions? If so, what were the reasons for this? Also, was there significant unofficial/rank-and-file activity amongst dockers, or even break-away movements from established unions?

5.5 What kind of collective bargaining systems operated in dock labour? How did employers (individually and/or collectively) respond to unionisation?

5.6 What were the main objects of the dockers' guilds/trade unions etc. (labour market policy, control of the labour process, wage and social policy, etc.)?

5.7 Was there any nationalism/internationalism (formal or informal) in the ranks of the dock labourers, and in what historical situations did such actions and organisations (eg ITF) develop?

5.8 What were the attitudes of the guilds/unions etc. and the workers towards political organisations and political parties? How did the shop-floor militancy of dock labourers interrelate with political affiliations, if at all? How were political attitudes reflected in voting behaviour in the city and rural districts populated by these labourers?

5.9 How did war-time needs affect the militancy of dock labourers?

Conclusion

The reports based on the framework document were written and delivered by the various participants by March 1997. The extent to which these reports had been constructed strictly within the limits of the suggested framework varied to some degree, but in most cases the guidelines had been fairly faithfully followed. It should be pointed out that it is no easy task to ensure that such a large group of

contributors, coming from a wide variety of intellectual and academic traditions, will all conform to the suggested approach. In the circumstances, the reports overall could be deemed a success. They provided a large body of descriptive work on the history of dockers in almost thirty different locations worldwide. The reports as they stood at this stage were published by the *IISG*, and on their own they would represent a valuable advance in our knowledge of the area.³

This rich material on individual ports made us think of going beyond this. The accumulation of systematic descriptions, which is effectively what we had achieved so far, in itself prompts comparative observations. Nevertheless, to return to the checklist of key points for the comparative method that was started above, it is necessary to further develop a 'systematic method to build up a full comparative description of the various cases'.⁴ Comparative history cannot be simply a cumulative process, but it must also be a reflexive and iterative method. In other words, it is necessary to return and reflect on the evidence in order to produce further comparative analysis. It is also important to stress that such comparative history does involve identifying similarities and dissimilarities. It was asserted above that the comparative historian must *start* by treating all instances as of equal interest, and by not setting up from the outset some norm against which to measure all other cases. This does not mean, though, that all historical cases can only be understood on their own terms. Such an historicist approach will by definition exclude the possibility of comparison. What the comparative historian can and should do is to identify important aspects and recurring themes in the cases under examination, and to seek to explain how and why particular cases diverge from the rest. This above all is the most important and useful outcome of the comparative approach.

To develop the project along these lines, the project team met in Hamburg in April 1997. Surveying the full range of port reports, they identified a number of major themes that recurred in many of the individual examples. They assigned these themes to individual contributors, who were asked to analyse them in a comparative fashion, drawing upon both the evidence of the reports and other published work. These thematic papers in turn provided the focus for the conference involving all the participants in the project that was held at the *IISG* in Amsterdam in November 1997. This conference proved to be a tremendous success, providing a unique opportunity for collective reflection by all the participants on the material that had been produced by then, and a stimulus for the further development of ideas about the history of dockers. The final stage of the project thus far was to move towards the publication of these explorations in comparative history. In the light of the thematic papers and the discussion at the conference, the original port reports were refashioned and edited to become the 'Port Studies' of this volume. The conference papers were similarly refined to produce the 'Thematic Studies'. This collection of thematic essays represents the most significant product of the ambitious project that started six years earlier.

³ *Port Reports Prepared for the Conference Comparative International History of Dock Labour, c. 1790–1970*, (3 vols.), (Amsterdam, 1997). These volumes are now out of print.

⁴ Breuilly, *Labour and Liberalism*, p. 23.

As stated earlier, the project team would not claim that this publication represents a fully realised exercise in comparative history, but rather a stage along the way. But as far as we can see this project is among the first to produce a prestructured international comparison of an important occupational group, a comparative history that goes beyond the collection of national case studies.⁵ In the end, however, it is for our readers to judge for themselves how successful and useful these international explorations in the comparative history of dockers are.

We must finally record our acknowledgements to the individuals and organisations that have helped us in producing this book. Marcel van der Linden must be thanked for his initial encouragement for the whole idea of the project. The support in general of the *International Institute of Social History* in Amsterdam was vital, especially in its role as a co-ordinator and a conduit for the exchange of messages, drafts, etc. The organisation of both the project as a whole, and the 1997 conference, was to a great extent funded by the *Institute*. Additional funding was provided by the *Royal Dutch Academy of Arts and Sciences*, and by the *International Institute for Asian Studies*. Marianne Smit and Guus de Boer assisted in the editing process as trainees at the *IISH*. Non-contributors to this book who attended the 1997 conference must also be thanked for their contribution to the discussion and debate. These include Jordi Ibarz, Antoni Lucchetti, and Peter Turnbull. We must also acknowledge the participation of Roland Baetens and David Wellman, who submitted port reports which for various reasons did not in the end appear in this volume. We are most grateful to all those at Ashgate who have helped in the publication of this book, most notably Alec McAulay, Rachel Lynch and Kirsten Weissenberg. Finally, we thank Tom Norton, who produced an excellent index and at the same time picked up many typographical errors that had been missed by everyone else.

⁵ For a comparable project on miners, see Tenfelde, K. (ed.), *Towards a Social History of Mining*, (Munich, 1991).



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PART TWO
Port studies



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CHAPTER TWO

Danish dock workers: Aarhus, 1870–1970

Svend Aage Andersen

Introduction

In Denmark dock labour has not been studied very intensively, especially for the period before the end of the nineteenth century. There are some studies of ports and their developments, and on the economy of transportation and technology. There are also a couple of studies on important strikes and a few historical accounts of the development of unions, but with very few exceptions there is nothing about dock workers and their life in the docks. Besides my own study of dock workers in Aarhus¹ there are very few studies written of the real-life experience of the people themselves. Particular strikes, such as the Aarhus dockers' big sympathy strike with the Hamburg dockers in 1897 and the dockworker strike in Esbjerg in 1893, have been studied.² In his major study of the 'port-society' of Copenhagen around 1970 Bøje Larsen has given a thorough account of work conditions and social structure.³ Furthermore an anthology about life and work in the port of Copenhagen 1880–1991 has been published by The Workers' Museum.⁴ The relationship between workers and employers in the port of Aalborg has been illuminated in a short review as a part of a larger investigation of the development of the port. This publication also includes an interview with an old docker of eighty, who started working in the docks in 1922.⁵ For Esbjerg there is a short account of the many changes which have taken place

¹ Andersen, S.A., *Havnearbejderne i Århus - før containernes tid: En undersøgelse af deres livsform og erfaringsverden ca. 1880–1960*, (Aarhus, 1988). Besides, in two small books – *Mennesker på havnen*, (Aarhus, 1972/73) and *Åkander vokser ikke i saltvand*, (Aarhus, 1980) – journalist Knud Esmann has by means of interviews and observations thrown light on some of the anonymous figures of the docks. Also through interviews Aarhus dockers of the 1980s have been described in Rasmussen, M., *Færdigt Arbejde: En bog om havnearbejderne*, (Jyderup, 1983), and Andersen, S.A., 'Havnearbejdernes virkelighedskonstruktion', *NYT fra Center for Kulturforskning*, 13, (1989).

² Engberg, J., *Dyre lærepenge: Den store havnestrejke i 1897*, (Aarhus, 1985); Christensen, E., *Havnearbejderstrejken i Esbjerg i 1893: Træk af arbejdsmændenes fagforenings første år i Esbjerg*, (Copenhagen, 1975).

³ Larsen, B., *Havnesamfundet: En analyse af arbejdsforhold og social struktur i Københavns havn*, (Copenhagen, 1975).

⁴ Vasström, A. and Varmose, P.-E.B., (eds), *16 tons dagens akkord – en antologi om havnearbejdernes vilkår i Københavns Havn 1880–1990*, (Copenhagen, 1991).

⁵ Bergh, O., Drescher, H. and Olsen, S.B., (eds), *Aalborg Havn*, (Aalborg, 1976).

in dockers' working conditions since the 1950s.⁶ There are few accounts of the history of unskilled labourers like dockers, and a small number of studies of transport workers in general include dock work in different Danish ports.⁷ Finally, there are some accounts of the history of trade unions and federations and jubilee publications, mainly written by leading figures from the labour movement, teleological in their view, and with their vantage point in the Head Office.⁸

Besides different kinds of written sources some of the studies mentioned above also use oral history and interviews as a method. The following overview is mainly based on my own study of Aarhus, in which I use traditional sources such as labour newspaper articles, union minute books, fragmented union membership rolls, union ledgers, registers, subscription books and correspondence. These sources are combined partly with autobiographies written by workers from Aarhus and collected by the Danish National Museum during the 1950s, and partly with oral sources (interviews with former dockers and dockers' wives) collected by myself in the early and middle 1980s.⁹

This contribution offers a case study of dock labour in one port, which cannot automatically be generalised to other Danish ports. In my disposition I have followed the framework document of the organisers as closely as possible, but in order to provide a frame of reference for the following survey I will start with a short account of the position of Aarhus in Danish society.

A provincial town in an agrarian society

Around 1850 Aarhus was a relatively small provincial town in an overwhelmingly agricultural country, which relied heavily on the export of agricultural products to England.¹⁰ Until about the 1870s three-quarters of the Danish population lived in

⁶ Liljedahl, E. 'Havnens mange ansigter', in Hahn-Pedersen, M., (ed.), *Esbjerg havn 1868–1993*, (Esbjerg, 1993).

⁷ Federspiel, S. and Jensen, E.B., '... i Esbjerg var der større Chancer': *Arbejdsmændenes historie i Esbjerg 1890–1990*, (Esbjerg, 1990); Jepsen, A.U., *Arbejdsmandens historie i 100 år*, 3, *Transport*, (Copenhagen, 1985).

⁸ For instance, *Havnearbejdernes Fagforening, Aarhus, 80 Aar*, (Aarhus, 1965).

⁹ Andersen, *Havnearbejderne i Aarhus*. See also Andersen, S.A., 'Dockers' culture in three North European port cities: Hamburg, Gothenburg and Aarhus, 1880–1960. A study of subcultures and their social contexts', in Holm, P., and Edwards, J., (eds), *North Sea Ports and Harbours – Adaptations to Change*, (Esbjerg, 1992); Andersen, S.A., 'Is dockers' culture unchanged? What happened to dockwork during the last three decades? The case of Århus', in *Harbour. The Development of a Harbour and the Work in a Harbour. X International Baltic Seminar in Kotka 10–13 August 1994*, (Publication No. 22 in the Series of the Provincial Museum of Kymenlaakso, Kotka, 1996).

¹⁰ For a general economic and social history from the nineteenth century, including industrial relations and the history of the labour movement, see for instance Westergaard, J.H., *Scandinavian Urbanism: A Survey of Trends and Themes in Urban Social Research in Sweden, Norway and Denmark*, New Social Science Monographs, (Copenhagen, 1966); Therborn, G., 'Why some classes are more successful than others', *New Left Review*, 138, (1983); Galenson, W., *The Danish System of Labor Relations*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1952).

rural areas. Denmark was still a tradition-bound agrarian society and still had a relatively static economy. Only slowly did the modernisation of farming and the abolition of old monopolistic trade restrictions and urban guild organisation clear the way for industrialisation and urbanisation. In this process of transformation a majority of the Danish population still derived their livelihood from agriculture, but as peasants became small-scale capitalist farmers, many agricultural labourers migrated from the countryside to the capital and to provincial towns like Aarhus.

For Aarhus the second half of the nineteenth century was a period of industrial growth, which also continued through the twentieth century. The town grew tremendously, from 21,000 inhabitants in 1870 to 71,000 in 1911, 128,000 in 1940 and 177,000 in 1960. By Danish standards and the standards of the time Aarhus was a big town. Underlying the population growth in the second half of the nineteenth century was the expansion of trade, commerce and industry which greatly changed the economic and class structure. During these years Aarhus developed into an industrial and commercial town, and the port had to be enlarged. During the 1890s more factories employed more workers. The demand for labour created a rush of people from the countryside, a rush which continued during the first half of the twentieth century. In turn the greater numbers of industrial workers promoted organisation.

The 'Industrial Revolution' in Denmark is usually regarded as having commenced in the 1870s. However, the real take-off was in the 1890s and the full breakthrough only in the 1950s. So industrialisation in Denmark occurred later than in Germany, France and England. Denmark long remained predominantly agrarian and rural, in spite of rapid industrialisation. In the towns the traditional handicraft production was only slowly undermined by industrial production. But even when the growth of industrial labour began to have an effect on the composition of the labour force, much industry was still dominated by small-scale enterprises. Denmark was an agricultural country right up to about 1961 and dominated by a petty bourgeois class structure, both in the countryside (by small farmers) and in the towns (by artisans and small industry).

The maritime labour market

During the whole period 1870–1970 there was a constant surplus of labour on the maritime labour market. At the end of the eighteenth century this was mainly due to the constant rush of people from the countryside. This situation made unemployment one of the typical characteristics of casual labour. The labourers were constantly exposed to the danger of losing their jobs. Consequently they frequently had to leave the trade and look for other kinds of jobs, or combine it with other occupations, such as digging, driving, bricklaying, warehouse-work, work for merchants, work at tile-works, and agricultural work. In some cases they moved to and fro between Aarhus and the surrounding area. The unstable work conditions in the docks thus partly caused great social insecurity and great occupational and geographical mobility. Casual workers often had to live a 'nomadic existence'. Several examples from the turn of the century show that a docker's earnings had to be complemented by those of his wife and his children in

order to secure the survival of the family. To go out washing for other people or to keep a little shop were common occupations for dockers' wives.

For Aarhus there is no evidence of an artisanal period previous to that of casual labour, and there is no information about guilds available. As far as is known, before about 1870 dock work was done by sailors on the ships. During the second half of the nineteenth century the need for dockwork grew rapidly, and by about 1880 dock work was being done by casual labourers. Dock work was one of the possibilities in a casual labour market where a large number of workers found it difficult to find permanent work. So-called foremen were middlemen between the importers and the workers. Dock work was a free enterprise, and foremen simply entered the ships and made a contract on the spot. A dockers' union was formed in 1885, and in 1895 an employer's organisation was constituted as an association of the largest grocers and firms with interests in the port. In 1896 the employers started a new labour exchange, which had as its aim to take care of all loading and discharge in the port, as well as take over the tasks of the former foremen.

In 1897 a big strike marked a dramatic change in the power relations in the docks. As a consequence of the strike the dockers lost their work, and scabs were hired instead. After the strike the old dockers were not rehired, with only a few exceptions, and the scabs kept their work. The new labour exchange – the later Aarhus Stevedore Company – made every effort to employ a hard core of loyal, permanently engaged workers. In order to secure a livelihood the old dockers formed their own co-operative stevedore club in 1903.

After the dockers had lost the strike, the employers' stevedore company totally controlled the hiring through different foremen used by the companies receiving goods in the port. Although these endeavours were met with resistance from the dockers, the employers more or less succeeded in dividing the dock labourers into a hierarchy: a) dockers 'permanently' employed by specific firms, b) dockers who were sent from one firm to another according to demand, and c) further casual workers who were taken in when the first two groups were insufficient in number to cope with the work. Thus, the dockers were divided into at least two sections, 'core' workers in the regular gangs, and more 'peripheral' workers who were only employed when a larger labour force was needed. By favouring the inner core of loyal workers the employers were able to further internal divisions within their work force. This fragmentation weakened the dockers' capacity for collective action and discouraged the growth of class consciousness. However, in Aarhus the workforce was much smaller and more compact than in bigger ports, and also less divided up into a myriad of different categories.

Casual labour promoted both competition and solidarity among the workers. On the labour market the unskilled workers were competitors and had to fight each other to get a job. In order to protect their work and keep rival workers from the countryside, or from other trades, away from their workplace, the dockers had to unite in what has been called 'defensive elitism'¹¹. Workers belonging to the group were included in the solidarity, whereas others, perceived as a threat, were excluded. Furthermore, the organisation of work created a very strong informal

¹¹ Wilson, D.F., *Dockers: The Impact of Industrial Change*, (London, 1972), p. 53.

solidarity in the individual gangs, but this solidarity did not always extend to all dockers (as represented by the union) or to the total working class (as represented by the Social-Democrat labour party). Dockers' work experience thus included forces that promoted class solidarity as well as forces that created divisions within the working class.

Most of the dockers originally came from the countryside around Aarhus. Most of the men working in the docks around 1900 were sons of agricultural workers, peasants and small-holders. Many of them had worked as farm labourers, and a few might even have had their own small-holding, before migrating to the town. Most of them had married in the years before or the same year as they moved to Aarhus. The dockers' wives came mainly from the same social layers as their husbands. Some dockers had moved around a little before coming to Aarhus. The immigrants who came to Aarhus were approximately thirty to thirty-five years of age and tried to stay on the maritime labour market as far as possible, but returned, when that was not possible, to the countryside again. During the twentieth century the dockers increasingly formed a self-generating stock. To some extent there was a kin-based recruitment, and many sons of dockers inherited their fathers' occupation. A certain proportion of the dockers were former seamen, but roamers, proletarianised people and people who could not adjust anywhere else also played a minor part in maintaining the ranks of the dock labour force.

With the growth of transportation and expansion of traffic the number of dock workers grew all the time, from 400–500 in the 1880s to 600–700 in the years before World War I and 900–1,000 during the war. However, rationalisation and the introduction of mechanical equipment and cranes lead to reduction of the gangs, and the workforce declined to about 700–800 workers in the 1930s. It stayed at this level up to the 1950s, when there were about 800 dockers. From then on, as a consequence of more new technology and rationalisation, there was a further decline. Year by year there were fewer and fewer work opportunities in the docks. In the middle of the 1960s there were more than 700 members of the dockers' union in Aarhus. In 1970 a container terminal was in use, but in the early 1980s, when the amount of cargo passing through the port was much larger than in the 1960s, there were no more than 281 union members. Crane and truck drivers were regularly employed, the rest were still casual workers. Ten years later in 1990 the number of union members was reduced to some 230–240 workers. The explanation of this reduction of the work force was the continued mechanisation and especially the shift from conventional cargo-handling to the new techniques of unit loads and containerisation. The improvements in handling techniques reduced the labour requirements considerably, and the size of the labour force dwindled. In 1998 most of the remaining 200 dockers were now regularly employed, but a minority of some 80 dockers were still casual workers.

Working conditions, technology and wages

Around the turn of the century loading and unloading the goods was organised in gangs under supervision of a foreman. The size of the gangs varied according to

the different tasks. Over time, as a consequence of rationalisation, the gang sizes were reduced. Between the shipping firms and the gangs, the employers had a stevedore firm to hire the workers and organise the work. To lead the work the stevedore firm employed a number of foremen. The composition of the regular gangs was relatively stable, and those who were not members of a regular gang had to compete for the available jobs. In order to get a job the dockers had to appear at the hiring place several times a day. Around 1900 they were required to turn out five or six times a day. At that time it was not unusual for them to leave home at 5 a.m. in the morning and return home as late as 6.30 p.m. in the evening. In 1965 dockers still had to appear at the hiring place three times a day. When there was no work on the first call, at 7 a.m., they had to come back at 9.30, and if there was still no work, again at 1.30 p.m.

The working conditions were hard. Even those who did manage to get a job had no job security. Dockers were usually paid by the hour. Most of the work was manual and hard physical labour. However, some work was harder, more dirty or worse paid than others. The heavy physical work down in the hold was especially hard, whereas the work alongside the quay was less demanding. The handling of goods was mechanised little and late, and even then it still remained extremely hard and labour-intensive. Work processes and methods of stevedoring varied from product to product. Among the imported goods were coal, grain and feedstuffs, timber, wood and general cargo. From the port agricultural products – bacon, eggs and butter – were exported to England.

