

Waterfront Unionism

in

Seattle and Tacoma

1887 - 1958

A Comparative Study in Radicalism

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The Union Democracy Reexamined Project is an ongoing study by a working group of the Harry Bridges Center for Labor Studies. Cognizant of previously identified standards of democracy, the project seeks to explore alternative incarnations. Must a democratic organization feature rotating leadership? Are contested elections the only mechanism for understanding rank-and-file participation? How does a movement sustain and develop rank-and-file ownership and participation over time? These are some of the questions being addressed by the group. This analysis applies those questions to a comparison of the longshore locals in Seattle and Tacoma, Washington. As two of the most militant labor organizations in the country, but with vastly differing histories, these organizations are a perfect case study for radicalism and democracy.

***Waterfront Unionism in Seattle and Tacoma, 1887-1958
A Comparative Study in Radicalism***

The Seattle and Tacoma local organizations of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) are a unique case study in radicalism. Few organizations standing as subsidiary parts of the same labor international and situated in such nearly identical economic, geographic, and political environments nonetheless feature such divergent histories, both economic and political. Yet still they stand, ILWU Local 19 Seattle and Local 23 Tacoma¹, creatures of different mentalities. In the dawning of the modern age of unionism, these two organizations chose seemingly different paths: one was radically syndicalist and affiliated with the Congress of Industrial Organizations while the other seems, at least on its face, to have been more conservative and more craft oriented, as evidenced by its affiliation with the American Federation of Labor. Despite these seemingly different courses, both unions have ended up in what appears to be virtually identical situations. The question, then, is as to the nature and cause of apparent differences and similarities. This paper explores the histories of the Seattle and Tacoma longshore unions for evidence of institutional or cultural differences as a case study of differing paths in the advancement of union democracy and solidarity.

Fundamental to this examination is the question of radicalism and leftist radical tendencies. A history of radicalism pervades the American West Coast, yet it seems to have acted differently on Puget Sound's Seattle and Tacoma longshore locals. This paper puts already existing theories of identified radical determinants to the test in the context of the Seattle/Tacoma comparison. While some of these accepted theses can be applied to this assessment, others simply do not present enough descriptive or analytical value in a contrast of such similar organizations to serve a predictive purpose. In refuting some of these accepted theories, the paper finds other factors that contribute to the development of leftist radical movements in a very narrow context. Among the most concrete

¹ For purposes of consistency and easy understanding, for the remainder of this paper ILWU Local 19, Seattle, is referred to as such even in reference to the period before its formation, except as specifically noted and in the initial historical chronology. ILWU Local 23, Tacoma, is referred to by its prior designation, ILA Local 38-97 even in reference to the period subsequent to its incorporation into the ILWU, except as specifically noted.

contentions is that the social isolation of groups within a community that features internal embeddedness is a good predictor of radical tendencies. More nebulous findings support the idea that the actual development of radical movements, far from an easily predicted phenomenon, is the product of the chance convergence of favorable timing, receptive leadership, and enabling social events. To highlight these theses, this analysis utilizes case studies in environmental, cultural, and historical conditions.

Introduction to the Research

A leading expert on radical tendencies in the waterfront labor movement, Howard Kimeldorf advocates several applicable theories of radicalism that ought to be applied to the Seattle/Tacoma experience. Kimeldorf explored waterfront radicalism in a different comparative context than does this analysis: contrasting the very different union experiences of the East Coast International Longshore Association (ILA) and that of its West Coast rival, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU). This is a particularly important analysis because of the differences in outcome, with the East Coast pursuing a conservative agenda and the West Coast standing as a more radical organization.²

The comparison at hand is of a much different nature, but nonetheless benefits from much of the same type of analysis. In this case, the examination is of two *West Coast* unions. Many of the determinants of radical unionism, such as cultural, religious, and structural occupational differences, identified by Kimeldorf simply cannot be pointed to as determinant factors in the Seattle/Tacoma experience. The unions are plainly too similar for such an analysis to be significant. Other factors that Kimeldorf points to are more important in the development of differing cultures on the Puget Sound waterfront, as are a host of factors that, while not significant in the east/west comparison by Kimeldorf, rise to prominence in the regional north/south comparison of Seattle and Tacoma.

² Howard Kimeldorf, *Reds or Rackets? The Making of Radical and Conservative Unions on the Waterfront* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988) 41.