The accident rate was high. For instance, balancing with heavy wheelbarrows on narrow bridges was not easy, and it was always necessary to be alert and to look out for goods being dropped from above. Dockers' wives knew about the risk of accidents, and as a consequence, when a docker did not come home at the appointed time, this caused great anxiety to his wife. Several of my informants have told me about times when they had been in danger of losing their lives during their work in the port. Many of the dockers were physically marked by their occupation, and some had lost one or two fingers, or had other impairments caused by injuries at work. The continual grind of hard work also wore the men out, and this often appeared in their physiognomy. Much of the work endangered the dockers' health. Working in coal dust or grain, for instance, damaged the dockers' lungs. Masks for protection were not mentioned or used. These dangerous working conditions continued up to the 1970s.

During the twentieth century changes in technology and work organisation greatly influenced the activities, interaction and common values of the dockers. New technology caused many changes in the nature of the work, and the last hundred years can be divided into three different stages in this regard, as defined in Björklund's research into the question.¹² During the first stage manual skill was the foremost requirement. Work was rarely mechanised and its proper execution depended on the workers' physical strength and dexterity. The second stage was characterised by industrialisation, increasing mechanisation and gradual subordination of the means of production to the policy of one big management

¹² Björklund, A., *Hamnens Arbetare: En etnologisk undersökning av stuveriarbetet i Göteborg*, (Stockholm, 1984).

concern. The third stage is characterised by a trend towards automation, an increasing separation between the planning of work and its actual execution, standardisation of tonnage, types of cargo and means of traction, and their integration into a general transport system.

It is to be expected that technological change should have reached the big ports before the small ones. The first steam winches were introduced in Aarhus during the 1880s and were met with resistance. Workers united in a struggle to make the employers remove them, because they were seen as dangerous to the workers and moreover reduced the number of men needed on the quay. Even though the winches relieved the workers of some of the most strenuous aspects of their work, dockers regarded the machines with ambivalence and called them 'bread thieves'. Despite the resistance of the workers, however, several stages in the loading and unloading process were eventually mechanised. In Aarhus the fight against steam winches did not succeed, but it encouraged the workers to join the union.

During the twentieth century the dockers were constantly threatened by dangers, rearrangement of the work organisation and risks of unemployment caused by the new technology. Under the attack of new technologies and new ways of work organisation the dockers sought to preserve existing modes of work, and with the passage of time the customs and loyalties of the workforce became an independent factor in the perpetuation of casualism. This does not mean that mechanisation and changes in working methods did not influence the attitudes and life style of the dockers. They certainly did. One can understand the history of the dockers as a constant fight against the influences of new technology and new working methods in order to defend 'traditional' working methods, customs and lifestyle. New technologies, from steam winches to containers, were a constant threat to the traditional docker lifestyle, which implied control over the work situation, safety at work based on co-operation between men who knew each other well, and customary rights with freedom to take a break when wanted. The conservative features of dockers' culture not only included the efforts to preserve existing modes of work when under attack from employers or the state. It also included the workers' wish to sustain the casual labour system.

Although the history of the dockers' work conditions is the history of a constantly changing technology, the persistence of their culture is due to the fact that work – despite all these changes – was still essentially based on physical strength, dexterity and co-operation. In spite of new quays and modern equipment in the docks – such as gas or electric light for instance – the techniques of loading and unloading were not basically changed until the 'container revolution' in the post-war period. Work remained a manual skill.

As the wage question has not been studied in detail, all that can be said is that the dockers were relatively well paid. By 1913 dockers were the best paid single group among the unskilled labourers, measured by the hour. Even if dockers were usually relatively well paid by the day, this did not mean that they also had a high annual income. Because of the casual nature of work, only those who had fairly regular work had a relatively high annual income. For the majority, life was characterised by a high degree of income insecurity as well as insecurity at the workplace. In a long perspective wages rose all the time, and around 1970 the most regularly employed dockers were fairly well paid. Others, who were not able

to obtain as much work, on a yearly basis did not have more than perhaps half the income of those working regularly the whole year through.

The culture of dock work

Four major factors must be taken into account to explain the long persistence of the culture of dock work. One factor is the prevalence of the system of casual employment and its influence on the collective attitudes of the dockers, especially the concept of freedom. A second factor is the way in which dock work has been organised up to today: that it has been performed in gangs, which require the intimate co-operation of the men. Thus, the terms of work helped to produce an extraordinary solidarity and quixotic generosity among the dockers. A third factor can be found in the fact that dock work remained all the time very labour-intensive involving hard physical work. Despite ongoing introduction of new technologies there were always some pockets of conventional cargo-handling techniques and some hard, manual labour which survived. Besides, dock work was still a dirty, exposed and dangerous occupation – even in the sections of the harbour that were dominated by new handling techniques. It was still a rough, unpleasant and demanding job, which needed to be met with a profoundly masculine attitude. Thus the fourth condition that has contributed to the persistence of the dockworker subculture is the fact that dock work is an entirely male occupation.

Most of the men who migrated to Aarhus from the countryside during the last decades of the nineteenth century, as well as later on, were men socialised to a traditional, pre-industrial rhythm of work and leisure. To many of these men the work in the docks undoubtedly had a strong appeal. It was, unlike factory work, connected with some of the freedom they knew from the countryside. Instead of working indoors on a shop floor and under close supervision, they preferred to work in the open and with a relative freedom to act on their own. Work in the docks was prized because it allowed the docker a measure of control over the disposition of his time and effort. When a gang of dockers was hired for a job, it was hired to work until it had finished the job. The dockers could often expect to remain on a job for twenty-four hours or more before having a period of recuperation. But they did not have to go to work every day if they did not want to. They could decide to take a day off if they wanted to.

To these men the tradition of 'episodic work' was already well known. The alternating rhythm of intensity and slack time recalled some of the traditions of agricultural labour. A traditional, almost pre-industrial rhythm of work and leisure thus persisted in the docks. If agricultural work, in a way, predisposed them to doing casual work, the rural background may also have helped the dockers to accept hard labour and extraordinarily long hours. The men actually preferred long spells of continuous work by day and night, followed by two or three days of complete idleness. It supported their concept of freedom and was, at the same time, consistent with the work ethic created by their rural background.

The dockers have been characterised as 'free birds'. They took the work that suited them, just as they were accustomed to act and think independently in their

work. The irregular employment conditions and the casual labour system freed them from the necessity to work a continuous six-day week. They were free to take a day or two off, when they thought they had earned enough. In their interpretation the casual system gave them a freedom enjoyed by no other group of workers. This conception of freedom was further strengthened by a far-reaching freedom and autonomy in the work-processes. But although the feeling of freedom was based on certain realities, it was in a sense also 'a virtue made of necessity'.

Beneath the freedom was the uncertainty, the shortsighted life perspective produced by the instability of their life situation, a condition which was created by the problem of constant underemployment in the docks. Dockers were usually employed and paid for a period no longer than a day or half a day. Thus, casual work, which gave the dockers a shortsighted perspective on employment as well as on life, was also the basis of a life pattern characterised by living from day to day and from hand to mouth (sometimes called a 'culture of poverty').¹³

The low degree of mechanisation meant that dockwork – even when cranes were used – was a manual skill requiring physical strength, dexterity, ability to work long and hard, special occupational skills, ingenuity, and the capacity to coordinate one's moves and routines with the other men in the gang. These qualities were cultivated and admired by the dockers. The casual system and the teamwork of the gangs played an important role in the working practices and the work culture. Dock work was mainly piece work, and each docker knew that his income depended on the work abilities of the other men in the gang. This arrangement encouraged a close co-operation and a work ethic of hard labour. The men knew that the harder they worked, the more they earned. Accordingly they really worked like donkeys. A docker also knew that his safety depended on the skill of the other men and the accuracy of their moves. This interdependence was rooted in the organisation of work and significantly contributed to the dockers' mutual solidarity and loyalty, to the constitution of 'we-feelings', comradeship and sharing. There were very distinct moral rules concerning how to behave towards a 'mate', and normally this meant that there was a special good fellowship and a very strong group solidarity, especially in the gangs. Solidarity was also encouraged by the relative homogeneity of the workforce. The men were almost equally poor, they did basically the same kind of work, no one was more important than anyone else, and they all had approximately the same amount of work (and accordingly the same income), or at least the dockers strove to make this equality real.

It almost always took some time to become a member of a regular gang. A new worker had to become accustomed to the situation, learn the basic skills and ways of sociability before he was accepted as 'one of them', before he had acquired his real identity as a docker. Furthermore, a new worker was often subjected to a kind of test, which he had to pass, before he was taken in. The men wanted to see if they could chase the newcomer away. He had to show his ability to work hard and long, that he had the potential to become 'one of them'. This schooling in the trade was absolutely essential for the preservation of dockers' culture. As most

¹³ Cf. e.g. Grüttner, M., *Arbeitswelt an der Wasserkante*, (Göttingen, 1984), p. 101.

dock labour remained hard physical work, strength and toughness continued to play an important role. The work was still tough, unpleasant and dangerous, and the workplace was dominated by men and men's values. The profoundly masculine ethos of the dockers had its expression in their social intercourse, which reflected a genuine working-class masculinity, to which I will later return.

Housing and living

Compared with other ports Aarhus was relatively small, and the process of industrialisation and urbanisation was nowhere near as developed as in the big cities. The port, however, had long been considered as 'the heart of the town', and it certainly had a big influence on the local economy. Work stoppages immediately influenced almost all trades and industrial sectors of the town. In the town council it was seen as in the best interest of the whole town that shipping functioned optimally. Thus, the local power elite was eager to ensure that the circulation of goods had as favourable terms as possible. This meant that trade and industry generally could rely on a favourable reply to requests for new port enlargements, railway tracks, accommodation, and warehouses. Consequently, after the opening of the first railway in 1862 and the expansion of the railway system in the following years, the port has been enlarged several times during the last 125 years.¹⁴

Industry in Aarhus served the farmers with machines and feeding stuff. By the end of the nineteenth century trade was to a great extent based on agricultural products, which were bought up and exported to England. While previously the main export had been grain, in the 1870s agriculture was reoriented towards the export of animal products (bacon, butter and eggs). This rearrangement was caused by growing imports of grain and feeding stuffs for the agricultural market. Indeed, the biggest single factory of the town was an oil factory, which used imported soya to produce oil cakes for agriculture. The main importers were timber-firms, coal-firms, feeding stuff firms and oil mills. The port firms were relatively big, mainly importing coal for private heating and for the municipal works, wood for construction, and feeding stuffs such as soya beans, copra, peanuts, palm kernels, cotton seed cakes, linseed cake, corn and maize. Besides this, the town had several engine works, supplying farmers with different machines. Many of the business men and merchants in town were also ship owners and importers of consumption goods.

At the turn of the century the dockers lived relatively close to the harbour and near to one another in typical working-class neighbourhoods. These were the parts of town closest to the harbour (the old centre of the town), and new working-class districts like *Sjællandsgade* and *Trøjborg*, which lay not as close to the docks, but were cheap, and within walking distance of the docks. At a time when people had to walk to work, it was important to live near the docks in order to get work when it was available. However, the relatively small size of the town meant that many dockers preferred to live in new districts on the periphery of the town. The flats

¹⁴ Cf. Sejr, E., *Træk af Aarhus Havns Historie*, (Aarhus, 1937).

here were cheaper, at some times even free, because it was difficult for the owners to let such new, barely dry flats 'outside' the town. So these districts also became dominated by unskilled workers.

Many of the dwellings were overcrowded small flats, and dockers often had to take in lodgers in order to pay the rent. These conditions gave little opportunity for privacy, and much of life often took place on the streets and the spaces outside the narrow flats. In recent research this way of dwelling has been characterised by the term of 'half-open family structure'.¹⁵ The dockers' own accounts bear witness of a strong group solidarity in such living quarters. Research into the social structure of these districts demonstrates that they were dominated by workers; more than two-thirds of the population belonged to the working-class, and the great majority of the working-class population was made up of unskilled workers. The instability of the work situation of the dockers was extended to the sphere of home-life, and families with an unsteady income had to take the poorer and cheaper flats. Thus dockers often accumulated in the worst flats in certain slum districts. Here the danger of falling into the lumpenproletariat made them base their life on hard work and a fight for respectability. Some of them did not manage this, and they did indeed sink into the lumpenproletariat.

Although the dockers lived in crowded slum areas with a bad reputation, there are no indications that these areas were perceived as a threat to the established order. The dockers were discriminated against by the surrounding community, partly because of their dirty job and partly because of their reputation as drunkards. However, in Aarhus there were no major riots and no 'red Wednesday' with suffrage disturbances like those for instance in Hamburg in 1906. Neither was any step taken by the municipal authorities to improve the housing conditions of the people in these areas. On the contrary, time after time dispensations were given by the local government to builders who wanted to build houses even closer to each other.

However, the dockers were exposed to 'civilising' efforts from several sides. First and foremost the employers were interested in having a sober and industrious workforce. Endeavours in this direction were central in gaining control over the workers. Among the dockers, however, drinking during working hours was a part of normal behaviour. So, the efforts of the employers were met with resistance. For instance, when the employers in 1886 sought to gain more control over alcohol consumption during working hours, the dockers refused to work before the order not to pick up beer during working hours was withdrawn.

The church also showed an interest in influencing the dockers. In 1889, for example, an application was addressed to the port authorities for permission to use the dockers' waiting room for a series of lectures, given by the local clergy. A bookcase full of books was placed in the same rooms by the trade and clerical association. The character of these books is not known, but the aim of influencing the dockers ideologically and morally seems clear.

In the 1880s medical doctors repeatedly warned against the rise of a large drunken proletariat, mainly originating from migrating farm labourers, hanging

¹⁵ Cf. Brüggemeier, F.-J., *Leben vor Ort: Ruhrbergleute und Ruhrbergbau 1889–1919*, (München, 1983).

around in town without any desire to work. As a reaction to this situation, maintained by the unceasing rush of new individuals, the first temperance societies were constituted in the 1880s and 1890s. An essential aim of these societies was to 'domesticate' those men whose drinking ruined the economy of their families. For the dockers, they thought, it was better to become aware of the family as a precious emotional unit that had to be protected with privacy, than to spend so much time with their drinking comrades. And alcohol actually destroyed many families. To prevent such consequences the temperance movement sought to install a teetotaler barman in the house where the dockers waited for the arrival of the ships. However, some of the dockers just reacted by going to other bars or to illicit shops to get their drink. They seemed unwilling to give up their own lifestyle and allow themselves to become 'civilised'.

The nature of association among the dockers off-the-job is another factor in the constitution of their 'occupational community'. The dockers had their own cultural organisations such as a choral society (founded 1921), an athletic association (founded 1938) and allotment gardens. Besides, the waterfront neighbourhoods eventually became communities made up largely of dockers. In their leisure time dockers socialised more with people in their own line of work than with a cross-section of occupational types. Partly for this reason they often spent much of their leisure time together in pubs, coffee rooms, sheds or warehouses near the docks, waiting for the next ship to come in. In 1918 a housing association was constituted, and in 1919 a block of houses was built for dockers only.

For the second and third generation of dockers recruitment to dockwork was to a considerable extent kin-based. This also helped to produce a coherent 'occupational culture'. Many sons were more or less socialised into dock-work. It was common for sons of dockers to start working in the docks as soon as they were old enough, and many families had a long tradition of working in the docks. By these ties of kinship dockers were often integrated into a clan-like structure, and thus the family functioned as an agency of tradition.

These closely-knit communities began to erode during the 1950s and especially the 1960s. The conditions under which dockers lived and worked altered drastically during these decades, and the rise of the 'affluent society' led to lasting changes in the conditions of dockers. These years saw an end to poverty and led to big improvements in living conditions. Even though the improvements did not lead to financial security and regular employment, the long hours of working meant that dockers were among the highest paid of all workers. The higher earnings of this period were accompanied by changes in the dockers' traditional pattern of life to one closer to that of other wage earners. Even though there may have been a considerable element of unassimilated persons in the work force, the dockers generally became a group more integrated in wider society.

For workers in regular employment, the 1960s saw an improvement in living standards. Wages rose rapidly, and formerly middle-class possessions could be found in most homes. Manual workers became owners of washing-machines, refrigerators, telephones and televisions. When the dockers became car-owners there was no need for them to keep living in the districts near the waterfront any longer. The improvement in their standard of living meant that they wanted to

spend more time than previously in their homes. Accordingly the attachment to the workplace weakened, and they took up more 'instrumental' orientations to work. Generally there was a shift in the search for satisfaction, away from the male sociability at the workplace towards the home and consumption. It became more likely that they would perceive the docks as any other workplace and leave it as soon as work finished. It also looks as if the gangs lost some of their importance. They did not keep together as much as before. This may also be a result of the changes in work, because the intimate co-operation in the gangs was not needed as much as formerly. The fact that dockers were no longer 'one big family' in their gangs and no longer so much together in their spare time seemed to weaken their noted solidarity. However, this tendency to some extent was countered by the dockers' unchanging marked preference for spending their time together in the shelters of the port, talking, drinking beer and playing cards.

In the 1960s and 1970s some of the inhabitants of the dockers' old residential communities moved out to the new suburbs on the outskirts of town. Although it has not been investigated,¹⁶ many dockers presumably moved to better houses outside the dockside area. This means that one of the factors that made the dockers form a well-knit social group within the wider community almost disappeared. However, the dockers to some degree still kept their traditional image as a low-status group.

Workers' culture

A distinct form of workers' culture developed as a reaction – and an answer – to the dockers' material living conditions. Looking at these conditions we find several factors tending to produce a distinct lifestyle: the wage relation, the system of casual employment, poverty, and so on. Expressions of this culture such as slang, songs, working-class masculinity, violence, drinking and pilfering can be traced.

Dockers' culture is characterised by several ambiguities, especially the dialectic between individualism and collectivism. Usually workers' culture is seen as constituted by its basic collectivity, the affinity and solidarity between the workers. However, as sons of farmers and agricultural labourers the dockers in Aarhus preserved many habits from the countryside, which gave them a rather individualistic outlook on life. Accordingly they had both individualistic attitudes – for instance in their conceptions of freedom and honour – and collectivist attitudes – for instance in their generosity and egalitarian efforts.

First of all the dockers' culture was characterised by masculinity and toughness. Bodily experience and body language may be seen as elements of dockers' *class habitus*. Pierre Bourdieu mentions the 'physical habitus' as a

¹⁶ Investigations in Copenhagen in the early 1970s show a concentration of dock workers in typical working-class living areas near the docks. Few dockers – absolutely and relatively – lived in the suburban areas. Cf. Larsen, *Havneseamfundet*, pp. 92 *et seq.*

salient dimension of a class habitus.¹⁷ Accordingly curses, killing replies, small scuffles, gestures of defiance, fights and so on can all be seen as expressions of strength, expressions which functioned as a part of the men's trials of strength. Their ritualised status-games such as physical contests or social drinking functioned as a kind of 'trial' of physical, economic and social achievement. In this interpretation the dockers' valorisation of physical strength (and of everything that produced or supported it: strong food and drink, heavy work and exercise) as a fundamental aspect of virility, may be related to the fact that dockers more than any other group of workers depended on sheer muscle power. There was an elemental masculine self-esteem in doing a hard job well, and this fact made the dockers a very self-conscious group. They were well aware of their own capabilities and their own indispensability: without their muscle and dexterity the work could not be done.

The valorisation of virility and masculinity was due to the fact that earning a living depended on physical strength. The docks were a relatively closed and separate world, a man's world, in which women seldom appeared. The men's values were typically masculine values, and this showed up in drinking invitations, boasting, story telling and sexist attitudes. The fact that it was an entirely male occupation thus may have caused a blatant sexism in the dockers' 'macho' self-image. Sexism was an integral part of their masculine culture. However, the dockers' culture just reflected a sexism and a form of masculine chauvinism that was typical of the shop-floor culture of the working class. Talk and jokes about sex were a part of the conversation. Among the men women were often viewed as sexual objects, and the men often worked in an atmosphere thick with male jokes and sexual remarks. Dirty stories and rough argot had to be accepted.

The kind of working-class speech spoken in the docks was immediate, direct, clear and expressive. The dockers had their own peculiar argot and language of work that had to be learned by a newcomer before he could become fully accepted by the elder workers. There was a coarse and rough tone between the men. Aggression was expressed directly, and much conversation was on a 'give as good as you get' basis. Nicknames were common. By swearing and drinking the men might emphasise their manliness. Heavy drinking was seen as a proof of manliness. If they did not drink, curse, swear or use the jargon it might be taken as a sign of 'unmanliness'.

Physical contact between the workers was not unusual. On the way to work one docker might collide with another, and the men might snarl at each other and say coarse things. However, this did not mean anything serious, and in a few minutes it was forgotten. It was just the way language was used amongst the dockers.

Presumably this direct and unostentatious way of socialising with each other was rooted in the extraordinary roughness of the conditions of work. The rough sociability expressed itself in a particular idiom of the port, with a rustic story-telling tradition and the ability to deliver killing replies during an argument.

¹⁷ Bourdieu, P., *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, (London, 1984), p. 384.

Another side of this sociability was straightforwardness, liberality and generosity, an attitude of brotherhood towards fellow workers. Feelings of honour, loyalty and upright attitudes towards one another were essential.

An especially tough form of camaraderie dominated. Often the men 'took the piss out of each other', and a 'bloody fool' was mobbed out. There was no room for 'soft soaping', egoists and bad mates. To stay in the docks you would have to understand the common values that kept the men together. Toughness and roughness was central in the group-feeling – and in consequence of that one of the things that defined the dockworker's identity. How far a newcomer would succeed in becoming a docker depended – among other things – on this: was he able or not to hold his own and stand up to the male sociability, the tone and the language. If he was 'soft' and not able to retort, he would not be allowed to enter the community.

From the outside the dockers were often met with discrimination by the surrounding society. Often they were stigmatised as 'drunkards' and 'roughs'. The dockers' wives were sensitive to such stigmatisation. The role of drinking during and after work as well as pilfering and other petty crime at the workplace helped to nourish myths about dockers and isolate them as a separate group in urban society. The dockers reacted to discrimination through sceptical attitudes towards employers, the bourgeoisie and the institutions of the civil society (such as schools or the public assistance office).

Attitudes of mind and patterns of behaviour that were formerly typical of the dockside seemed to endure into the era of containerisation and high technology. New technology changed work conditions and the nature of work considerably. These changes affected the men and the social relationships between them, but in spite of the changes the dockers kept their own conception of freedom, good fellowship, solidarity and extraordinary on-the-job militancy. Maybe there was not the same need of physical strength as previously, but the dockers still valued it as well as other things associated with masculine capacity.

The government and dock labour

Even if the extensive migration from the countryside and the rapid transformation of Aarhus created huge social problems, up to the end of nineteenth century poor relief was the only social benefit of significance offered by the public authorities. Little help was offered to the poor, the old, the unemployed and the homeless by private charity. Housing shortages were extensive. The old-age asylum only had room for forty-five persons, which was insufficient, and there was no orphanage for children. In 1870 a poorhouse was built, which was considered progress, but far from enough.¹⁸ However, the miserable social conditions fertilised the soil for socialism, and gradually the conditions were improved by legislation. Important legislation on old-age pensions for the 'deserving poor' was adopted in 1891, and again in 1892 over state aid to health insurance societies. In 1898 – when 2,500

¹⁸ Cf. Nielsen, K., *100 år i solidaritetens tjeneste*, (Aarhus 1983), pp. 9ff; Gejl, I., *Under værgerådet*, (Aarhus, 1967), p. 10.

persons, or 6 per cent of the population of Aarhus, were on poor relief – legislation over accident insurance followed. In 1907 an unemployment fund was constituted by the dockers as a result of a new act over state aid to unemployment funds connected with the unions. Until then help for dockers getting ill, being hit by industrial accident or by unemployment was mainly organised by the dockers themselves. Indeed the dockers' trade-union originally was constituted in 1881 as a mutual benefit and sick benefit association for all unskilled labourers in Aarhus and its surroundings.¹⁹

During the twentieth century the government primarily fulfilled a role as a granter of unemployment relief for dockers who did not get a job despite appearing at the hiring place three or four times a day. Before the 1933 Social Act relief was very low, and the risk of being forced onto dishonourable poor relief was great.

Before the turn of the century the municipal government was dominated by the ruling class and the party *Højre*, but after 1900 the Social Democratic party – which was founded in 1871 as a Danish section of the International Workingmen's Association – was represented in the most important committees of the town council. In the municipal election in 1909 the Social Democratic Party won a majority in the town council, and its election victories in 1909 and 1917 prepared the way for a reform of municipal institutions such as schools and hospitals, which were transformed into public institutions for all citizens. These reforms also marked important steps in the movement away from the Night Watchman State and the Liberal Social Security State of the nineteenth century 'towards the early Danish welfare model with increased social benefits for a growing number of citizens combined with universal benefits in restricted fields'.²⁰ The role of the Social Democratic municipality is to be stressed. The Social Democrats used their influence among other things to secure some work for the Dockers' Co-operative Stevedore Club, which carried out work for the municipality. Indeed one of the dockers who founded the Dockers' Stevedore Club was on the town council from 1908 to 1922. Municipal socialism was in some ways a forceful reality in Aarhus.

The labour movement

In Aarhus the first trade unions emerged in 1871 as sections of the International Workingmen's Association, and the first trade-union federations were founded in the latter half of the 1880s. In 1878 a national Social Democratic party was constituted as a political party separate from the trade-union movement. Its portion of the vote rose with almost every subsequent election, from 5 per cent of

¹⁹ Jensen, H., *Arbejdsmændenes Fagforening Afdeling A, Århus, 1889–1949*, (Aarhus, 1949), p. 6.

²⁰ Kolstrup, S., *Velfærdsstatens rødder: Fra kommunesocialisme til folkepension*, (Copenhagen, 1996), p. 462.

the vote in 1884 to 25 per cent in 1906.²¹ In a few decades the rapidly expanding labour movement seemed to become a dominant social force. During the last two decades of the nineteenth century Aarhus saw an expanding labour movement and around the turn of the century the town had become a stronghold of Social Democracy.

Aarhus was not industrialised to anything like the same extent as big cities such as Copenhagen, and at the turn of the century its working class had still an almost pre-industrial character, being mainly composed of artisans, a few factory workers (especially in brewing, tobacco, textiles, and the metal and machine industries) and some unskilled workers. The artisans who had been organised in guilds up to 1857 were the first to organise trade unions in the 1870s and 1880s, and became the nucleus of organised labour during the early phase. They were skilled workers and did not welcome the organisation of the unskilled, because – as they said – these had never learned a trade. The skilled workers were not yet ready to support the struggles of the unskilled as well as women. During the 1870s and 1880s the artisans were the spearhead of the constitution of the first trade unions, and when the labour movement spread to groups of unskilled workers, they continued to dominate the movement.

When a dockers' trade union was founded in 1885, it was joined by eighty-six out of 450 dockers, and during the following years the number slowly grew. However, the high fluctuation among the casual workers no doubt was a hindrance to a lasting consolidation.

One of the aims of the union at its constitution was to render superfluous the foremen, who got the contracts for work on the different ships and consequently scored the profit. The union's efforts were mainly aimed at the foreman-as-institution. The dockers simply wanted to take over these negotiations by themselves, that is to take over the role of the foremen. Accordingly the efforts of the dockers involved an element of 'proletarian self-organisation'.

This attempt to bring control into their own hands was not totally unrealistic in a situation where anyone was allowed to initiate stevedore work as a private entrepreneur. Furthermore the employers were unorganised and relatively weak. An illustrative parallel to Aarhus is Norrköping in Sweden, where the dockers in the 1890s were able to gain complete control over the labour process in the port. Here a union was constituted in 1891, and in the same year the union started to take over the work in the port on a co-operative basis. However, after an extensive labour-conflict in 1907–08 the co-operative organisation lost its position of power. The decisive factor in this outcome was the near total mobilisation of the resources of power at the disposal of the employers on a national level.²²

Another central demand put forward by the Aarhus union in 1885 was that union members should be hired mainly. In the years up to 1897 the dockers' union struggled to gain control over the labour market, forcing the employers to employ union members only. The principal aim was to keep unorganised labour away

²¹ Logue, J., *Socialism and Abundance: Radical Socialism in the Welfare State. A Study of the Danish Socialist People's Party*, (Copenhagen, 1982), p. 57.

²² Johansson, I., *Strejken som vapen: Fackföreningar och strejker i Norrköping 1870–1910*, (Stockholm, 1982).

from the docks in order to secure the jobs for the organised workers. Especially in wintertime the influx of labour from other trades and from the countryside was extensive. In a situation with a big surplus of labour it was easy for the employers to use such people for purposes of sweating and, in strikes, as strike-breakers. Right from its start the union was characterised by a tendency to protect the group of organised dockers from competition from outside.

A third central demand was a collective agreement on wages by the day, piece-work rates and a complete fixed price. Thus, a main object of the union was to be recognised by the employers as a negotiation partner. However, in the beginning the local employers would not tolerate trade unions in their workplaces. Although the union gradually succeeded in securing precedence for its members for vacant jobs, the employers did not want to acknowledge the union. So, the endeavours of the dockers' union were met by the employers' collective counter-mobilisation, including both the foundation of an association of employers in the port in 1895 and a new labour exchange (*Aarhus Stevedore Company*) in 1896. All dock work was to be organised through this company, and no worker would be able to get work except through the company. The dockers' unionisation thus provoked the employers into undertaking a complete reconstruction of the organisation of the work force. With the foundation of the association the employers not only created for themselves an instrument that strengthened their position on the labour market but also made it possible to create a new, privileged group of dockers whose interests were bound up with those of the employers.

That being the case the Aarhus dockers were in a weak position when they decided to enter a strike in solidarity with the Hamburg dockers in 1897. The employers imported many strike-breakers from the countryside, with whom they were able to continue the work. Also during the strike an alternative 'yellow' union was constituted by the employers. At the end of the strike some of the imported strike-breakers were employed on individual long-term contracts under privileged conditions. The struggle ended with the defeat of the 'old' dock workers, and those of them who wanted to go back to work had to accept the contracts, which required full loyalty to the employers and made strikes and work stoppages impossible. Furthermore, they had to work together with the 'contract workers', the former strike-breakers. Those of the men who could not get back to work sought to ward off the consequences – unemployment and distress – by constituting a Dockers' Co-operative Stevedore Club, which operated on the labour market right up to 1966 as a competitor to the employers' stevedore company.

After the strike in 1897 the union was seriously weakened, and the employers could on the whole accomplish all the changes they wanted. In the following period the employers extended their control of the labour market, and the contract system was extended to all workers. So the 1897 strike meant a considerable change in the balance of power, to the advantage of the employers. United behind their new stevedore company they started to enter into personal contracts with their workers. Included in the contracts were rules about orderly conduct and stipulations that a certain part of the earnings should be deposited with the stevedore company as a guarantee for the fulfilment of the contract. To those who kept the rules a good income and guarantee of work was promised. Thus the

workers were stratified into groups, so that regular contract workers were preferred to irregular workers. The influence of the union was broken, and union members were reduced to irregular workers. During the strike almost all the dockers had joined the union, but as a result of the defeat, they did not remain there. Consequently, a year later, out of approximately 500 dockers only 176 were union members. The union only slowly regained its strength, and in 1903 the dockers' union had still less than 400 members out of a total of roughly 500–600 dockers. The period from 1897 to 1908 was a phase in which the union was almost defeated and trade union power only slowly rebuilt.

The members of the Dockers' Co-operative Stevedore Club were hired to work by turns according to the number of their membership card. This was a way of preventing the injustice (favouritism) caused by the employers' system of hiring, where certain workers, loyal to the employers, were always preferred, while others (less submissive) were often passed over. By insisting on a hiring procedure which meant that everybody was employed in turn the dockers demonstrated their ideals of equality and social justice. And by equalising their job-opportunity the dockers also helped to equalise their income.

The club was not unsuccessful, but due to the limited amount of work it could get it was only able to employ a very small proportion of the dockers. In 1924 there were about 400 members out of a total of about 1,000 dockers. There were certain membership rules, for instance members should also be union members and have been employed at least one year in the docks. Before joining members had to buy a share in the club. However, the club never managed to gain so much work that it became a real threat to the employers' stevedore company. Most of the work captured by the club was for the municipality (coal for the gas works) and for a couple of the large co-operative companies which served the agricultural sector. In Denmark the co-operative movement within agriculture was very strong. However, in situations of labour conflict the club was a power resource, which could be mobilised against the employers.

In the years immediately after 1897 the club was able to secure some work for the former union activists from the 1897 strike, who had been blacklisted by the employers, and who did not want to work alongside the former strike-breakers. On the wider labour market controlled by the Stevedore Company these activists remained peripheral workers for several years. The dockers' union was not recognised as a 'negotiating partner' until 1908. During World War I and the immediate post-war period the dockers consolidated their power, partly by getting more work for club members, partly by reducing the recruitment of new dockers by setting an upper limit for the number of union members.

Life style, radicalism and collective action

As early as the 1870s the dockers were willing to start strikes and join labour conflicts. The typical strike pattern was the spontaneous strike, not controlled by the union. The spontaneous manifestation of the dockers' collectivity is important, partly because their solidarity may be seen as a prime source of their power. However, a number of other circumstances influenced the ability of the workers to

engage in collective action. As Kim Voss has pointed out, the traditional Marxist assumption that 'the capacity for collective action develops automatically with the productive forces' has not been corroborated. Collective action, as Voss states, is inherently difficult, for one thing because 'it requires resources and organisational capacity as well as shared grievances and generalised discontent'.²³

When work in the docks stopped, business was threatened immediately and suffered deeply. Accordingly work stoppages were an important weapon for the dockers. This gave them a central position in negotiations with the employers. Nevertheless, the employers had their own strategies in struggles with the dockers, and the dockers were not always eager to follow their union leaders in such struggles. The rank and file often tended to react more spontaneously and independently than their leaders wanted. The old generation of dockers from about the turn of the century can be described as having a disorderly, 'chaotic' lifestyle, characterised by autonomy, freedom and an ability to initiate their own protest actions without consulting the union leadership. Later in the century, when union leaders had gained more control over their members, the dockers were still an unusually radical and militant group of workers, frequently willing to strike or stop work and with a tendency to join 'wildcat strikes'. The Aarhus material bears witness to the existence of inconsistencies and disagreements between union leaders and ordinary members. It seems that many of the rank and file were accused by the leaders of lack of understanding of the dockers' long-term interests, for instance by following their own personal interests, disobeying the rules of the union and the co-operative undertaking, or by getting drunk during work.

In situations of conflict the union leaders especially emphasised the necessity of acting with more dignity: if the workers took to drinking and behaved like a 'mob', the workers, the unions and the whole labour movement would not be respected by the employers and the authorities. At the turn of the century power was still totally in the hands of the employers. The bourgeoisie and the local power elite, represented through the right-wing (*Højre*) party, were the absolute rulers in the town council, and many workers did not have the vote. The ulterior strategy of the labour movement was to gain political influence in parliament and in the town council, and the dockers were through their affiliation to the movement subsumed under this strategy. One central aspect of the Social Democrat strategy was to demonstrate that the workers were honourable and respectable people, to whom responsibility for state and municipality could be entrusted. Also, in order to make the employers accept the union as a trustworthy negotiating partner, it was necessary for its members to submit to its decisions and behave in a disciplined way. In this respect the labour movement and the union had a clear disciplinary and socialising aim.

In Aarhus the contract worker system with its individual work contracts was used in the industry as a general employer strategy against the growing power of the labour movement in the 1890s. In contrast to Copenhagen, where the industrial employers had a more positive attitude to trade unions, the employers in

²³ Voss, K., 'Labor organization and class alliance: industries, communities and the Knights of Labor', *Theory and Society*, 17, (1988), p. 330.

Aarhus used a hard, paternalist strategy as a last defence against the recognition of the unions. In Copenhagen the factory owners were ready to recognise and negotiate with the unions long before the so-called ‘September Agreement’ in 1899, which confirmed an institutionalised nation-wide system of collective bargaining.

In many trades the unions managed to organise the great majority of employees, and the strength of the unions forced the employers to a corresponding organisation. This paved the way for the establishment of an institutionalised bargaining system for the labour market. The trade union movement was gradually centralised in national unions and forced the employers to form a corresponding national organisation. This development had profound consequences for industrial relations. Class conflict and industrial relations assumed a nation-wide and synchronised character, which together with the establishment of an institutionalised bargaining system was quite essential for the process of growing control by the unions over their members. The growing centralisation of employer and union resources actually tended to reduce the element of spontaneity in favour of planning and strategic rationalism. Thus, this bureaucratic system sometimes came to limit worker solidarity and the emergence of what Rick Fantasia calls ‘cultures of solidarity’.²⁴

During the first decades of the twentieth century spontaneous and direct forms of action were superseded by more rational and organised forms of collective action organised by the union, and to some extent built on a ‘partnership’ between capital and labour. However, the disorderly tendencies among the rank and file were not entirely incorporated and integrated into the institutionalised labour movement.

How the shop floor militancy of the dockers inter-related with their political affiliations has not yet been investigated. But as already suggested we have evidence that there was a latent conflict between the ideas and strategies of the leaders and the behaviour of rank-and-file union members. However, it has not, from the available sources, been possible to investigate, how the dockers’ political attitudes were reflected in their voting behaviour. As far as known the dockers generally tended to support the social democratic movement. For instance, during the years 1910–19 the leader of the union was a Social Democrat, and so was the leader of the Co-operative Stevedore Club between 1903 and 1919. However, during World War I, the syndicalist movement – a union opposition especially characterised by direct action tactics – was supported by an increasing number of workers, and presumably also by a good number of dockers.

During World War I, which brought hardship and distress, the militancy of the dockers increased. Due to the war there was a lot of extra work in the port, and the dockers increased in number. Generally, however, the wartime period was characterised by scarcity, high prices, high unemployment rates and social unrest. Class inequalities were widened, and in most bigger towns the syndicalist movement increased its following. In several towns there were clashes between the police and the syndicalists. For instance, in Aarhus in November 1918 for the

²⁴ Fantasia, R., *Cultures of Solidarity: Consciousness, Action, and Contemporary American Workers*, (Berkeley, 1988).

first time in the history of the town it came to a violent clash between police and demonstrators.

In connection with a political crisis in spring 1920 the Seamen's Union – which was dominated by syndicalists and left socialists – struck for some weeks. They were joined by the dockers, who refused to load and discharge the ships, which were blocked by the seamen. As a consequence the agricultural products destined for England accumulated in the port. In this situation the shipowners recruited voluntary labourers from a Copenhagen strike-breaker organisation called *Samfundshjælpen* (The Help of Society). The port was barred by the police in order to protect the volunteers, and mounted police were brought into action in order to clear the crowd. Even the military was thrown in to assist the police, but it was met with stones from the crowd. When the policemen drew their truncheons it came to a clash between the police and the crowd. However, with the help of the strike breakers the export boats were loaded and left the port.²⁵ Only once more, in connection with the big transport worker strike in spring 1925, was *Samfundshjælpen* used by employers in the port of Aarhus.

Syndicalism never had many followers among the dockers in Aarhus. War time was an exceptional period. In the years after World War I the syndicalist movement withered away. The crisis in the 1930s gave the communists wind in their sails, and during this period there were many small strikes and work stoppages in the port of Aarhus. The leader of the dockers' union, although a Social Democrat, adopted a quite combative stance.

During World War II, when Denmark was occupied by the Germans, dock workers did not want to work for the German troops. Some of them looked for work elsewhere, and in the port the remaining dockers reduced speed. Working for the Germans among other things meant having to load weapons and ammunition from railway wagons to ships, a job which was not without risk for the dockers and warehouse workers doing it. When a German ship with weapons and ammunition exploded on 4 July 1944, thirty-three Danish workers – including sixteen dockers – were killed.

After World War II another Social Democrat took over as the leader of the union. However, in the 1950s and 1960s the communists gained some influence in the union, and in the 1960s the union was even led by a communist. Right up until today dockers have proved to be a militant group, most recently in strikes in 1961 and 1982–83. In 1961 when the dockers physically blocked a ferry they were met with forceful police violence.