Other theorists have speculated as to the nature and cause of radicalism in the American labor movement. A key ingredient in the analysis is the presence of democratic tradition and the relationship of the worker to union leadership. Judith Stepan-Norris and Maurice Zeitlan have written extensively on the topic, beginning with the question of “how democratic ought a labor organization be?”³ They explore the extent to which grassroots democracy has a place in an organization with the primary function of fighting management. In the Seattle/Tacoma comparison there are key differences in this respect. Democratic tradition and the degree to which there is, in each organization, an *expectation of participation* can and has played a role in the development of radical tendencies.

One cannot forget the seminal work of Seymour Martin Lipset, Martin Trow, and James Coleman. Their 1956 analysis, “Union Democracy,” extols the International Typographical Union (ITU) as the model of democratic unionism. The work revolves around the nature of democracy in voluntary organizations, such as labor unions. Relying heavily on the early Twentieth Century work of Robert Michels and his “Iron Law of Oligarchy,”* Lipset, Trow, and Coleman agree that, generally, the large-scale nature of labor unions as voluntary organizations necessitates a bureaucratic structure that limits democracy. They further argue that trade unions tend not to inspire rank-and-file action, leaving administration and thus political decision making to an elite few. Finally, they suggest that the traditional status gap between leadership and rank-and-file creates an incentive for leadership to institutionalize dictatorial relationships that preserve its own power.⁴ Lipset, Trow, and Coleman’s analysis suggest a tendency toward conservative trade unionism under which leadership, rather than rank-and-file membership, is the determinant of union policy. This paper’s analysis brings the idea of union democracy, as defined by Lipset, Trow, and Coleman and Stepan-Norris and Zeitlan, to the waterfronts of Seattle and Tacoma to explore how democratic tendencies in each of the locals contribute to radicalism.

³ Judith Stepan-Norris and Maurice Zeitlan, Left Out: Reds and America’s Industrial Unions (New York and Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2003) 58.

* See: Michels, Robert. Political Parties. 1911; reprint New York: The Free Press, 1962.

⁴ Seymour Martin Lipset, Martin Trow, and James Coleman, Union Democracy (New York: The Free Press, 1956) 404.

breeds in the same institutions that promote democracy: participation, less complex bureaucratic institutions, and restraints on leadership.

Finally, there is the question of cultural, sociological, and environmental determinants. To what extent are the workforces in each of these situations similar or different? In what ways are environments, both physical and political, within which these unions exist comparable or not? And, how do the varied histories of each labor organization contribute to the political courses they chose and the political destination they reached? These are the critical questions.

Part I. History

The Longshore Trade and Puget Sound

The longshore industry is as much a part of West Coast scenery as is the Pacific Ocean. For as long as Europeans have been visiting the coast by ship, such traffic has necessitated a cadre of workers to load and unload goods bound for nearly all points of the world. That is the job of the longshoreman, he is the link between the international and the domestic; and as a result is ideally situated within an ever trade-dependent economy to either ease or disrupt the flow of goods into and out of the country.

The term “longshoreman” comes from a contraction of the descriptor “men-along-the-shore,” referring to the groups of men (and until relatively recently only men) who gathered along the shore of port cities to greet incoming boats. The job of the longshoreman is to unload cargo packed on a vessel, moving it onto the dock, and then reload the vessel with goods for export. As simple as this sounds, the job itself has been the source of decades of dispute. First, there is the question of where longshore jurisdiction ends and transportation worker jurisdiction begins. This has historically created conflict with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT), who wish to be able to handle cargo after its point of first rest on the dock, and the longshoremen, who believe they can handle cargo more than once along its journey inland. Aspects of the job also require a good deal of skill, as ships must be loaded correctly to ensure that cargo does not come loose in rough seas and that the weight is balanced.

The oldest national amalgamation of longshore unions is the International Longshore Association (ILA). The ILA was founded in 1887 in Chicago by Dan Keefe, a tugboat worker, as the Association of Lumber Handlers (ALH). As an organization mainly representing lumber handlers on the Great Lakes, the ALH was marginally successful in building worker solidarity if not in winning the sort of bread-and-butter concessions that are the hallmark of modern unionism. This was by no means a contemporary labor union organization, but rather relied on a loose affiliation of men practicing wildcat and spontaneous labor action in the small ports of the Great Lakes region.⁵

In 1892 a meeting was called in Detroit bringing together representatives of eleven ALH ports to form the National Longshore Association. Given the geographic situation of these ports in the Great Lakes region the idea of solidarity was jeopardized by the exclusion of Canadian workers. The name of the organization was quickly changed to the International Longshore Association (ILA) and Canadian longshoremen were welcomed into the organization.⁶