The international orientation of the Aarhus dockers has not been studied thoroughly, but it has been outspoken, right from the solidarity strike with the Hamburg dockers in 1897 up to the membership and activities in the ITF in more recent times. During a labour conflict in 1905, when 3,000 Swedish unskilled labourers were hit by a lock-out, the international solidarity of Danish labourers was shown in practice for the first time. The federation of Danish unskilled labourers – and among these were Aarhus dockers – helped their Swedish fellow

²⁵ See Rishøj, H., *Århus i krisetider*, (Aarhus, 1980), pp. 33–43; Nielsen, *100 år i solidaritetens tjeneste*, pp. 67 et seq.

workers with a cash payment of 54,590 Danish crowns, a very large amount by the standards of the time.²⁶

Conclusion

It is not possible to generalise from Aarhus to other Danish ports, and there are no comprehensive historical studies of dock labour in these ports. Regarding work conditions and culture much will have been the same. However, regarding militancy and radicalism the situation may have varied in other ports. The Aarhus union was not an especially strong bastion of syndicalist or communist unionism, and things may have been different elsewhere. For instance, during World War I and its immediate aftermath the dock workers in Copenhagen were one of the core groups of the syndicalist opposition.

In Aarhus dock work has remained casual work right up to our own time. The Aarhus dockers still have to report to the call stand every morning at 7.00 a.m. and 10.00 a.m. The foreman from the Aarhus Stevedore Company places himself on a stand and shout the names of the workers he needs, and the rest of the dockers go home again. Here the situation is different again from that in Copenhagen, where all dock workers became permanently employed in 1987 by signing a local agreement with the employers. When the Aarhus dockers declined to accept decasualisation as proposed several times by the employers, it was partly because it seemed incompatible with their own conception of 'freedom'. The resistance to decasualisation was not due to fear of 'exploitation', but to a fear of losing the 'freedom' associated with the casual system. This resistance has continued right up until today.

²⁶ Andersen, O. (ed.), *Strejflys i tekst og billeder over en faglig indsats i anledning af Dansk Arbejdsmands – og Specialarbejder Forbunds 75 års jubilæum*, (Copenhagen, 1972), p. 20.

CHAPTER THREE

Race and labour in a Southern US port: New Orleans, 1860–1930

Eric Arnesen

Historiography, methodology, sources

In the nineteenth century, the activity on the Mississippi river waterfront of New Orleans attracted the interest of countless visitors, who recorded their impressions in numerous travel guides and memoirs. Their attention was riveted on the 'unbroken line' of the 'legions of steamers' from 'every part of the world', a veritable 'forest of ships'; on the hundreds of steamboats, resembling 'immense floating castles and palaces' or 'floating store-houses'; on the 'pyramids' of cotton piled stories-high on the docks; and on the 'busy, bustling scene' involving an army of labouring men who 'swarmed' over the docks and on board vessels to load, unload, and transport the cotton, sugar, molasses, and other agricultural staples. There was no question that the Mississippi river – the 'Father of Rivers' – was the axis on which the city's entire economy turned. The importing, processing, and exporting of agricultural staples that lay at the heart of the city's economic life underlay the city's rise as a 'vast commercial emporium'.¹

In the mid and late twentieth century, the city's waterfront has attracted the interest of a variety of historians, whose scholarly interest has centred on the world of waterfront workers.² Two features of longshore labour stand out in their

¹ Murray, H.A., *Lands of the Slave and the Free: or, Cuba, the United States, and Canada*, (London, 1855), pp. 250–51; Goodrich, C.A., *The Family Tourist. A Visit to the Principal Cities of the Western Continent*, (Hartford, 1848), p. 340; Ratzel, F., *Sketches of Urban and Cultural Life in North America*, (1876; rpt. New Brunswick, 1988); King, E., *The Great South*, Drake, W.M. and Jones, R.R., (eds), (1875; rpt. Baton Rouge, 1972); Warner, C.D., *Studies in the South and West, with Comments on Canada*, (New York, 1889); Pedrick, W.E., *New Orleans as it Is, With a Correct Guide to All Places of Interest*, (Cleveland, 1885), pp. 87–88; Somers, R., *The Southern States Since the War 1870–71*, (University, Alabama, 1965), p. 191; *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 13 Apr. 1884.

² Bennetts, D.P., 'Black and White Workers: New Orleans, 1880–1900', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, (1972); Rosenberg, D., *New Orleans Dockworkers: Race, Labour, and Unionism 1892–1923*, (Albany, 1988); Arnesen, E., *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics, 1863–1923*, (New York, 1991); Northrup, H.R., 'The New Orleans longshoremen', *Political Science Quarterly*, 57, (1942); Miller, C.G., 'A Study of the New Orleans Longshoremen's Unions from 1850 to 1962', unpublished M.A. thesis, Louisiana State University, (1962); Pearce, R.A., 'The Rise and Decline of Labor in New Orleans', unpublished M.A. thesis, Tulane University,

studies: First, New Orleans dock workers, from 1880 to the early 1890s, and from 1901 to 1923, built a powerful labour movement that proved to be the envy of dockers not only in the South but in much of the United States. Second, and closely related to the first, although the New Orleans dock labour force was sharply divided along racial lines, white and black waterfront workers crafted a series of agreements and established institutional structures that mediated racial tensions, minimised racial conflict, and fostered interracial collaboration. Although the collapse of the city's biracial dock labour movement in the early 1920s was followed by decades of union fragmentation, corruption, and weakness, as well as racial competition,³ the earlier 'golden age' of New Orleans biracial unionism commanded scholarly attention and required explanation, given the broader contours of race and labour in the American South during those years.

Earlier accounts from the 1940s through to the 1960s provided brief overviews of labour-management relations or highlighted the exceptional character of the New Orleans experience regarding race and labour.⁴ By the 1980s and early 1990s, the city's seemingly unique waterfront labour movement was the subject of two monographic studies which explored in detail the character of biracial unionism on the city's docks. But was New Orleans' biracial unionism unique? This author has recently argued that while the strength and accomplishments of biracial unionism may have been the greatest in the Crescent City's longshore industry, other Gulf and South Atlantic ports developed biracial union structures that could, depending on circumstances, advance or retard black workers' interests, while other historians have charted the strengths and limits of biracial unionism in such trades as coal mining and lumber.⁵ But far more comparative attention is needed to the mechanics of biracial unionism and the character of working-class race relations in the waterfront and in other workplaces in the American South before a clear and full picture emerges.

Whatever the findings of future studies, the New Orleans waterfront story has been central to new debates within the subfield of labour history which focus on race. To some critics, the new labour history has ignored race in its attention to class, while others insist that labour history is developing an impressive literature

(1938); Wells, D. and Stodder, J., 'A short history of New Orleans dockworkers', *Radical America*, 10, (1976).

³ Spero, S.D. and Harris, A.L., *The Black Worker: The Negro and the Labor Movement*, (1931; rpt. New York, 1969), pp. 190–92; Wells, D.L., 'The ILWU in New Orleans: CIO Radicalism in the Crescent City, 1927–1957', unpublished M.A. thesis, University of New Orleans, (1979); Nelson, B., 'Class and race in the Crescent City: the ILWU, from San Francisco to New Orleans', in Rosswurm, S., (ed.), *The CIO's Left-Led Unions*, (New Brunswick, 1992).

⁴ See footnote 3 above. For a classic account highlighting the exceptional character of New Orleans longshoremen, see Woodward, C.V., *Origins of the New South, 1877–1913*, (1951; rpt. Baton Rouge, 1971), pp. 229, 231–32.

⁵ Arnesen, E., 'Biracial waterfront unionism in the age of segregation', in Winslow, C., (ed.), *Waterfront Workers: New Perspectives on Race and Class*, (Urbana, 1998). On mining, see Letwin, D., *The Challenge of Interracial Unionism: Alabama Coal Miners, 1878–1921*, (Chapel Hill, 1998).

on race and working-class history.⁶ The case of New Orleans, as it has been treated in the literature, has certainly not ignored race, and it lends itself to no easy characterisation. On the one hand, the degree of interracial collaboration and, indeed, solidarity, fostered by the city's biracial union structure was impressive by all measures. On the other hand, biracial unionism had sharp limits – it did not promote an interracial alliance outside of the work place, nor did it eliminate all racial inequalities. Moreover, white workers in the Crescent City demonstrated that they could be as viciously racist as any white Southern mob in the violence they perpetrated against blacks during the 1894–95 waterfront riots. Providing no tale of a useable past nor constituting a simple story of either white racism or interracial progress, the history of New Orleans waterfront workers is most fruitfully approached from the perspective of the analysis of the factors that promoted and eroded an exceptional if flawed movement in a period that otherwise witnessed the consolidation of a racist social order based on segregation and political disfranchisement.

The sources for studying waterfront labour in New Orleans are numerous. The centrality of commerce to the city's prosperity meant extensive coverage of waterfront affairs in the daily white press. For both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, local journalists provide lengthy coverage of labour negotiations and conflicts, offering a level of specificity that allows for the detailed reconstruction of labour-management conflicts as well as inter- and intra-union relations. The African-American press also provided considerable editorial and journalistic accounts. Longshore employment made substantial contributions to the economic health of the New Orleans African-American community; black dock unions played vital roles in the city's black social network; and black union leaders often were prominent members of fraternal orders, religious congregations, and political organisations.⁷ Union sources, unfortunately, are somewhat harder to come by. But a number of union newspapers, including the *Union Advocate* in the early twentieth century and the *Longshoremen*, the monthly journal of the International Longshoremen's Association during the 1910s, provide invaluable information, as do a number of published and unpublished memoirs by white radicals Covington Hall and Oscar Ameringer.⁸

Finally, government records in the twentieth century provide a unique window into union dynamics, workers' demands, working conditions, and managerial strategies. The Louisiana Bureau of Labor Statistics described strikes and contract negotiations in various years, and the federal government's National Adjustment Commission and US Shipping Board records, housed at the National Archives,

⁶ This debate can be reviewed, albeit from a particular perspective, in Arnesen, E., 'Up from exclusion: black and white workers, race, and the state of Labor History', *Reviews in American History*, 26, (1998).

⁷ Rosenberg, *New Orleans Dockworkers*; Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers*. Important New Orleans black weekly newspapers include *The Louisianian*, *The Pelican*, the *Southwest Christian Advocate*, and the *Louisiana Weekly*.

⁸ Hall, C., 'Labor struggles in the deep South', unpublished manuscript, Special Collections, Tulane University; Ameringer, O., *If You Don't Weaken: The Autobiography of Oscar Ameringer*, (New York, 1940).

offer a wealth of detailed information about the effect of World War I on the world of the waterfront, not only in New Orleans but in virtually all American ports.

Maritime labour markets, dock labour, and the culture of dock work

From the nineteenth through to the mid-twentieth century, the loading and unloading of various cargoes involved a detailed and strictly observed division of labour, with each task forming the basis of a distinct 'trade' or occupational grouping. Within the cotton trade – which employed the greatest number of workers until roughly World War I – the 'division of labor has advanced furthest', in the words of German economist August Sartorius von Waltershausen. For Mississippi River steamboats collecting cotton from Louisiana plantations, African-American roustabouts physically carried bales of cotton on their backs onto the boats over simple gangplanks. Arriving in New Orleans, that cotton became the responsibility of more highly skilled cotton screwmen, the 'aristocrats of the levee' who earned the port's highest wages.⁹ These men transferred the cotton to longshoremen, the largest category of waterfront labourers, who delivered it to draymen (also known as teamsters), who, driving horse-drawn carts, then transported the bales to the cotton yardmen in the nearby cotton compresses. (Longshoremen loaded and unloaded all round freight, such as molasses, while a distinct category of round freight teamsters moved these goods through the city). In the cotton yards, the bales were moved by yardmen, were sorted by quality by white classers and markers, were placed on the scales and then removed by the scalehands, and were weighed and reweighed, not surprisingly, by weighers and reweighers. After the bales had been compressed by large hydraulic presses to about a third of their original size by pressmen, yardmen delivered the compacted bales to draymen, who returned them to the wharves, where longshoremen manually and with winches loaded the bales onto the deck. Screwmen next assumed control: utilising jackscrews, they carefully compacted the cotton into the ships' holds. Indeed, roughly thirteen thousand men laboured in various waterfront trades during the Gilded Age. A generation or so later, by World War I, that number had increased to as many as twenty thousand. Among those joining the ranks of riverfront workers alongside the older categories of dock hands were new groups of employees brought into existence by the port's modernisation (see below) in the early twentieth century, including among others cotton warehouse workers, Public Belt Railroad clerks, and public grain elevator clerks.¹⁰

For much of the nineteenth century through to the mid-twentieth century, commerce in the port of New Orleans remained highly seasonal, dependent upon

⁹ Marks, G.P. III, 'The New Orleans Screwmen's Benevolent Association, 1850–1961', *Labor History*, 14, (1973), pp. 259–63.

¹⁰ Von Waltershausen, A.S., *The Workers' Movement in the United States 1879–1885*, Montgomery, D. and Van der Linden, M., (eds), (Cambridge, 1998), p. 88; Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers*, p. 88.

the arrival and processing of agricultural staples, particularly cotton, and to a lesser extent, sugar. The first bales of cotton might arrive in August, but the season truly commenced only in late September and early October, with cotton work available through March. The longshoreman 'gets plenty of work during the season for shipments of cotton and sugar', one local paper observed in 1883, 'but once the crop is gone he must sit with folded arms for the remaining months until the next season begins'. The average season in most of New Orleans' industries in the 1880s, one of the city's leading dailies estimated, 'was barely six and a half months'. In between seasons, the workingmen 'did anything they could find to eke out a living'. It was not uncommon for unmarried male workers to leave the city in search of work during the off-season (such as timber transporting in Canada and New England), while others, like dock workers in the early twentieth century, might secure employment in the various breweries near the waterfront.¹¹

Until the demise of the powerful Dock and Cotton Council in 1923, the infamous 'shape up' was largely absent from the New Orleans waterfront. In many ways a 'middleman's city', New Orleans maintained a waterfront employment structure in the pre-World War I decades that was dominated largely by a multiplicity of small employers – contracting stevedores, boss draymen, and the like – who hired individuals and gangs on a daily or short-term basis. While railroad freight yards hired more regular crews direct, and transatlantic steamship agents often hired screwmen and longshoremen directly, in many cases ship agents contracted with a middle man who was responsible for hiring and paying labour and completing the task.

While often offering a united front in their public face against labour, employers were often divided among themselves, and those divisions allowed workers to make concrete gains. In the 1880s, for instance, associations of contracting stevedores and boss draymen sought admission to the powerful alliance of waterfront unions, the Cotton Men's Executive Council, in the hopes that non-member employers could be disciplined by the unions' refusal to work for them; similarly, the Cotton Press Association, whose members owned the cotton yards, successfully sought membership for the same reason: to impose order on their own business. By the early twentieth century, striking longshoremen and screwmen occasionally benefited from divisions between smaller agents and contracting stevedores, who still relied upon the screwmen's skills and preferred to reach an accommodation with the unions, and the agents of the larger steamship lines like the Elder Dempster and Leyland lines, who did not require the screwmen's skills and who instead preferred a fight to the finish.¹²

Origins of dock workers: race and the labour force

¹¹ New Orleans *Morning Star*, 16 Dec. 1883; New Orleans *Times-Democrat*, 7 Apr. 1903; Von Waltershausen, *Workers' Movement*, p. 89. On the employment of longshore workers in breweries, see Ameringer, *If You Don't Weaken*, pp. 195–96.

¹² On employers, see Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers*, pp. 39–40, 107–14, 168–69, 198–99.

The riverfront of the ante-bellum era, one foreigner visitor noted in a typical observation, was peopled by a ‘class of ten thousand men... unique, eccentric, original, a distinct and unmistakable feature in the floating mass that swarms on the levees, and threads the streets, of the crescent city’.¹³ Riverfront labour was performed primarily by Irish (and to a lesser extent, German) immigrants, who dominated the most skilled and highly remunerated work of cotton screwing along with the work of draying, and African-American slaves, who were employed on the ‘hiring out’ system (they received but a small portion of their wages, turning over the bulk to their legal owners). The Civil War witnessed a temporary racial recomposition of the labour force. Although the war itself wreaked havoc with river-born transportation and threw the city’s economy into crisis, what longshore work there was became the domain of first slaves, then emancipated African Americans.¹⁴

Following the war, whites reclaimed their control of the screwmen’s trade, and from the Reconstruction era onward, blacks and whites both laboured as general longshoremen and cotton yardmen. Indeed, during the heyday of nineteenth century waterfront unionism – the 1880s and early 1890s – yardmen and longshoremen agreed to divide all available work upon an equal basis. At some point in the 1870s, a small group of black screwmen had emerged, but with widespread unionisation and union recognition in the 1880s, white screwmen succeeded in restricting their numbers to no more than a hundred men per day. The system of the equal division of work for the largest groups of workers, and the quota system for black screwmen, were both destroyed during the depression of the mid-1890s. In 1894–95, white screwmen and longshoremen repudiated their agreements with African Americans and sought to claim all work for themselves, refusing to work for any employer of black labour. The result was the destruction of their unions’ power, the lowering of wages, the worsening of working conditions, increased racial competition, and an increase in the number of black waterfront workers. The early twentieth century witnessed the restoration of the ‘equal division’ principle among longshoremen and its extension to the ranks of the cotton screwmen. Until 1923, when waterfront unions were decisively crushed, blacks and whites divided most work equally and overt racial competition for jobs was eliminated.¹⁵

Certain categories of waterfront labour remained the domain of either whites or blacks. Mississippi River roustabouts, for instance, were always black. Occupying the lowest rung on the hierarchy of waterfront labour – and what one white observer condescendingly described as the ‘lowest strata of the Negro

¹³ Norman, B.M., *Norman’s New Orleans and Environs*, Schott, M.J., (ed.), (1845; rpt. Baton Rouge, 1976), pp. 74–75.

¹⁴ Murray, *Lands of the Slave and the Free*, pp. 250–51; Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers*, p. 20.

¹⁵ Cook, B.A., ‘The use of race to control the labor market in Louisiana’, in Van der Linden, M. and Lucassen, J., (eds), *Racism and the Labour Market: Historical Studies*, (Bern, 1995), p. 155. Also see background material in Bennetts, ‘Black and White Workers’; Rosenberg, *New Orleans Dockworkers*, and Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers*.

race',¹⁶ – roustabouts were uniformly African-American rural workers who earned a reputation for hard drinking, hard living, and violence. Despite their status as river workers and their presence in New Orleans, roustabouts found few allies among either the more 'respectable' white or black unionists in the city, who preferred to keep them at arms' length in their union alliances. Other all-black occupations like cotton teamsters and round freight teamsters, through their affiliation with several waterfront labour federations, fared better. Even during periods of economic hardship, whites left such positions to African Americans. Both blacks and whites effectively regulated the entry into waterfront jobs by refusing to work for any employer of non-union men; during moments of labour conflict when employers tried to circumvent unions by hiring strikebreakers, unionised dockers resorted to the time-honoured technique of threatening newcomers with violence.

By the end of the nineteenth century, Italian immigrants also found work on the city's expanding banana docks, where they experienced the shape up, confronted a higher degree of mechanisation, and earned less than the black and white longshoremen in the cotton sector, a mere 'hand-to-mouth existence'. At no point did black and white dockers in the cotton or sugar trade ever make common cause with them; they remained culturally and organisationally isolated. During the 1910s, the syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) did attempt to organise employees of the United Fruit Company, but ultimately unsuccessfully.¹⁷

Technological change on the waterfront

Well into the mid to late nineteenth century, the New Orleans waterfront depended largely upon steamships and muscle power. In 1845, one observer described the 'legions of steamers... [F]or miles and miles the levee forms one unbroken line' of them. A decade later, Henry Didimus noted that the steamboat landing was covered with 'a mountain of cotton ... Huge piles, bale upon bale, story above story, cover the levee'.¹⁸ Accompanying the 'pyramids of cotton bales', reported another, were 'rows of sugar hogsheads', bags of rice, and barrels of port, along with flour and imported coffee. Although uncovered piles on the docks did not vanish, warehouses and sheds near the levee appeared as early as

¹⁶ Chapman, V., 'Roustabouts are treated worse than brutes', *Southwestern Christian Advocate*, 29 Nov. 1900. On roustabouts, also see Ralph, J., 'The old way to Dixie', *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 86, (1893), p. 175; Hesse-Wartegg, E. von, *Travels on the Lower Mississippi 1879–1880: A Memoir by Ernst von Hesse-Wartegg*, Trautmann, F., (ed.), (Columbia, Missouri, 1990), pp. 26–28, 189–90; Rosenberg, *New Orleans Dockworkers*, pp. 73, 130–31; Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers*, pp. 103–6.

¹⁷ Reed, M.E., 'Lumberjacks and longshoremen: the I.W.W. in Louisiana', *Labor History*, 13, (1972), pp. 53–57; Cook, B.A. and Watson, J.R., 'The sailors and marine transport workers' 1913 strike in New Orleans: the AFL and the IWW', *Southern Studies*, 18, (1979), pp. 111–22; *Cost of Living in American Towns. Report of an Enquiry by the Board of Trade into Working Class Rents, Housing and Retail Prices*, (London, 1911), p. 292.

¹⁸ Murray, *Lands of the Slave and the Free*, pp. 250–51; Didimus, H., *New Orleans As I Found It*, (New York, 1845), pp. 14–16.

the late 1840s.¹⁹ The ubiquity of piled cotton continued to catch the outsider's eye through the mid-1880s, as W. E. Pedrick recommended the walking of the 'length of these wharves amidst acres and acres of compressed cotton bales on the one hand, and a river lined with masts upon the other'. Yet dramatic changes were also evident, for the expansion of the railroads diminished the significance of river-borne commerce into the city, particularly that of flatboats and steamboats. 'The railroads have killed the steamboat passenger traffic by doing in two or three days what the steamboats consumed a week in doing', concluded Mark Twain in 1883.²⁰

The railroad sector, however, never dominated the port of New Orleans the way it did Mobile, Pensacola, and Savannah. 'The private wharf system is not a serious one', reported one contemporary historian of the port, 'and there are no holdings of any considerable size privately controlled, with the exception of a few railroad terminals'.²¹ In those other cities, powerful railroads physically occupied and controlled choice water frontage and exercised an iron hand over their employees; rarely did waterfront unions exercise much influence there in the early twentieth century. In contrast, New Orleans' large municipally owned and controlled waterfront gave rise to a multiplicity of employers, middlemen, and employment relations. While work on railroad docks might be more regular than in the larger competitive contracting sector dominated by numerous middlemen, wages for railroad work tended to be lower than those of longshoremen, and efforts at unionisation proved sporadic and largely unsuccessful. Indeed, it is likely that a key factor in the strength of both unionisation and biracialism in New Orleans was the respective size of its contracting and railroad sectors. Workers often proved quite effective in forcing smaller employers in the contracting sector to negotiate and recognise their power; at the same time, the irregularity of work, daily or weekly competition for work, and the constant recomposition of work gangs made effective unionisation often dependent upon labour biracialism. Reducing employers' ability to play blacks and whites off of one another was a prerequisite for union success. When dock unions recognised this, as they did in the 1880s and in the first two decades of the twentieth century, they tended to prosper.²² Biracialism allowed them to reap economic benefits during periods of prosperity and weather many business cycle downturns more effectively than many other groups of American dockers (for example, in New York or Baltimore).

The advent of larger transatlantic steamships designed to transport cotton from the Crescent City to Europe by the 1890s introduced new tensions into the port's labour relations. Smaller tramp ships entering the port maintained more flexible

¹⁹ Mackay, A., *The Western World; or, Travels in the United States in 1846–47*, vol. 2, (Philadelphia, 1849), pp. 79–80; Somers, *The Southern States*, p. 191.

²⁰ Pedrick, *New Orleans As It Is*, pp. 87–88; Twain, M., *Life on the Mississippi*, (New York, 1929), p. 195; Warner, *Studies in the South and West*, p. 45.

²¹ Hearsey, C.G., 'History of the port of New Orleans', in *Behrman Administration Biography, 1904–1916*, (New Orleans, 1917), p. G.

²² This argument is more fully developed in Arnesen, 'Biracial waterfront unionism in the age of segregation'.

sailing schedules than the transatlantic steamers, which adhered to set schedules and relied upon speed in turn-around time in port. Unlike their smaller, tramp counterparts, a handful of European-owned steamship companies operating what one agent termed 'floating warehouses now on the sea' were not particularly dependent on the skills of the cotton screwmen. These firms spearheaded efforts to circumvent the cotton screwmen's unions' rules in the mid-1890s by opposing union limits on the number of bales to be stowed daily and by lowering wage rates. Temporarily successful during the depression of the 1890s, these employers confronted a revitalised waterfront labour movement after the turn of the century and again set the stage for confrontation. In 1902, they introduced a method of loading cotton called 'shoot the chute', whereby gangs of workers would stow exorbitantly large numbers of cotton bales by swiftly dropping them into the ships' holds. This attack on the screwmen's rules and dominance prompted a strong counterattack by waterfront unions, which succeeded in blocking the implementation of the plan.²³ Yet the rise of larger ships with different labour needs meant that the heyday of the cotton screwmen had passed. Although the black and white screwmen's unions remained influential until the post-World War I years, their power was based on smaller ships' dependence on their skills, on the one hand, and the active support of other dock workers, on the other.

The port's modernisation commenced in earnest in the early twentieth century. Under an act of the Louisiana State Legislature in 1896, a Board of Commissioners of the Port of New Orleans (the Dock Board), composed of five gubernatorial appointees, was established, assuming jurisdiction over much of the publicly owned waterfront in 1901. That waterfront included temporary structures and no permanent sheds or freight handling equipment. The entire dock system it inherited, one observer noted, was 'comprised [of] a long line of wooden wharves, badly kept up, and in many cases falling to ruin'; outside of the sheds of several railroads, most freight was protected merely by 'tarpaulins which were spread over the piles of merchandise', another recalled.²⁴ (Several decades earlier, in 1882, the black weekly *Louisianian* described the wharves as being 'in a wretched condition of decay and ... our alleged depots are nothing but dilapidated shanties in near proximity of the worst dives').²⁵ Funded through the collection of wharfage fees and through bonds it issued, the Board launched an ambitious program of modernisation which resulted, by the 1910s, in the rebuilding of the wharf system and the erection of numerous steel sheds. The Board also constructed a six-million dollar Public Cotton Warehouse. Consisting of five reinforced concrete warehouses, a wharf house, and compress plant, all served by the municipally constructed and operated Public Belt Railroad, it claimed the title

²³ Arnesen, E., 'To rule or ruin: New Orleans dock workers' struggle for control, 1902–1903', *Labor History*, 28, (1987); Rosenberg, *New Orleans Dockworkers*. On ship size and technology, see Lovell, J., 'Sail, steam and emergent dockers' unionism in Britain, 1850–1914', *International Review of Social History*, 34, (1987), pp. 237–40.

²⁴ *Times-Picayune Guide to New Orleans*, thirteenth edition, (New Orleans, 1918), p. 63; Kendall, J. Smith, *History of New Orleans*, vol. 2, (New York, 1922), p. 607.

²⁵ *New Orleans Weekly Louisianian*, 4 Feb. 1882.

of the ‘world’s largest and most modern storage facility for cotton’.²⁶ In addition, the Board built and operated a Public Coal and Bulk Commodity Handling Plant and a Public Grain elevator; a few years later, it sponsored the construction of the Inner Harbor Navigation Canal, a five-and-a-half mile long waterway connecting the Mississippi River to Lake Pontchartrain. By the 1920s, the Board of Commissioners boasted that the more than ten miles of wharves were mostly covered ‘by single-story steel transit sheds’ and were ‘fully equipped to transship and store rail, river and ocean traffic efficiently and economically’. Moreover, the loading and unloading of the majority of the port’s vessels now involved longshoremen employing derricks, locomotive cranes, stationary and portable conveyors and trucks, as well as ore elevators and other equipment. Unionised cotton longshoremen closely monitored the introduction of new technologies and were generally successful in blocking any changes that threatened their institutional power or intensified their work load. But the managers in the growing non-union public and railroad sectors found modernisation and technological innovations to be important weapons for gaining greater control over their labour forces, which toiled under conditions far harsher than those endured by union men in the competitive contracting sector.²⁷

Housing, living, and workers’ culture in the port city

Residential segregation in the Crescent City was marked sharply by class and to a degree by race. In the ante-bellum era, the city’s wealthy whites established residences in ‘what was then considered the rear’ of the city, in ‘large, commodious, one-story houses, full of windows on all sides’. Immigrant workers, particularly Germans and Irish, resided near the riverfront.²⁸ As late as 1911, British Board of Trade investigators discovered that streets in the riverfront neighbourhoods remained poor, improving gradually only ‘as one goes inland from the river ... until St Charles Avenue’ – along with the neighbouring Garden District, home to many of the city’s wealthy – was reached. (Along St Charles, one might observe the ‘magnificent modern homes set in their green lawns, orange and magnolia groves, their waving palms and jasmine-wreathed walls’, as one observer put it in 1891). The city’s middle class, as well as some of its ‘upper working classes’ could be found beyond St Charles. While few blacks resided there, along the ‘belt between Magazine Street and the river bank, white and coloured people live in close proximity’. In another working-class district further east, past the French quarter, blacks and whites also resided, although with a higher degree of residential segregation. Working-class homes tended to be one-

²⁶ Kendall, *History of New Orleans*, p. 608; Reeves, R.D., ‘New Orleans area’, in *Organization and Traffic of the Illinois Central System*, ed. Research and Development Bureau, (Chicago, 1938), p. 66.

²⁷ *New Orleans: The Nation’s Second Port, the South’s Greatest City*, (New Orleans, 1925).

²⁸ ‘New Orleans in 1880’, Tenth Census, *Report on the Social Statistics of Cities*, XIX, Pt. 2, (Washington, 1887), p. 257.

family frame houses of the 'gun-barrel' type, and by the second decade of the twentieth century, few were connected with the developing sewer system. The city's tenements, while not as numerous as in many other cities, housed Italian immigrants and African Americans, and were often dilapidated and subject to overcrowding.²⁹

For those working-class neighbourhoods near the river, the fact that the city was below sea-level meant that they were susceptible to frequent flooding. Charles Dudley Warner, writing of his 1885 visit to the city, complained that 'Nothing could be more shabby than the streets, ill-paved, with undulating sidewalks and open gutters green with slime ... [or the] streets with rows of one-story houses, wooden ... or brick, with the painted stucco peeling off'. Indeed, after rain, one commentator noted during Reconstruction, 'there is a curdled depth of ooze', while a European observer complained that after a heavy rain, 'You see cascading water rushing over dead cats on into a whirlpool of oranges, banana peels, corn cobs, and cottonseed ... soon every street turns into an interesting aquatic world'.³⁰

Race relations in the Crescent City were never simple or static. On the political level, from the Civil War years onward, working-class whites pursued an electoral strategy that often put them at odds with working-class blacks, supporting the Democratic party and its anti-black strategy, while newly enfranchised blacks backed the Republican party and the occasional anti-Democratic machine reform tickets. By the 1880s, however, the waterfront witnessed the emergence of a significant biracial union movement that minimised overt racial hostilities and encouraged workplace collaboration; at the same time, historians and observers of Gilded Age race relations reported significant amounts of racial interaction in parks, streetcars, and the like. However flexible racial codes were in the 1880s, the colour line began to harden by the 1890s. During the depression of the 1890s, white longshoremen and screwmen repudiated their alliance with black dockers, turned to violence, and sought (unsuccessfully) the ousting of blacks from the waterfront. The passage of Jim Crow laws, mandating 'separate but equal' facilities for blacks and whites, the disfranchisement of black voters, and the rise of anti-black violence also marked the decade. Yet by the early twentieth century, waterfront unions reconstructed an alliance between black and white workers that constituted the most conspicuous exception to the congealing racist order.³¹ That exception, as impressive as it was, had its limits. British Board of Trade

²⁹ *Cost of Living in American Towns*, pp. 294–95; Hunt, B., 'New Orleans, yesterday and to-day', *Frank Leslie's Popular Monthly*, 31, (1891), p. 641; Ratzel, F., *Sketches of Urban and Cultural Life in North America*, Stewart, A.S., (ed.), (n.p., 1876; rpt. New Brunswick, 1988), p. 204; Ralph, J., 'New Orleans, our southern capital', *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, 86, (1893), pp. 376–77; McMain, E., 'Behind the Yellow Fever in Little Palermo', *Charities*, 15, (4 Nov. 1905), pp. 152–59.

³⁰ Warner, *Studies in the South and West*, p. 39; Somers, *The Southern States*, p. 193; Ratzel, *Sketches*, p. 203.

³¹ On black politics in the twentieth century, see Hirsch, A.R., 'Simply a matter of black and white: the transformation of race and politics in twentieth-century New Orleans', in Hirsch, A.R. and Logsdon, J., (eds), *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, (Baton Rouge, 1992).

investigators found in 1911 that ‘even amongst the unskilled labouring population ... the “colour line” is drawn with all the strictness common to the Southern States. The two races will work side by side, but they will not play together, go to the same schools, or sit together in the tramway cars’.³² If whites recognised blacks’ ‘industrial equality’, they parted ways with them at the polling booth and in the churches, fraternal orders and benevolent societies, and in their recreation.

The government and dock labour

From the end of the Civil War through to the end of the Reconstruction era (1865–1877), waterfront workers found few allies among either federal officials stationed in New Orleans or local Republican party politicians elected to public office. Black longshoremen seeking to exercise their newly won rights as freedpeople found that the free labour convictions of federal military men and republican leaders extended no further than support for their ‘right to work’; strikes by black (and in some cases white) dock workers in 1865, 1867, 1872, 1873 and 1875, for instance, were met with repression, as local police and federal army troops threatened strikers, dispersed sympathetic crowds, and arrested those who interfered with strikebreakers.³³

Longshore labour’s relationship to the state changed dramatically with the overthrow of the Republican government in 1877 by conservative white ‘Redeemers’, the lifting of the 1870s depression, and the rise of widespread waterfront unionism in the decade after 1879. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, New Orleans’ municipal government was often dominated by the Democratic party’s ‘Ring’, a powerful political machine also known as the ‘Old Regulars’. The Ring drew extensive political support from the city’s white working class, particularly its Irish immigrant community, and many of its leaders were themselves self-made men of working-class and immigrant backgrounds. In exchange for electoral support, the Ring provided extensive municipal employment for white workers, offered contracts to sympathetic local businesses, and, crucially, adopted a largely hands-off approach to labour conflict between strong white unions and their employers. Much to the dismay of the ‘silk-stocking’ elite (including many leading waterfront employers), the Ring often ignored, or responded ineffectually and reluctantly to, strike-related violence or other disruptions. As a critical component of the Ring’s electoral base, white dock workers in the 1880s and early 1890s, and again after the turn of the century, were free to unionise and exercise their economic strength in the workplace with little fear of police repression. Black dock workers too benefited from the Ring’s pro-labour stance, even though they tended to vote for Republican or local reform candidates in the late nineteenth century and were effectively disenfranchised by the 1898 Louisiana Constitutional Convention, so long as their alliance with whites held firm. However, when whites broke with blacks, as they did in 1894 and 1895, and violently attacked them on the waterfront, blacks found local police

³² *Cost of Living in American Towns*, p. 290.

³³ Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers*, pp. 21–31, 52–60.

indifferent to their plight and openly sympathetic to white rioters. Only the dispatch of the state militia by the Louisiana governor provided them, and their employers, with the necessary protection to allow them to resume work.³⁴ But in much of the heyday of biracial unionism and union power (1880s–1892, 1901–1919), much of the waterfront labour movement's success could be attributed to the benevolence or neutrality of local political officials.

Two additional points regarding the city government's role on the waterfront require elaboration. First, the city maintained ownership of a significant majority of the riverfront. Although riverfront enclaves owned by various railroads grew in importance by the 1880s, municipal ownership of much of the five miles of riverfront generated an employment structure dominated by contracting middlemen. In general, dock unions had greater successes against smaller employers than they did larger ones. While the 1880s Cotton Men's Executive Council and the twentieth-century Dock and Cotton Council managed to exercise tremendous workplace power and win recognition and significant benefits from smaller steamship agents and hiring stevedores, riverfront employees of the larger, self-contained, and more powerful rail companies often could not. Indeed, this extensive municipal ownership, the large competitive contracting sector it generated, and the relatively smaller railroad sector distinguished New Orleans from many of its neighbours on the Gulf and South Atlantic coasts. By the early twentieth century, the waterfronts of Mobile, Pensacola, and Savannah were largely privately owned by railroad companies, whose economic strength ensured weak or non-existent unions and conditions that compared poorly to those of the New Orleans contracting sector.

Second, the Ring, under Mayor Martin Behrman, and the Dock Board aggressively sponsored infrastructural waterfront development in the first and especially second decade of the twentieth century. With the legal power to expropriate property, collect wharfage and other fees, and issue bonds, the Board launched a massive program of port modernisation involving extensive construction of steel sheds and warehouses, an inner canal linking the Mississippi River to Lake Pontchartrain, and extending the belt railway along the docks. Ultimately, the city's commercial elite, not its waterfront unions, benefited from such infrastructural development, for that development was dominated by the elite, which set policy and staffed its managerial positions. Port employers found their hand considerably strengthened through the government-sponsored diversification of import-export trade goods and the enlargement of an elite-dominated public sector that was reluctant to tolerate unionisation.

Labour regulation during World War I

The US entry into World War I in 1917 was accompanied by the creation of numerous federal labour regulatory bodies charged with stabilising the labour

³⁴ On Gilded Age politics in New Orleans, see Jackson, J., *New Orleans in the Gilded Age: Politics and Urban Progress 1880–1896*, (Baton Rouge, 1969); Ettinger, B.G., 'John Fitzpatrick and the limits of working-class politics in New Orleans', *Louisiana History*, 26, (1985).

supply by reducing absenteeism and turnover and minimising disruptions caused by unions and worker dissatisfaction. The National Adjustment Commission (NAC), established in August 1917, took charge of longshore labour relations across the country. Seeking to resolve grievances before they resulted in strikes, lockouts, slowdowns, or unnecessarily high labour force turnover, the NAC's twenty-four local boards oversaw wages and working conditions, fostered voluntary mediation of disputes, and held hearings into local conditions. Despite strikes by teamsters and loaders, longshoremen, and freight handlers in September 1917, the New Orleans NAC board contributed to 'orderly' labour relations for the war's duration. While overt labour conflict proved rare, low-level warfare between employers and employees was a regular occurrence, with employers seeking to intensify the pace and discipline of labour and with unionised workers utilising labour shortages and the official adjustment machinery, often successfully, to resist those increases.³⁵

The war's end, however, witnessed the collapse of voluntary arbitration and the resumption of outright war between longshore labour and capital. While the NAC delivered numerous wage increases to placate organised longshore labour during the war, in the post-war era, the NAC – never a neutral body – pursued the Wilson's Administration's position of holding the line on wages before its dissolution in the summer of 1920. New Orleans dock workers joined the nationwide strike wave in the fall of 1919, with walkouts by cotton warehouse employees, banana workers, public grain elevator workers, car loaders, Public Belt employees, tugboat men, longshoremen, and cotton screwmen. Although the NAC did increase longshore wages slightly, the eighty cents an hour wage disappointed unionised longshoremen. Persistent inflation disquieted dock workers into 1920, prompting further strikes of freight handlers, coastwise longshoremen, marine clerks and checkers.³⁶

Post-war politics

The political environment that proved advantageous to organised waterfront labour disintegrated in the year following the Armistice ending the Great War. The NAC faded into organisational oblivion, after turning less responsive to labour's demands, and the US Shipping Board, which continued to play an active role in dockside labour relations, adopted a hard line against labour. On the municipal level, the New Orleans 'Ring' fell from power, with negative consequences for the Dock and Cotton Council. The sixteen-year reign of mayor Martin Behrman ended in the election of 1920. Behrman's provision of minor patronage positions to labour leaders and his adoption of a largely hands-off or mediating stance during labour disputes had long earned him white labour's

³⁵ National Adjustment Commission, *Chairman's Report for the Period Ending December 31, 1918*, (Washington, 1919); Squires, B.M., 'Peace along shore: how the longshoremen settle differences with employers', *The Survey*, 64, (1920), pp. 569–75; Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers*, pp. 217–28.