On the West Coast, the longshore industry was extremely casual. Hiring was daily and through means of the “shape-up.” Under the shape-up, a foreman came to the waterfront to hire men according to his own preferences. While all men ostensibly stood the same chance of being hired on any given day, in reality hiring was a product of cronyism and bribes and served as a mechanism through which agitators were ostracized from work opportunities. This system, in which management had absolute authority in hiring, lasted until 1934, when an arbitrator’s decision institutionalized union control of a regulated hiring and dispatching system up and down the coast.⁷

⁵ International Longshore Association, “ILA History” [accessed 7 May 2005]; from http://www.ilaunion.org/history_early.asp; INTERNET.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Kimeldorf, *Reds or Rackets?*, 41.

In September 1906, representatives of waterfront unions in Washington, Oregon, and California met in Portland to discuss coastwise unity.⁸ The conference was prompted by a crisis in Tacoma, where longshoremen were striking for recognition against Washington Stevedoring, a major state stevedoring firm.⁹ The conference ended with the signatures of representatives of 25 locals to create the Longshore Union of the Pacific (LUP), a short-lived amalgamation of West Coast longshore unions. In September 1909, International Longshore Association (ILA) president Thomas V. O'Connor proposed the addition of the LUP to the ILA. A relatively uncontroversial referendum that followed resulted in the admission of the West Coast longshoremen as the autonomous ILA District 38, with Seattle's longshoremen becoming ILA 38-12 and Tacoma's receiving a charter as Local 38-30 (soon to become, through conglomeration, Local 38-97).

Affiliation of the West Coast ports with the ILA was under a less centralized model than was practiced throughout the Great Lakes, East Coast, and Gulf Coast. Under the model of affiliation put into practice on the West Coast, the Pacific Coast District of the ILA was ILA in name only. Though ostensibly subordinate to the International, the Pacific Coast District was nearly entirely autonomous, the result mainly of a lack of resources within the ILA to regulate workers' organizations in the far-flung ports of the Pacific. It was this vacuum of institutional leadership that allowed local leaders, such as later District president Harry Bridges, to assume a degree of independence unimaginable in other ports around the country. The relationships of the District leadership to the relative backwater ports of Seattle and Tacoma were a virtual microcosm of the relationship of the International to the District. A lack of coastwise resources prompted a situation where local leaders were able to initiate negotiations, conclude agreements, and call strikes without deference to the preferences of either the International or the District.

As the First World War ended and the 1920's boomed, union penetration on the West Coast fell off dramatically. Men who had come to see union membership as a means of gaining work opportunities in times of scarcity found it an unnecessary luxury in times of

⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

plenty. Because of the increase in trade, longshoremen were generally able to find work unloading vessels bound for the West Coast with goods from European colonies in China and the Far East as well as the emerging Empire of Japan. This all changed on October 29, 1929 with the crash of the stock market and the beginning of the Depression. While it took some time for this catastrophe to spread to the West Coast, the collapse of the currency, as well as the emerging global crisis precipitated a sharp drop in imports as fewer Americans could afford to buy expensive imported goods. This led to an inversely dramatic increase in the number of out-of-work longshoremen, contributing to conflict on the waterfront that culminated in the 1934 General Strike, a ninety-nine day dispute that spanned the West Coast and brought shipping to a standstill.

As it stood in the beginning of 1937, the waterfront union organization in the United States was in disarray. While most longshoremen were organized under the auspices of the ILA, the West Coast was an autonomous unit, operating institutionally separately from the rest of the organization but politically within the same realm. The greater labor movement had also witnessed the recent split of the Committee of Industrial Organizations from the American Federation of Labor to become a rival organization, the Congress of Industrial Organization (CIO). As unions across the country took sides either in favor of AFL business/craft unionism or the CIO syndical/industrial variety, the West Coast ILA put forth a referendum to union locals, an act that, according to members of Local 38-97, contributed to the unnecessary break in solidarity that perseveres to this day.

In this progressive era, a complex web of overlapping and interlocking institutional affiliations characterized West Coast waterfront unionism. While the ILA controlled dock workers coast-wise, seafarers unions, ships' cooks' unions, grain-handlers' unions, and the Teamsters all competed with each other for jurisdiction and comprised the landscape of the transportation sector. Many of these transportation labor organizations were organized under the umbrella of the Maritime Federation of the Pacific (MFP). Founded in 1934 under the oft-repeated slogan "an injury to one is an injury to all," the Federation briefly united the labor organizations of the U.S. West Coast, until its collapse

in 1941.¹⁰ The presence of this organization, and the extreme overlap of union officers between the MFP and the ILA, led to ambiguity over whether the ILA was a subsidiary organization of the MFP or a parallel organization.