³⁶ Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers*, pp. 228–36.

electoral support. But the election of progressive reformer John Parker as governor in 1920 turned the political tables decisively against unions, on and off the waterfront. Parker ousted political appointees with union cards, responded harshly to strikes by condemning unionists and protecting strikebreakers, and worked hard and with success to elect a reformer, Andrew McShane, as mayor of New Orleans in the municipal election later that year.³⁷ This ascendancy of anti-labour forces in New Orleans and Louisiana politics coincided with a resurgent open shop drive by employers committed to rolling back wartime union gains. Two other institutions reinforced the anti-union trend. First, the US Shipping Board, itself a significant employer of labour, drew the line against unionised seamen and longshoremen's demands. Second, the judiciary proved more than willing to support anti-union public officials and employers by issuing injunctions against strikers. When vast waterfront strikes erupted in the Fall of 1921 and 1923, unionised dock workers could count on few allies in government. Indeed, deprived of the Ring's support, strikers confronted not only aggressive and determined employers and a reserve army of strikebreakers, but willing public officials who dispatched police, protected strikebreakers, and arrested and prosecuted strikers.³⁸

The labour movement

The earliest reported waterfront strikes in New Orleans occurred in 1850, 1854, and 1865, when the Screwmen's Benevolent Association (founded in 1850, the first union on the New Orleans docks), called out its members to increase wages. Cotton screwmen, unlike many dock workers, possessed valuable skills and owned their own tools; their labour was indispensable to ship owners, who relied upon them to pack bales of cotton carefully and tightly into ships' holds. African-American longshoremen, many recently free from slavery, also struck over wages in 1865 and 1867, with considerably less success, while groups of black and white longshoremen battled police and strikebreakers in futile struggles during the depression of the 1870s. Before the 1880s, longshoremen's strikes were often poorly organised affairs, involving spontaneous attacks on contractors or specific ships, with police intervention putting an end to the walkouts. The first union of black longshoremen – the Longshoremen's Protective Union Benevolent Association (LPUBA) – was organised in 1872, while a white Longshoremen's Benevolent Association was organised in 1873.³⁹

³⁷ Reynolds, G., *Machine Politics in New Orleans, 1897–1926*, (n.p., 1936; rpt. New York, 1968); Schott, M.J., 'John M. Parker of Louisiana and the Varieties of American Progressivism', unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, (1976); Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers*, pp. 237–44.

³⁸ Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers*, pp. 244–52.

³⁹ Marks, 'The New Orleans Screwmen's Benevolent Association, 1850–1961'; Spero and Harris, *Black Worker*, pp. 183–84; Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers*, pp. 21–24, 27–33, 51–60.

Only with the end of the 1870s depression did organised labour emerge as a force to be reckoned with on the waterfront. A wave of union organising swept the docks between 1879 and the early 1880s. A white Cotton Yardmen's Benevolent Association was established in December 1879, followed by a black Cotton Yardmen's Benevolent Association No. 2 a month later. Black teamsters and loaders, black coal wheelers, black and white coopers, white cotton weighers and reweighers all organised separate associations in 1880, while black and white railroad freight handlers organised separately in 1883. Roughly five different black longshoremen's unions were in existence by the 1880s, before most were subsumed under the organisational umbrella of the LPUBA. Following a series of strikes by cotton yardmen and teamsters and loaders in 1880, eight waterfront unions representing as many as 13,000 men – of black and white screwmen, black and white longshoremen, black and white yardmen, white weighers and classers, and black teamsters – joined together in a new organisation, the Cotton Men's Executive Council (CMEC).⁴⁰

From 1880 until its demise in the early 1890s, the CMEC transformed labour and race relations on the New Orleans waterfront, shifting the balance of power in labour's direction. German economist August Sartorius von Waltershausen referred to the CMEC as a 'Ring' marked by 'committed solidarity and ruthless actions While it is usually the workers who complain about the demands imposed by employers, in New Orleans the employers complain about a workers' tyranny'.⁴¹ The strength of the CMEC rested on the collaboration and even solidarity it fostered among its constituent members. Individually, there was little that waterfront workers – with the exception of the skilled screwmen – could do during labour conflicts to avoid replacement by greenhands or otherwise resist managerial pressures. Under the CMEC, however, no union man would touch a bale of cotton handled by a non-union man, ensuring the failure of any employer strategy relying upon strikebreakers. Any union securing permission and endorsement from the CMEC could count on the collective support of all the council's constituent members, tilting the balance of power firmly in strikers' direction.

The CMEC, and its successor organisation, the Dock and Cotton Council, rested on a foundation of biracial unionism. In every trade where blacks and whites worked (especially longshoring and cotton yard work), two unions – one black, one white – were established and entered into co-operative agreements with each other. Each union was required to abide by the identical work rules and observe the same wage rates; both met jointly to set policy and ratify contracts; both participated in joint strikes; and leaders of each negotiated with employers. The one exception was cotton screwing: until the mid-1890s, the larger and

⁴⁰ The paragraphs about the rise of biracial unionism and the CMEC are based on Bennetts, 'Black and White Workers'; Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers*; Arnesen, 'Learning the lessons of solidarity: work rules and race relations on the New Orleans waterfront, 1880–1901', *Labor's Heritage*, 1, (1989), pp. 26–45; Pearce, 'The Rise and Decline of Labor'. Also see: Newman, J.T., 'The future of the South – V', *Southwestern Christian Advocate*, 9 Apr. 1885.

⁴¹ Von Waltershausen, *Workers' Movement*, p. 90.

dominant white SBA No. 1 restricted to one hundred men the number of black screwmen, enrolled in SBA No. 2, who could work. During the depression of the 1890s, white screwmen and longshoremen, as noted above, violently repudiated their biracial agreements and sought blacks' ousting from dock work. But economic conditions, state repression, and determined employers contributed to their failure. Blacks retained their jobs, the biracial union structure was dead, wages fell, and working conditions deteriorated.⁴²

The Dock and Cotton Council (DCC), formed in 1901, re-established the biracial alliance on an even more firm footing. Not only did the unions of yardmen and longshoremen divide all work equally and act functionally as a single unit, but the white cotton screwmen also agreed to the principle of equal division, known as 'half and half', and struck to ensure that employers adhere to their new rules. For the white screwmen, repudiating racial restrictions and agreeing to organisational equality paid handsome dividends, allowing members of their trade to block the implementation of a 'shoot the chute' system of cotton cargo loading that would have rendered their trade obsolete, and enabling them to put an end to the most debilitating racial divisions. The DCC regularly brought whites and blacks to joint meetings, where they sat on separate sides of the room and alternated in speaking. Although the 'half and half' principle was never extended to the foremen's positions – whites rejected such proposals – the interracialism of the DCC and its constituent unions ran counter to the dominant trend of segregation and exclusion in the American Federation of Labor, won the praise of national black leaders, and constituted a major exception to the rising tide of Jim Crow in the early twentieth century.⁴³

The DCC, like its nineteenth-century predecessor, not only regulated race relations but also fostered effective intertrade collaboration. The port's strongest unions – the longshoremen and screwmen – fared the best, and the waterfront alliance helped them resist managerial assaults on work rules and work limits in 1902–03 and again in 1907–08 through exhibitions of impressive solidarity during port wide strikes. Beginning in 1908, employers and waterfront unions entered into a series of five-year contracts, ending annual outbreaks of labour strife that marked much of the twentieth century's first decade. Although the daily limit of cotton stowed by screwmen rose, the increase fell far short of what steamship agents desired, and managers continually lamented that the unions, not they, ultimately controlled the labour process.⁴⁴

Politically, the DCC offered no radical challenge to the municipal government, the new racial order, or, with one exception, the American Federation of Labor.

⁴² Woodward, *Origins*, p. 267; *Southwestern Christian Advocate*, 7 Dec. 1882; Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers*, pp. 121–45. Extensive coverage of the violence appeared in the *New Orleans Daily Picayune* and *Times-Democrat* in Oct.–Nov. 1894 and Feb.–Apr. 1895.

⁴³ Rosenberg, *New Orleans Dockworkers*, pp. 69–92; *New York Age*, 14 Aug. 1913; Washington, B.T., 'The negro and the labor unions', *Atlantic Monthly*, (Jun. 1913).

⁴⁴ *Report of the Bureau of Statistics of Labor for the State of Louisiana 1902–1903*, (Baton Rouge, 1904); articles in *New Orleans' Daily Picayune* and *Times-Democrat*, Oct.–Nov. 1907; *Official Journal of the Proceeding of the House of Representatives of the State of Louisiana*, 28 May 1908, pp. 107, 198–200; Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers*, pp. 160–89, 196–210.

White dock leaders were loyal backers of the Democratic party ‘Ring’, counting on the city government and police’s neutrality during strikes in exchange for endorsements and votes. When black voters were disenfranchised in 1898, white dock unions took no public stands on their behalf. Although the DCC fostered a kind of quasi-industrial unionism – one which linked a variety of waterfront craft unions into an effective federation fostering solidarity – the main waterfront unions stood aloof from the Industrial Workers of the World and on only one occasion did it openly challenge the AFL’s approach to organising. In 1907 and 1908, the DCC backed the socialist-led brewery workers’ union and its black and white members against the AFL-backed all-white teamsters’ union in a messy jurisdictional dispute. The high-profile role of several radical leaders affected the DCC’s rhetoric, but ultimately produced no long-term consequences when the conflict had ended with the teamsters’ success.⁴⁵

Although unionists enjoyed high wages and generally good working conditions during the decade of labour peace after 1908, the rebuilding of the riverfront infrastructure by employers, the city government, and the Dock Board laid the groundwork for a shift in the balance of power toward capital. During and immediately after the US participation in World War I, the federal government, through the NAC, fostered voluntary arbitration of disputes. But the post-war era witnessed a series of large-scale waterfront strikes – in 1919, 1920, 1921 and 1923. In the final confrontation in 1923, increasingly hostile employers drew upon friendly elected officials, police and judges, imported large numbers of strikebreakers, and fought the battle to the finish. In the end, the DCC and interracial unionism were effectively dead, and the open shop reigned supreme.⁴⁶

In the years immediately following the failed 1923 strike, the remaining union longshoremen found employment only on ships of the US Shipping Board, while the now overwhelming number of non-union dockers laboured for private companies. Government investigator Boris Stern found that there was ‘no limit to the supply of longshore labor in port’, and that earnings of black and white dockers was widely acknowledged to be ‘very low’, ‘considerably lower than in any other large port in the United States’. (A survey of some 10,573 weekly pay envelopes issued by one company in 1926 revealed that over a third contained less than \$15, roughly another third from \$15 to \$25, and only less than a third \$25 or more). The end of the union era witnessed the return of the infamous shape-up on each pier, where hiring foremen made their daily decisions. ‘In New Orleans there are more rumors current of the abuse of the hiring power by the foremen than at any other port in the United States’, Stern found. Those abuses allegedly included the forced borrowing of money from foremen at exorbitant interest rates, while it

⁴⁵ Hall, ‘Labor Struggles in the Deep South’, p. 3; Ameringer, *If You Don’t Weaken*, pp. 194–202; Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers*, pp. 189–96.

⁴⁶ Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers*, pp. 228–36, 244–52. On the waterfront strike waves along the Gulf Coast, see Mers, G., *Working the Waterfront: The Ups and Downs of a Rebel Longshoreman*, (Austin, 1988).

was reported that black dockers were paid only a portion of their wages, with the remainder going directly to the foremen.⁴⁷

Conclusion

With the exception of the mid and late 1890s, Crescent City dockers in the large cotton sector enjoyed a significant degree of control over the labour process and commanded relatively impressive wages and working conditions for over four decades lasting from 1881 until 1923. Their success rested on a strategy of intertrade co-operation and interracial collaboration, and was facilitated by often sympathetic or neutral municipal officials and an employment structure dominated by a large number of small to middle-sized contracting stevedores, shipping agents, boss draymen, and the like. But as impressive as it was, the interracialism and intertrade co-operation fostered by such bodies as the CMEC and the DCC were marked by persistent jurisdictional rivalries and racial inequalities. It would also be a mistake to view the New Orleans waterfront experience as wholly unique, a complete aberration in the Jim Crow South. Along the Gulf and South Atlantic coasts of the United States, craft unionism, intertrade alliances, and biracial union structures also emerged in the Gilded Age and Progressive eras, each reflecting the specific employment structures, prior divisions of labour, and political dynamics of their respective port cities.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Stern, B., 'Cargo handling and longshore labor conditions', in *Bulletin of the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics*, (Productivity Series, 550, Washington, D.C, 1932), pp. 87–89.

⁴⁸ See issues of the monthly journal of the International Longshoremen's Association, *The Longshoremen*, during the 1910s for numerous examples of waterfront unionism. Also see Maroney, J., 'The International Longshoremen's Association in the Gulf States during the Progressive Era', *Southern Studies*, 16, (1977), p. 225–32; Arnesen, 'Biracial waterfront unionism in the age of segregation'.

CHAPTER FOUR

Dock labour in Le Havre 1790–1970

John Barzman

Historiography

Many disciplines, among which history was not foremost, have contributed to the study of French dock labour either in the framework of the country as a whole or in that of individual ports. Sociologists of labour have examined changes in technology and work rules.¹ Cultural sociologists, anthropologists, and social workers have focused on community values and customs (notably the sensitive study of Marseilles in 1945 by labour priest Jacques, Révérend Père Marie-Réginald, Loew).² Jurists have produced a considerable body of work, notably on insurance (responsibility for loss, theft or damage of goods) and labour law (accidents, unemployment compensation), with useful analyses of the various stages of cargo handling and of the diversity of employers and owners.³ Economists, often working for employers' federations, sometimes gave sustained attention to analysis of the work force.⁴ Geographers have written valuable descriptions of many ports, some with retrospective insights, among which the masterful study of northern range ports by former Havrais scholar André

¹ See, in the footsteps of Friedman, G. and Naville, P., *Traité de sociologie du travail*, (Paris, 1962): Delamotte, Y., 'Changements dans les règles et pratiques du travail des dockers', in *Une nouvelle civilisation: Hommage à Georges Friedman*, (Paris, 1973), and, in the case of Marseilles, Cornu, R., 'Les portefaix et la transformation du port de Marseilles', *Annales du Midi*, 117, (1974), and Cornu, R., Duplex, J. and Picon, A., *Analyse contextuelle de la mobilité: les industries portuaires à Marseille*, (Aix-en-Provence, 1971). See also Harmel, C., 'Dockers', *Etudes sociales et syndicales*, 8, (1991).

² Loew, R.P.M.-R., *Les dockers de Marseille*, (L'Arbresle, 1946). See also Grellet, H., *Entre dockers et technocrates. La vie profonde des ports marchands*, (Paris, 1981), or Baudoin, T., and Collin, M., 'Le Havre face à la mondialisation. Le retour à ville portuaire', *Etudes Normandes*, 2, (1997).

³ See the early work by Belgian lawyer Baron de Pélichy, C.G., *Le régime du travail dans les principaux ports de mer de l'Europe*, (Louvain, 1899), which includes Le Havre in its survey; and, for example, Geffré, J., *Les manutentions dans les ports maritimes français*, (Bordeaux, 1934), Bérard, G., *Les entreprises de manutention dans les ports maritimes*, (Marseille, 1951), and Chao, A., *Acconiers et destinataires*, (Paris, 1971).

⁴ See Rousiers, P. de, *Les Grands ports de France: leur rôle économique*, (Paris, 1909); Hecquet, G., *Les Ports et la manutention maritime*, (Paris, 1946); Tridon, H., *Les ports de France*, (Paris, 1956); and the most recent survey Hislair, L., *Dockers, corporatisme et changement*, (Paris, 1993).

Vigarié⁵; memoirs of participants and other narrative works include savoury details but only occasional analysis.⁶ However, until recently, historians have not approached the topic directly but through general histories of port cities or through monographs on urban labour. The former usually contain more information on the built-up environment and merchant communities than on the lowly people who moved the goods.⁷ The latter have dealt with dockers as one component of the urban work force, often at the expense of the particularities of the industry: in this respect, the contribution of William Sewell on Marseilles deserves to be singled out for combining the two aspects.⁸ In the last few years, historians have given more direct attention to the topic.⁹

On Le Havre itself, geographers have been most prolific.¹⁰ Anthropologist Jean-Pierre Castelain has contributed a book about the drinking customs of Havrais dockers, which, despite his obvious sympathy for the community and his conclusion that alcoholism has declined, earned him quite a bit of hostility from union leaders who feared the effects which yet another association of dockers and

⁵ Vigarié, A., *Les grands ports de commerce de la Seine au Rhin. Leur évolution devant l'évolution de l'arrière-pays*, (Aubenas, Ardèche, 1964).

⁶ For the memoirs genre, see Pacini, A., and Pons, D., *Dockers à Marseille*, (Paris, 1996), and Hernandez, J.-P., *Au port, t'en souviens-tu? Les dockers de Dunkerque de 1900 à 1939*, (Dunkerque, 1975); for narratives, Aubéry, P., *Les Américains au Havre*, (Paris, 1948).

⁷ For a general history of the coastal population, see Cabantous, A., *Les Citoyens du large: les identités maritimes en France (XVIIe–XIXe siècles)*, (Paris, 1995); for a single-port study, Roncayolo, M., 'Les grandes phases de l'économie marseillaise depuis le XIXe siècle', *Marseille*, (1964), and *L'imaginaire de Marseille: port, ville, pôle, Tome V de l'Histoire du commerce et de l'industrie de Marseille, XIXe–XXe siècles*, (Marseille, 1990), and Gontier, C., *Docks en stock: la manutention portuaire marseillaise: hommes, territoires et techniques, 19e–20e siècle*, (Marseille, 1988).

⁸ Sewell, W., 'Uneven development, the autonomy of politics and the dockworkers of nineteenth-century Marseille', *American Historical Review*, 43, (1988).

⁹ See for example the contributions of various authors gathered in Rouen in 1995 and collected by Pigenet, M., (ed.), *Le syndicalisme docker depuis 1945*, (Cahiers du GRHIS/PUR, 232, Rouen, 1997). Pigenet has begun to study the history of the national federation of dockers and is assembling biographies of docker militants for the 1945–1968 series of the *Dictionnaire biographique du mouvement ouvrier français*, known as the 'Maïtron'; see Pigenet, M., 'Le miel et le fiel ou le difficile cheminement des dockers vers l'unité', in Institut d'histoire sociale de la CGT, 1936. *La CGT: Le Front populaire (Actes du colloque)*, (Paris, 1998).

¹⁰ A partial list, in chronological order: Hérubel, M., *La France au travail. En suivant les côtes de Dunkerque à Saint-Nazaire*, (Paris, 1910); Weulersse, G., *Le port du Havre*, (Paris, 1921); Lavergne, E., *Le Havre, son évolution et son avenir*, (Paris, 1927); Amphoux, M., *Le Havre et sa fonction industrielle*, (Paris, 1931); Nègre, T., *Le Havre. Etude de géographie urbaine*, (Le Havre, 1947); Gay, F., 'Urban decision-makers and the development of an industrial port: the example of Le Havre', in Hoyle, B. S., and Pinder, P. A., (eds), *Cityport Industrialisation and Regional Development*, (Oxford, 1981). The social science laboratory CIRTAI has attempted to continue this tradition with notably Brocard, M., et al., *Atlas de l'Estuaire*, (Le Havre, 1997).

alcohol might have on their public image.¹¹ Occasional studies by journalists have contributed some insights.¹² Historians have published fewer direct scholarly studies of Havrais dockers. They have approached them obliquely from the point of view of the history of Le Havre, an antiquarian interest in old trades and ships, heritage, and the history of mutual aid societies and urban unions.¹³ Important unpublished work includes doctoral theses in labour medicine and economics, and a number of master's theses.¹⁴ This author is presently working on a two-century survey of Havrais dockers.