It was a dispute over a CIO referendum in the West Coast ILA in 1937 that set the stage for a divergence of paths that would last well into the 1950's. Many within the District wanted to affiliate with the CIO, expressing support for the wall-to-wall organizing that the new organization preached. Others, most vehemently Tacoma's leadership, were opposed to the affiliation, claiming it would shatter both the national solidarity and the coastwise solidarity that settled the 1934 strike largely in favor of labor. As the initiative progressed, Local 38-97's warnings became prophetic and the historical course of the two largest Puget Sound labor organizations became increasingly divergent.

ILA Local 38-97: Tacoma, Washington

Tacoma longshoremen have a rich history of unionism. The first Tacoma waterfront union was founded on March 18, 1887, representing longshoremen as well as stevedores and riggers (who were necessary for the type of sail-powered cargo vessel typical of the time). Shortly thereafter, the rigger trade became an anachronism as sail-powered ships were replaced with the more reliable and larger coal-powered vessels, but both longshoremen and stevedores continued to be key to the transport of goods on the waterfront.

The late 1800's was a time of severe volatility in western economies. As much of the market was in agriculture, trade, and mining, the economic conditions of the time were also predicated on the relative prosperity of those trades. The period following the formation of Tacoma's first waterfront union was one of economic downturn and port workers paid the price. Cargo volume declined, wages stagnated, and, until the Klondike Gold Rush of the 1890's, fewer people moved to the Pacific Northwest.

¹⁰ Sailors Union of the Pacific "Chapter VIII: Rebel Workers, History of the Sailors Union of the Pacific" [accessed: 19 September 2004]; available from <http://www.sailors.org/history.html>; INTERNET.

As economic security began to return to the waterfront in the 1890's, so did a spirit of solidarity. On May 9, 1900, a cargo-workers' union was formed in Tacoma, receiving a charter as International Longshoremen's Association (I.L.A.) Local 179. Over the ensuing years, workers in other transport trades, including grain workers and lumbermen, similarly organized under the umbrella of the ILA and competed with each other for jurisdiction over the unorganized. As is the case whenever disputes arise between labor organizations, internal strife led to a weakening of labor's collective position vis-à-vis management. ILA leaders, who worked to solve internal conflict in the interest of solidarity, recognized this. Shifts in membership between locals, a result of ambiguous jurisdictions, came to an end on March 30, 1934 when Locals 38-30 and 38-3 combined to form ILA Local 38-97, Tacoma. This combination also brought together, for the first time, the handlers of lumber and those of general cargo.¹¹

The amalgamation of Local 38-97 could not have happened at a better time. By the end of the year, one of the greatest strikes in American history had begun. During this 1934 strike Tacoma took an active role in leadership, if not in the actual ground-level combat. Local 38-97 member William T. (Paddy) Morris and president Walter Freer served as officers for ILA District 38 (the coastwise organization) and the northwest negotiating committee, respectively. When the strike ended, a new push began from within organized labor against the recalcitrant American Federation of Labor in favor of John L. Lewis' newly formed CIO. By late 1937 most of the ILA locals of the West Coast, with the exception of Local 38-97, had voted to leave the AFL in favor of affiliation with the CIO.

When union newspapers trumpeted that "from Alaska to Mexico the Coast [voted] CIO," there was in fact a glaring hole in this assertion: Tacoma Local 38-97 decided against CIO affiliation. In a published letter on August 5, 1937 Local 38-97 secretary L.A. Reay explained to the Pacific coast maritime groups the reasons for Tacoma's decision against CIO affiliation. First, Reay explained, there was a procedural dilemma. Ballots regarding CIO affiliation had been mailed to members by a caucus of delegates to the

¹¹ Magden, Ronald E., The Working Longshoreman, (Tacoma: R4 Typographers) 130.

Maritime Federation of the Pacific rather than by the Executive Board of the Pacific Coast District of the ILA. The District, in a convention held two weeks before, had decided against a referendum on CIO affiliation. Given the highly decentralized nature of coast unionism at the time, the membership of Local 38-97 believed that affiliations ought to be decided internally and at the grassroots level, rather than by an extra-organizational federation. Reay shared this belief.