¹¹ Castelain, J.-P., *Manières de vivre, manières de boire : alcool et sociabilité sur le port*, (Paris, 1989), and personal interview with the author, Le Havre 1998. A recent balance sheet of sociological work on Le Havre can be found in Nicolle, A., 'Mémoire et prospective', *Cahiers de Sociologie économique et culturelle*, 26, (1996). See also Masdebrieu, C., 'Dockers du Havre : de l'identité culturelle d'un groupe professionnel,' unpublished Master's thesis, University of Caen, (1993).

¹² For example, Aubéry, P., 'Les dockers du Port du Havre', *Droit social*, (1950), and 'Les dockers du port du Havre. De l'isolement et de la misère à l'organisation professionnelle', *La Révolution prolétarienne*, 20, (1951); Equipe du Havre de 'Economie et Humanisme', *La population de l'agglomération havraise, et Le port du Havre et ses problèmes en 1954*, (Le Havre, n.d. [1954?]); Lemettais, R., 'L'évolution d'un problème social: la condition des dockers', *Escale, revue du Port autonome du Havre*, 42, (1956); Montigny, P., 'Les dockers du Havre : légende et réalité', (7 articles), *Le Havre Libre*, 4 Mar. 1969; Port autonome du Havre, 'Notre service des magasins publics succède à la Compagnie des Docks et Entrepôts', *Escale*, 5, (1953); Sider, R., 'Docks Story ou la légende des docks : la Compagnie des Docks et Entrepôts du Havre 1850–1973', *Bulletin de l'Association des Douanes*, (Mar. 1981).

¹³ On the history of Le Havre see Legoy, J., *Le peuple du Havre et son histoire. Volumes 1, 2 et 3. Des Origines à 1800, Du négoce à l'industrie 1800–1914*, (St-Etienne du Rouvray, 1979, 1982, 1984), and *Cultures havraises*, (Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray, 1986), *Les Havrais et la mer*, (Rouen, 1987); Corvisier, A., (ed.), *Histoire du Havre*, (Toulouse, 1987), and Boivin, M., et al., (eds), *La Normandie de 1900 à nos jours*, (Toulouse, 1978). On mutual aid and urban unions, see Chopart, J.-N., *Le fil rouge du corporatisme*, (Paris, 1991), and Barzman, J., *Dockers, métallos, ménagères : les mouvements sociaux au Havre (1912–1923)*, (Rouen, 1997); on old trades Briot, J., 'Les anciens métiers de la manutention', *Cahiers havrais de recherche historique*, 53, (1984).

¹⁴ See the solid and theoretically informed dissertation by Lemarchand, A., 'La structuration des marchés du travail portuaire', unpublished Ph.D., University of Paris X-Nanterre, (1994), and, by a medical doctor in charge of dockers' health, Avenel, J.-P., 'Les dockers du Havre–Aspects psycho-sociologiques de la vie du groupe', unpublished medical Ph.D., University of Medicine of Paris, (1960). Smaller unpublished university work includes Tétrel, C., 'Les travailleurs du port du Havre dans la première moitié du XIXe siècle', unpublished DEA thesis, University of Rouen, (1995); Barbera, M.A., 'La Chambre de Commerce du Havre des origines à 1914', unpublished DEA thesis, University of Rouen, (1991), Jolivet, V., 'Cafés et débits de boisson au Havre de 1815 à 1939', unpublished Master's thesis, University of Rouen, (1985), Pasquier, P., 'Les dockers du Havre de 1928 à 1947', unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Rouen, (n.d. [1970s])

Methodology

Dock labour is not an obvious entity. Here a narrow twentieth-century definition has been chosen, which includes only workers handling goods between ship and ground. However, this category was preceded and then coexisted with another, that of 'port workers', which included workers in navigation inside the port, ship repair, packaging, harbour construction and maintenance. Some of these 'port workers' who had occasionally handled goods in the nineteenth century, were not included in the twentieth-century dockers group. On the other hand, twentieth-century dockers lost some functions performed by their direct ancestors in the early nineteenth century (such as insurance of the merchandise), and kept or gained others that had little or no contact with the ship (sailmaking and haulage). The method retained in this study is to attempt to reconstitute the basic overall framework for the entire period.

Sources

The overview is based mainly on this author's own work on the 1840 to 1965 period, and for other periods on work by Jean Legoy (1790–1914), Claudine Tétrel (1790–1852) and Arnaud Lemarchand (economic view focused on the present, with retrospective developments).¹⁵ Sources are diverse: correspondence and documents of the mayor and city council (Archives municipales du Havre) and of the sub-prefect and prefect (Archives départementales de la Seine maritime, Rouen), reports received by Ministries based in Paris (Archives nationales, Paris), notably those of the Interior (police: series F7), of Commerce (series F12), and of Public Works (series F14), by the army, particularly for periods of war, and navy (Archives nationales and Service historique des armées, Vincennes, series 6N and 7N, and series CC and DD), the Le Havre Chamber of Commerce and Port Authority, the press (Bibliothèque nationale, Service des périodiques), and the few union archives open to the public (the dockers' union claims to have kept its records for a very long time but, so far, has not agreed to allow extensive scientific work on its collection).¹⁶

¹⁵ See their works listed above.

¹⁶ In addition to sources listed above, the following printed materials deserve special mention: state statistics (for instance, France. Ministère du travail. Direction du travail. *Statistique des grèves survenues en 1927... 1935* [various years], (Paris, 1928–1937); collections of commercial yearbooks (*Annuaire du commerce du Havre*, and *Annuaire du département*), decisions of the city (Ville du Havre, *Procès-verbaux des séances du Conseil municipal et arrêtés d'intérêt général et de police. Année 1945*), Chamber of Commerce reports (*Rapports annuels*) and industrial federations (for example, Comité d'organisation de la manutention dans les ports maritimes. Commission de la Main-d'Oeuvre et de la Prévoyance sociale, *Rapport général sur la législation des accidents du travail*, [Rouen, 1942]); union newspapers, such as *Bulletin de la Fédération nationale des travailleurs de la manutention des ports et docks de France* (CGT-rue Lafayette), *L'Avenir des ports, organe de la Fédération nationale des Ports et Docks* (CGT), *Vérités* (Havrais

Dock labour and work

When our story begins in 1790, Le Havre already had a long history as a large commercial port, having been founded in 1517. During the following two centuries, the flow of goods through its harbour remained large enough, and the social definition of skills durable enough, to require the creation of a specialised group of workers for the transport of goods to and from ships. Neither the seamen, who went from port to port, nor the workers of manufacturing or road, rail and river transport firms, who brought goods to the harbour, performed this work, except on rare occasions. This special port transport work force always involved some permanent and some casual workers. But the proportion, the status and type of work of both categories changed considerably. We can distinguish three periods when a particular configuration prevailed. Between 1790 and 1840, registered trades composed of permanent masters who hired casual but faithful helpers continued to dominate the work force. From about 1856 to 1928, a two-tier system combined a multiplicity of small employers hiring casual workers with a few large warehousing and shipping companies with a significant proportion of permanent workers. Beginning in 1947 and lasting until 1992, only workers defined as dockers could work in the port; these were registered and dispatched on a daily basis through a Central Labour Office with a rota. These periods were separated by situations with no stable dominant system. Let us examine them now in further detail.

Around the time of the French Revolution, in 1790, five trades which performed tasks later included in the dockers' jurisdiction, had a relatively stable existence: 1) a dozen carriers of liquid products such as wine, cider, oil, molasses (*bremens*, a name apparently derived from the port of Bremen); 2) about eighty barrowmen (*brouettiers*) who carried dry goods; 3) about twenty coal porters and measurers; 4) the coopers (*tonneliers*) who made and moved barrels; 5) the sailmakers (*voiliers*, *tréviers*, *gréeurs*) who made sacks for merchandise handling as well as sails. The city considered members of the first three as 'people of the arm' (*gens de bras*) entitled to be registered and regulated, a status one cut below the 'people of skill' (*gens de métier*) recognised as sworn corporations. The latter two were classified as skilled and granted the title of sworn corporation, not by the city but by the naval dockyard (the *Marine*) where they coexisted with many other ship building crafts. Other port transport trades mentioned occasionally, such as codfish sorters, wheat porters and wood porters, do not appear to have achieved a stable existence. The five stable port transport trades were closely associated with other trades active in the port.

Each master barrowman, *bremens* or porter guaranteed the safety of the merchandise for which he took responsibility, and was helped by one or two boys (*garçons*) and an occasional day-labourer (*journalier*) as necessitated by the size of the job. Between 1815 and 1840, as trade expanded and required more labourers, masters drew on a larger group of casual workers, difficult to identify precisely, but which included: rope towers and ballast-heavers (who helped ships

unions); the daily newspaper *Le Petit Havre*; and trade newspapers, such as *Le Journal de la Marine marchande*, and *L'Escalpe*.

in and out of the harbour), navvies working on port extension and fortifications; seamen waiting for a ship; early industrial workers seasonally unemployed (brick and china factories) and women lacemakers; agricultural workers, also seasonal; a floating population of 'outsiders' (*horsains*), a term designating people not from Le Havre, including poor people, beggars, street vendors, emigrants unable to pay their ticket, and reputedly deserters and ex-criminals.

By 1850, the transition to an unregulated situation was well under way. The number of casual workers had multiplied and their origin had diversified. The regulated port trades, dissolved by the Le Chapelier and Allarde laws of 1791, but initially tolerated in some French ports, as an exception to the rule, had lost sole access to the bonded warehouse of the customs service (in 1830), and had to compete with firms of other origins. The city had stopped issuing badges (medals) to port workers in 1848. Trades that previously operated in the city outside the port, such as carters (*voituriers-banneliers*), were now allowed in the harbour area. Between the late 1840s and 1859, large new enclosed docks were built, and their owners began to hire artisans and unskilled workers as they saw fit. As the years went by, the great bulk of cargo handling was done by casual workers employed by traders, merchandise brokers, ship captains, shipowners and shipping companies, warehousing companies, haulage companies, stevedores, as well as the more prosperous masters of the older port trades (sailmakers, coopers, barrowmen) who tended to become small firms themselves. The decisive turning point was the inauguration of the *Compagnie des Docks et Entrepôts du Havre* (Dock and Warehouse Company of Le Havre) in 1856.

Jumping ahead to 1890 and 1920, the picture from the point of view of casual status and number of workers is quite similar at both dates, the major changes in those thirty years being the final replacement of sail by steam (and increasingly oil for diesel engines) and the consolidation of a trade union. Otherwise, at both dates, a group of workers greatly enlarged compared to 1790–1840, about seven thousand in 1913 according to my estimates, had grown accustomed to obtaining jobs in the harbour and acquired an identity as port workers (*ouvriers du port*).¹⁷ A two-tier pattern of employment prevailed at both dates. In the first tier, the model developed in the *Compagnie des Docks et Entrepôts* prevailed: it combined a group of permanent staff with workers employed casually, by the day, on the basis of a preference list, and a third group employed on the same basis but without any priority. The system had spread to other large warehouse, shipping, cartage, and coal import firms. It is significant that the generic name which came to replace that of 'port worker' in the twentieth century, that is *docker* (in French), originally meant a preferred employee of the *Compagnie des Docks et Entrepôts* (otherwise known as *magasinier* or *magot*). But this labour system concerned only a fraction of the work force; most port workers (in the second tier) were hired on a

¹⁷ Two methods are used to count dockers: 1) those actually hired by firms on a given day, 2) those available on a monthly basis, who enter police calculations of percentages on strike or unemployed. The second set of figures is used here. See Barzman, J., 'Culture des métiers du port du Havre 1910–1914', *Bulletin de la Société libre d'émulation de la Seine-Maritime*, (1995).

daily basis by employers who preferred to maintain no permanent staff, rent the necessary equipment and hire casual teams upon arrival of the ship.

Around 1913, all port workers had divided into six trades (each identified by a stable trade union bearing its name): 400 sailmakers who no longer made sails, but repaired sacks and tent-like sheds used to shelter merchandise that had not yet been moved to a warehouse, 550 coal porters, 1,200 carters or hauliers, who trucked cargo on the wharves to and from warehouses, 1,100 warehouse workers, 150 tally clerks who sampled, measured, counted and weighed the cargo, and 3,600 quay day labourers.

The divisions were based either on the product handled (coal porters), the segment of the transport chain concerned (warehouse, warehouse-to-ship, wharf-to-ship), or the operations performed (sewing for sailmakers, counting for samplers). Comparing the Norman port to London and other ports, we note that there was no strong division between stowing (loading a ship, or *arrimage*) and unloading (*désarrimage*), or between work on board the ship and on the quay, or on board lighters, and that, except for coal, the handling of different products had not given rise to separate trades (even though Le Havre was a major importer of coffee, cotton, wood, oil and metallic ores). By 1920, some old trades associated with sail had been eliminated or reduced: the rope towers, ballast-heavers, sail riggers. Others had grown: coal porters, hauliers, warehouse workers. We should note also, that the workers employed on port facilities by the Chamber of Commerce and, beginning in 1926, by the new port authority (*Port autonome du Havre*), most notably the crane operators, had not yet been drawn into the newly emerging category of port workers (later to become the dockers). Nor had port workers attracted navigation helpers (tugboatmen, mooring linemen, firemen) or train drivers, who now operated directly on the wharves. Some evidence suggests that in times of slack business, some dockers reluctantly worked as navvies in port construction or as unskilled workers in the large engineering factories that developed after 1890. We know with greater certainty that in times of intense traffic, workers from other occupations sought work in the harbour. But the trend was toward a stabilisation and specialisation of dock labour, and this was reflected in the periodic but brief bursts of union membership.

1940 is not a good year to summarise the situation in Le Havre, because commercial traffic was interrupted by the Battles of France and Britain. Nevertheless, we can state that between 1928 and 1947, a rapid transition towards a highly regulated form of casual labour took place. In 1928, the police reported that about six thousand dockers could find work at one time or another; that year, a victorious strike forced employers to abide by union standards on wage rates, speciality rates and the number of men on a team, and union members began to refuse to work with non-members. This system was preserved through the 1930s. In 1938, eight thousand dockers were members of the union, and in 1939, the union card was bolstered by a port identification card issued by the state.¹⁸

When traffic resumed in September 1944, about seven or eight thousand dockers worked in the port. They were registered as professional dockers and

¹⁸ Barzman, J., 'Port labour relations in Le Havre, 1928–1947', *International Journal of Maritime History*, 9, (1997).

hired according to a rota kept by a *Bureau central de la main-d'oeuvre* (BCMO, Central Labour Office; decree of June 28 1941, implemented in 1945) with union representation. This system was given its lasting form by the law of 1947, and remained in place until 1992, acquiring amendments favourable to labour as the years passed. It defined professional dockers as intermittent workers with several employers, benefiting from a whole set of rights (notably through the *Caisse nationale de garantie des ouvriers dockers*, Cainagod).

By 1965 however, although the system remained in place, it covered a steadily smaller group of people. The number of registered professional dockers fell from about six thousand workers in 1948 to about 3,700 in 1965, and continued a slow decline. These professional dockers had to report every morning at the Central Labour Office (a new building finished in 1962), as a condition for receiving maintenance pay if they were not hired. Some professional dockers with supervisory or highly technical skills were sure (*assurés*) to be hired by particular employers who appreciated them, and could therefore earn more than other professionals. Unregistered dockers were considered occasional, and could only be hired after every professional had been hired. But the number of occasional workers declined even faster than that of professional. Between 1945 and 1965, professional dockers developed a more homogeneous status and culture. The Central Labour Office controlled all hiring for loading and unloading operations in the area defined as the port, which corresponded to the state's maritime domain. The one exception to this monopoly concerned jobs connected with oil transfer operations. In addition, beginning in the 1980s, to bypass the law and avoid hiring registered dockers, some cargo handling firms set up warehouses further inland, outside the maritime domain and employed part-time or short-term low-paid workers for storing, stripping and stuffing containers (*empotage-dépotage*).

Working conditions

All work conducted in the port of Le Havre conformed to certain norms, some written, others customary. Control over the hiring site for day-labourers was one method by which dockers could impose some rules of fairness. Its relocation reflected the three phases of dock labour described above. From 1517 to 1880, roughly the period of the artisanal configuration, the city designated only one hiring site, near the old port (between the bridge rue des Drapiers and the neighbourhoods of Saint-François and Notre-Dame). In 1880, well into the phase of deregulation, the city designated three open-air sites (Place de la Mâturation, the shelter on the Quai d'Orléans, and rue Royale) to accommodate the eastward expansion of port basins and warehouses and the diversification of potential employers. Around 1900, the city returned to one hiring site, still further east, in the newer part of the port, at Pont III, in the Leure neighbourhood. Owners of the bars located in the older sites (Quai d'Orléans and Saint-François), and some of their usual patrons, resisted this shift, but the union approved. Employers occasionally bypassed the rule and hired dockers in bars, by the ship's side or, in the case of large shipping companies, in their own sheds (*tentes*). Pont III

remained the official hiring site until the Central Labour Office was created in 1945, reflecting the phase of strict organisation.

Another norm of port work was the length of the standard working period. The hours were sounded by a bell located near the hiring site. Until 1900, the workday lasted between eight and twelve hours, depending on the season. Around 1890, for example, during the six warmer months from the beginning of April to the end of September, work began at 6 a.m. and ended at 6 p.m., with two breaks totalling two and a half hours. During the other six months, it began at 7.30 am and continued until nightfall, with two breaks totalling two hours. In 1900, Le Havre port workers won the eight-hour day (nineteen years before the law extended it to most other professions) in two shifts (*vacations*) of four hours each, beginning at 7 a.m. and 2 p.m. This schedule has proved remarkably resilient.

Customs (or past practice) claimed by dockers as rights were not entirely standardised, and differences over their interpretation could cause work stoppages. Between 1880 and 1945, there were many brief strikes by small numbers of dockers over such issues, which earned dockers the reputation of being 'strike prone'. In the 1930s and 1940s, such conflicts became the object of strike threats and negotiations. The contested norms included the proper size and composition of a work team (*bordée*) for any job on a specific cargo accomplished with a given technology, the right of a worker to refuse any job he did not want, and the right of one member of the team to be absent for prolonged periods (*ticket*). Overtime pay was another controversial subject. In principle, it was due for all hours outside the morning and afternoon shifts: lunch, evening, night and week-end; but the definition of the ninth hour and the rate of overtime pay fluctuated. Workers also demanded to be paid for a full hour, or a half-day or even a whole day for every job they had begun, even if they finished before the projected ending time. Finally, bonuses for particularly difficult jobs were also a major point of contention, because the degree of difficulty was unpredictable until the workers had actually laid their hands on the cargo: a job could be considered either unhealthy, heavy, cumbersome or filthy.

There is no full study of the pilfering tradition in Le Havre but its existence can be surmised from a few anecdotes. In the early nineteenth century, women and children could collect fallen pieces of coal, coffee, cotton and other merchandise from the streets and quays. When the *Compagnie des Docks et Entrepôts du Havre* began operating in 1856, the customs official pointed out that since its employees were now subject to a thorough search at the end of the work day, they had to be compensated for the part of their wages which derived from the appropriation of goods which had fallen to the ground in the hold of ships and on the quays. The company ruled that every effort would be made to restore such merchandise to its rightful owner, but that the remainder, which was swept up (the *balayures*), would be sold for the benefit of a company health fund for its injured and sick employees. This was opposed by the merchants who argued that, in the past, the entire work force had benefited from the customary right, and that the proceeds of the sale should be turned over to the city for aid to the needy (*Bureau*

de bienfaisance municipal).¹⁹ The construction of enclosed docks after the 1850s, the fencing in of new basins in the 1920s and the creation of a port police around the same time, were all intended to reduce the amount of theft in the harbour. In 1937 the consul of the United States complained about the disappearance of a large amount of precious furs, presumably because the bounds of what could be tolerated had been grossly overstepped. Finally in 1944, Pierre Aubéry described the widespread theft that occurred in the harbour and the efforts of the American military to prevent it. He argued that when dockers would once again be members of their union and proud of the work they performed, pilfering would decline.²⁰ Throughout these episodes, the logic of the situation seems to be: either union control or widespread theft.

Dockers' drinking habits belong in both the rubrics on working conditions and on community culture. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, dockers had a reputation as heavy drinkers. In 1913, a local doctor, basing himself on the per capita purchase of the equivalent of pure alcohol, calculated that Le Havre was the most 'alcoholic' city in France and therefore in the world. The role of bars was already widely discussed by observers of dockers in the 1870s, and continued through to the 1960s, although by that time, its function had changed. It was probably imposed on dockers from the outside in the 1850s, and later became part of their culture and values, until a conscious anti-alcoholic effort began within their community. The original practice was described by Charles Noiret in an 1876 report, and witnessed by many later observers.²¹ When stevedores, the newly emerging category of small employers in the 1850s, accepted an unloading job, they received payment from their client (a trader, shipowner, ship captain or warehouse manager) only when the job was finished. Until then, they had no capital with which to pay the men they chose. They therefore struck a deal with bar owners: the stevedore would pay the men with tokens redeemable at the bar at the end of each shift, and the bar owner would accept the tokens if the men agreed to buy a drink at his establishment. Once the job was finished, the stevedore bought the tokens back from the bar owner. Bars also served as placement offices where dockers could obtain promises to be hired.

Later, a culture of bars (variously called *bars*, *cabarets*, *estaminets*, *troquets*, *cafés*) developed: dockers took shelter in them during breaks, one docker was expected to buy a round for the others, and bonds of solidarity were built. Drinking became a sign of comradeship, virility and rejection of the outside world. Payment in tokens went out around 1925. But the bar culture continued into the 1960s, even after the Central Labour Office was created. Only with the dispersal over time of many dockers to new suburban neighbourhoods, the

¹⁹ This account is based mainly on Archives nationales (AN) F12-63887 to 6390 Commerce. Dock-Entrepôt du Havre.

²⁰ See Aubéry, 'Les dockers', (1951).

²¹ Noiret, C., *Projet de syndicat et de caisse d'échange pour les ouvriers du port et d'amélioration morale de notre population*, (Le Havre, 1876). The system is described in Manneville, P., 'Un entraînement forcé à l'ivrognerie : le paiement des ouvriers du port du Havre au XIXe siècle', in Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, *106ème Congrès des Sociétés savantes*, (Perpignan, 1981), and its sequels in Castelain, *Manières de vivre*.

increased use of dangerous machines in port work, and the creation of an anti-alcoholic committee, did this culture begin to peter out.

Occupational, ethnic, age and sex background of dockers

Women

In the artisanal phase, a widow sometimes inherited the trade membership in the barrowmen's corporation of her deceased husband and either replaced him, with the help of journeymen, or sold his share. Women were full members of other trades, notably the sailmakers and ropemakers. Many wives, daughters and companions of port workers had jobs in the nearby tobacco manufacture or as lacemakers.

Women remained in the sailmaking trade until the 1920s. In the nineteenth century, they also carried bricks onto small barges in the port, and cleaned barrels and drums in the oil industry. They served drinks and food in mobile canteens on the wharves. As stated earlier, for a long time women and children were allowed to gather bits and pieces of merchandise on the wharves. Finally, in the second half of the nineteenth century, between the periods of registered trades and union strength, particularly in the years of business downturns, a few women were hired by stevedores and traders to do loading and unloading jobs. This caused the nascent unions to write petitions to the mayor protesting the use of women to do 'men's jobs'.

By the 1930s, under the influence of unions, women were effectively removed from jobs defined as dockers' jobs, and the professional dockers' status of 1947 was de facto for 'men only'. Lack of sufficient physical strength was the conventional explanation for the exclusion, but we should note that dockers gave weaker men, such as older or disabled men, easier jobs on the team, supposedly in recognition of their earlier efforts as young or healthy men. Moreover, the maximum legal weight of bundles was contested on several occasions, and heavier loads were lifted by combinations of several dockers. Employers who hired women, did so outside the boundaries of the port (in the oil industry or in repackaging warehouses).

Female companions of dock workers, whether common-law or legally wed, often acted as housewives in charge of feeding the family. Their collective actions revealed a sense of responsibility for making sure that the price of bread, sugar and other food remained at a level consistent with the household's survival. There were several riots over food prices in the nineteenth century. These were based in neighbourhood networks and ended with direct action in the marketplace or in front of bakers' or grocers' shops. This author has studied four such riots triggered by inflation (in 1911, 1914, 1917 and 1919) in two of which dockers played a major role, possibly in support of their wives.²² Later, in the 1930s and

²² See Barzman, J., 'Entre l'émeute, la manifestation et la concertation : la crise de la vie chère de l'été 1919 au Havre', *Le Mouvement social*, (1995) and 'Continuité des lieux de

1940s, according to Pierre Aubéry, dockers' wives were expected by their husbands not to work, apparently a sign that the profession had finally achieved the ideal that every worker should receive a wage sufficient to keep a wife and children at home.²³ But the job remained irregular and wives alternated between buying food on credit at the grocer's when money was scarce, and splashing out when money was plentiful, a behaviour which apparently earned them the jealousy of other customers and the reputation of being pretentious.

Young and old

Division of labour according to age occurred in all periods. In the artisanal phase, significantly the lowest category was entitled 'boys' although their unfavourable status could last well beyond youth. In the period of the 'law of the jungle' (1850–1914), workers seemed to resent stevedores' preference for robust young men and tried to reserve special jobs for older dockers. This was one of the reasons why petitions written during the 1848 revolution demanded that a rota be reinstituted in the harbour.²⁴ Implicit recognition of this social obligation may account for warehousing companies' preference for older workers in permanent jobs requiring trust, and for the decision of the city, when rope-towers were replaced by tugboats, to hire the remaining old ones as street sweepers. Another form of positive recognition of age honoured the sailmaking trade, whose workers had the reputation of being old and of perpetuating the port union tradition. In the recent regulated period (from 1930), older men (in their forties) could help their sons, sons-in-law or younger acquaintances, to get jobs in their team and learn the ropes of the trade under their guidance. In exchange, the younger ones allowed their benefactor to be assigned less physical tasks without protest. The obligation was sometimes paid back years later, a system which required that the community of work be relatively stable and predictable. In the 1950s, active dockers showed their concern for retirees, by struggling for retirement pay to be calculated on the basis of 180 days of work per year, and fought to increase pension payments.

Occupational background

Today, the transmission of docker's jobs from father to son has become a subject of controversy in Le Havre. Dockers claim it is an ancient and continuous tradition. However, there is no rigorous study of the subject. Before 1830, in the days of the registered trades, the records show that sons and sons-in-law of

la contestation: les marchés du Havre 1911–1919', in Leménorel, A., ed., *Sociabilité, culture et patrimoine*, (Cahiers du GRHIS, 8, Rouen, 1998).

²³ The reference is to the ideal of the working-class family expressed by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, a theorist of the labour movement, in the mid-nineteenth century. On the early 1950s, see Aubéry, 'Les dockers', (1950) and 'Les dockers', (1951).

²⁴ The 1848 petitions of Le Havre are found in Archives municipales du Havre (AMH), Fonds moderne, F2, c7, 11. Those of France as a whole are in AN C 934 Assemblée nationale. Pétitions avril 1848.

masters often inherited the charge of their father or father-in-law.²⁵ After 1950, in the phase of regulation and steady numerical decrease, oral tradition indicates that many dockers were sons or sons-in-law of port workers. Between 1830 and 1930 however, the group expanded almost continuously and accommodated a constant influx of newcomers. Were skilled jobs handed down more easily than unskilled ones? From what occupations did the outsiders come? Hypotheses must still be formed on the basis of strictly anecdotal information. In the 1840s and 1850s, dockers objected to seamen accepting cargo handling jobs. Excess seamen might become dockers when maritime trade declined or was interrupted by war. We know of some cases where they became port equipment watchmen. On the other hand, there seem to have been significant transfers of workers from the construction industry (port extension), from agriculture, and later from engineering plants (when the latter experienced a downturn) to the unskilled dock day-labouring jobs. In the 1920s, the union complained that employers occasionally hired foreigners, policemen and other civil servants. The last significant influx of newcomers took place in 1944–45.

Ethnic and religious differences

The present ethnic composition of the port work force is considered relatively 'homogeneous', that is composed of sons of Normans and Bretons. But its history has not been studied separately from that of the city as a whole.²⁶ Throughout the two hundred years considered here, the division between Havrais and outsider (*horsain*) remained quite fundamental. A person was considered Havrais if he or she was born in the city or had been settled there for a relatively long time. Under the Old Regime, this was a requirement for membership in the corporations and regulated trades controlled by the municipality, which, in combination with caste-like recruitment, insured that the core of port transport remained in the hands of Havrais workers until about 1840. There was a clear distinction between Le Havre, which though smaller than today was the central port city, and its two suburbs (*faubourgs*) of Ingouville and Graille. Many unskilled day-labourers lived in the latter two. In addition, there were periodic rumours of vagrants, beggars and poor coming from the countryside. The discrimination against Ingouville and Graille residents was dropped during the 1848 revolution, and disappeared when the two neighbouring towns were annexed.

Until 1850, the unskilled day-labouring work force came mainly from the immediate surrounding area, the Pays de Caux. In addition, coastal shipping lines and fishing boats brought people from small fishing ports of the Normandy coast, and from inland Lower Normandy. In several instances, various foreigners, including Germans, Swiss, Austro-Hungarian migrants and English (perhaps Irish) railroad navvies, were stranded in Le Havre and employed on the port. From about 1850 to 1914, the main source of immigration shifted to the north coast of

²⁵ See AMH, Fonds moderne F2, c7, 13, Actes relatifs à la police des brémens, brouettiers et portefaix. Indications on the present oral tradition are derived from discussions by the author with dockers' relatives in the 1990s in Le Havre.

²⁶ This passage is based mainly on Legoy, *Le peuple havrais*, vol. 2.

Brittany. Dockers' neighbourhoods such as Notre-Dame and Saint-François were heavily populated by Bretons. These outsiders may have occupied the less skilled positions.

Then, during World War I, over 80 per cent of dockers were drafted into the army and the port transport industry employed hundreds of Indochinese, Algerian and Moroccan workers, and Belgian refugees from Antwerp, as well as five thousand German prisoners of war. Havrais dockers who served in the French army expressed worries that their jobs 'and wives' would be taken by foreigners when they returned. In 1917, residents of dockers' neighbourhoods rioted against Moroccans, an incident that was repeated in 1920. While demanding union control of foreign labour, the dockers bowed to internationalist principles by issuing leaflets in Flemish and Arabic between 1918 and 1920.

After the war, most foreign dockers left Le Havre, but a minority remained. As the port work force stabilised in the 1920s and 1930s, there was no massive influx of foreign labour (a major difference with Marseilles). The last major addition of newcomers in 1944–45 did not alter significantly the ethnic composition of the work force which was essentially Havrais. Thereafter, the group suffered steady attrition and, to the extent that it replenished itself, did so through recruitment of sons and sons-in-law, without explicitly excluding people on the basis of ethnic background or race. Thus in the twentieth century Havrais dockers were not divided into two or more large ethnic groups. There is some evidence of racist jokes and brawls, but directed at individuals and episodic.

Religion did not divide the docker population. Rather, it united the various port workers as people of Catholic origin who had come to oppose clerical power, some faster than others. In 1790, there were already signs of disinterest and hostility to the dominant Catholic church. These appeared again in the revolutionary crises of 1830 and 1870–71. Anti-clericalism served as the basis for an alliance with the Republican merchants (many of whom were Protestants opposed to Catholic influence in public affairs) between 1870 and 1914, and in support for public non-religious (*laïques*) schools in the twentieth century.

Two facts deserve discussion. First, the old corporations included devotion to a patron saint among their customs; the barrowmen (*Grand Corps des Brouettiers*) for instance, honoured Saint Bonaventure. During the Second Empire (1852–70), when the government attempted to revive the cult of patron saints, the barrowmen participated in several receptions and ceremonies in full folkloric gear. The Compagnie des Docks et Entrepôts took over the barrowmen's celebration and organised a yearly feast for all its employees on the occasion of the patron saint's holiday. But observers noted the growing disaffection of workers, particularly day-labourers, for these antics. Second, the Bretons have a reputation as devout Catholics and practitioners of folkloric cults. However, there was a division within Brittany, notably between the inland and the coast, where fishermen had a 'red' tradition. Many Bretons of Le Havre came from these red enclaves. The Catholic church attempted to keep some influence over them by introducing a mass in the Breton language in the church in Saint-François, but with little success. In the twentieth century, the unskilled immigrant Breton workers did not become a permanent subproletarian caste: their integration may have benefited from the unifying effect of union activism, of French patriotism during World

War I, or of the general improvement of docker's living standards. In any case, relations between unskilled Breton workers and skilled Havrais workers in the 1870–1930 period deserve a careful study.

Technological change

We include here changes in ships, tools and machines, storage buildings, and the configuration of basins. In 1790, sail ships averaged 100 shipping tons, with a crew of fifteen. Their cost was relatively low, and they remained in the harbour for about one month. By 1850, clippers had been introduced, averaging 750 shipping tons. They were far more expensive, carried up to 4,000 bales of cotton, and had to be moved in and out by tugboats. The same ships often sailed from the United States with cotton, and returned with emigrants. The introduction of steamships was resisted for a while by long-distance carriers of cheap bulk goods (guano, copper, nickel), but by 1890 a majority of ships were steam-powered. Their large size (8,000 shipping tons was common in 1910) required faster operations, deeper access channels and wider basins. Even the new steam-powered lifting equipment with which they were outfitted could not empty their holds without the help of numerous teams of labourers. This was also the great period of the speedy passenger liners. By 1920 sail ships were out, and steamers were mixing with fuel-powered ships. The next technological transformation witnessed the increased specialisation and standardisation of ships coming to Le Havre: oil tankers, refrigerated ships, Liberty ships.

Land-based cargo handling equipment had to keep up with these changes. In 1790, port tradesmen worked only with large and small wheelbarrows, ladders, planks, inclined planes, canoes and lighters. The merchandise was packaged in cloth, sacks or barrels. Most operations were done by human force alone, with a hook. A few horses and carts had been introduced since the 1750s. There were no cranes, the ship's masts were used to hang pulleys and ropes.

The volume of trade had expanded by 1850 and ships were larger. But the cargo handling techniques had not changed. Many labour intensive carting and stevedoring firms were therefore necessary to unload the ships speedily. This led to a vast expansion of the labour force, which burst beyond the control of traditional masters. Cranes were very slow to appear: as late as the 1860s only a handful of hand-powered cranes were available. In 1877, the Municipality and Chamber of Commerce published lists of average time needed for different jobs.

One basin was equipped with hydraulic cranes by 1890 and there were a few steam and electric cranes, some mobile. Rail tracks reached the warehouses. Mechanisation began in earnest after 1890 and led to a major conflict in 1910, when the *Transat*, a shipping company, introduced a coal conveyor belt, and coal porters demanded compensation for the work lost (*Affaire Durand*).²⁷ By 1920,

²⁷ On this important event, considered by labour militants of the time as the 'Dreyfus affair of the workingman', see Ollivier, C., 'Aspects particuliers du syndicalisme havrais : l'affaire Durand', unpublished Masters' thesis, University of Rouen; and Scoff, A., *Un nommé Durand*, (Poitiers, 1984).

there were many cranes, and a new group of crane operators emerged outside the dockers' group. Automotive trucks were now used, but a few horses survived until after World War II. After 1945, semi-trailers, fork-lifts (Clarks) and pallets were introduced, as well as specialised cargo handling equipment such as grain elevators, conveyor belts for mineral ores, oil and gas pipelines, tractors, gantry cranes.

Whereas the shift from one artisanal master to multiple employers in the 1840s can be associated with the vast expansion of trade, and the rise of dockers' unions in the 1890s with the progress of mechanisation, the shift to a regulated work force after 1928 corresponds to the decline of merchandise markets and of the warehouses which sheltered them. In 1790, merchandise was stored in sheds along the wharves, then carried into town to the merchants' small warehouses. There was also a bonded warehouse open to all merchants.

In 1856, a Parisian company (the Compagnie des Docks et Entrepôts du Havre), connected to the railway, obtained a concession and began to operate a vast warehouse. Local traders retaliated with the building of other warehouses. Finally the Chamber of Commerce was persuaded to build many goods hangars along the wharves, open to all traders. In 1910, there were 344,000 square meters of storage space, to which must be added the grain silos and oil reservoirs. This busy warehousing activity continued between the wars, though declining until the 1940s. In the 1950s, commercial practices changed: most warehouses closed down, as ship owners, traders and industries now emphasised the rapid delivery of goods, direct orders from consumer to producer, and the management of stocks overseas through communications networks.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Havrais commercial and shipping interests complained that the construction of new basins lagged behind the increase in the volume of trade and size of ships. Basins were built on the old model inside city walls until 1843, when the Vauban Basin was the first outside city walls, with clear negative implications for the registration of port masters and journeymen. Thereafter, the port expanded eastwards. However, ships could not leave these new basins at any time of the day because dock gates remained closed for eight hours or more (due to tides averaging eight meters in Le Havre). This gave some added muscle to dockers' threats to slow down their work and delay the ship. In 1910, a new tidal basin open twenty-four hours a day was put into operation. New tidal basins and a port industrial zone were created in the estuary to the east after 1945, moving work far from the dockers' hiring site. We see therefore that the desire to bypass dockers' mastery of specific features of the work site was a factor in public authorities' and employers' decisions to introduce new technology with greater or lesser speed.

The city

Merchants, shipowners, port employers

Port transport was an important activity for Le Havre from its foundation, but throughout the two centuries considered here, there were other important

economic activities such as shipping, shipbuilding, construction and food processing, and later on, engineering and oil refining. In 1790, Le Havre had about 20,000 inhabitants, in 1850, 30,000. It then mushroomed to 115,000 in 1891 and about 200,000 in 1920. It remained that size throughout the twentieth century, with some expansion of the suburban and rural population in its ambit.

The expansion of the city in the nineteenth century took place under the guidance of a patrician-like merchant-shipowner elite that controlled the municipality and port. Organised as a Chamber of Commerce in 1804, it obtained from the government the removal of the Naval Dockyard in 1823 and the creation of a bonded warehouse, financed the digging of new basins and extended the city limits. Connections to The Channel, Atlantic and North Sea ports by coastal navigation, and to Paris by road haulage and river navigation proved insufficient, and justified the building of a railroad link from Le Havre to Paris, completed in 1847 and later extended to Lyons, Switzerland, Alsace and Southern Germany. In all these endeavours, the city fathers presented themselves as friends of the port transport workers, seeking to bring more business to Le Havre, and protecting them against the rival port of Rouen and the protectionism of agrarian and industrial interests of the interior.

In the course of this expansion, the employer group diversified. Family businesses of merchant-shipowners who had obtained cargo handling services from master barrowmen in 1790, disappeared. Ships became too expensive and too large for the needs of a single merchant. The business divided into shipowners and traders. Maritime insurance, which had been handled by local traders, also changed scale and was taken over by Paris, London and Amsterdam companies. Havrais traders and shipowners had to compete (or associate) with large Parisian companies who established for example the *Compagnie des Docks et Entrepôts*, the *Compagnie générale transatlantique* (or *Transat*), *Worms et Cie* (coal imports), the *Compagnie des chemins de fer de l'Ouest* (Western Railway Company). Foreign shipping companies made Le Havre a port of call and established regular lines. Finally, the tramp ship trade increased dramatically. All this created a new, complex and constantly redefined dock labour market from about 1840 to the 1920s.

During this period, although transatlantic passenger traffic loomed large, the main activity was buying, selling and redistributing goods (rather than the simple delivery of goods from overseas suppliers to clients in the hinterland, the supply of a local manufacturing industry, and of course, military and fishing activities). Traders imported and bought and sold relatively expensive raw materials, mainly of tropical origin. Outgoing ships carried luxury and manufactured goods. Le Havre was the leading forward market for cotton and coffee. Most port transport therefore took the form of handling general cargo (bulk goods were usually shipped further inland to and from Rouen). As a result, Le Havre was not the first French port in terms of tonnage in this period, but it was number one in terms of the value of the goods passing through its harbour. Moreover, most cargo was not carried on French ships. This explains some of the divisions among employers of port labour. Companies based in Le Havre and employing a large work force there, such as warehouse owners, large local shipowners, generally wished to keep wages down. On the other hand, many traders, tramp ship owners, and