Second, however, the Tacoma local had substantive objections to the coast decision to pursue an affiliation with the CIO. According to Local 38-97 leadership, there were not recognized to be additional benefits to CIO affiliation above what had been achieved within the ILA. Indeed, many within 38-97 recognized the CIO as a threat to union autonomy, as an organization without a constitution or convention, and with appointed, rather than elected, District officers. Moreover, the locals saw the CIO as a threat to national solidarity, the very thing that 38-97 leaders believed had reinforced gains through organized labor throughout the past decades. They believed that being a part of the national ILA, whatever its flaws, was far preferable to supporting the division of port workers.¹²

None of this is to say that Tacoma was wholly unsympathetic to the CIO cause. Indeed, Local 38-97 was extremely supportive of industrial-style wall-to-wall organizing. Within the AFL, Local 38-97 was supportive of the Committee of Industrial Organizations and thought that industrial organization was a subset of the overall union movement. To local leadership, the craft/industrial dichotomy was artificial and served only to divide an already vulnerable labor movement. Nonetheless, the decision by Tacoma's longshoremen against CIO affiliation, coupled with the decision by much of the rest of the coast in favor, led to a bitter twenty-year dispute between the leaders of Tacoma and ILWU International President Harry Bridges.

In an open letter to Harry Bridges from the leaders of Local 38-97 they make explicit reference to the charges of communist domination, but explain that they do not believe

¹² "ILA 38-79, Tacoma explain stand on CIO Affiliation", *Voice of the Federation*, 5 August, 1937.

the accusations. Nonetheless, they accuse Bridges of being “dictatorial” and of not listening to rank-and-file concerns.¹³ Some were much less trusting of Bridges, suggesting clear submission to Party preferences on his part.¹⁴ They further suggested that, in enemy-of-my-enemy-is-my-friend style, West Coast support for Bridges was solely a reflex in opposition to ILA leader Joe Ryan*.

Despite the pleas from Local 38-97 members against CIO affiliation, the affiliation went forward in all corners of the Pacific Coast District, excluding Tacoma. Response from the ILA leadership was swift and severe, quickly accusing the CIO and those locals that were voting for affiliation of being infiltrated by communist operatives. This was neither the first nor the last time that those who were to become the membership of the ILWU would be accused of being dominated by the communists. Rather than repair the developing rift through red-scare mongering, these accusations served only to exacerbate the east/west divide which was ripping the ILA apart. This division jeopardized the national solidarity that many believed was holding the line against greater shipper exploitation of longshoremen and other maritime workers and vindicated the reluctance of the Tacoma longshoremen to join the CIO.¹⁶

Eventually, strategic considerations were set aside and AFL President William Green and California Secretary Edward Vandeleur decided that the obvious shows of solidarity with the expelled CIO were unacceptable. On August 9, 1937, Vandeleur sent a telegram to ILA Local 38-79 Secretary Ivan Cox announcing that the ten thousand members of the ILA locals had been immediately and unconditionally expelled from the state and

¹³ “An Open Letter to Harry Bridges,” *Voice of the Federation*, 3 August 1937.

¹⁴ Otilie Markholt, “AFL or CIO: Why did the Tacoma Longshoremen choose to remain outside the ILWU for twenty years?” (Tacoma, Washington: ILWU Local 23) 1993.

* Joseph Ryan, referred to by many as the “lifetime president of the ILA”, was the chief foe of radical west-coast organizers. Seen as in cahoots with Teamster leader Dave Beck, Ryan was typically seen as seeking to maximize his own power, often at the expense of his membership. Later investigations, both by government agencies and private investigative reporters have revealed significant evidence of Ryan’s corruption. At the time, he was the lightning rod for criticism of ILA policy within radical circles. (Clover Leaf Media, “The Shaping of San Francisco,” [electronic publication], 1999- [accessed 21 September 2004]; available from <http://www.shapingsf.org/ezone/labor/genstrike/main.html>; INTERNET.)

¹⁶ “ILA Local 38-79 Hears Both Sides of CIO Plan,” *The Voice of the Federation*, 24 June 1937, 4.

national committees of the AFL.¹⁷ Thus a split emerged on the West Coast, with the vast majority of longshoremen finding themselves outside of the ILA*, and the members of ILA Local 38-97, while still members of the ILA, now cut off from the rest of the coast.**

As the different courses of Local 38-97 and its ILWU counterparts became institutionalized, conflict between the organizations became rampant. The Tacoma local took every opportunity to accuse Bridges and the ILWU of communist domination. While a virtual cottage industry had emerged within the government and greater labor movement to pursue this pastime, criticism of the sort from a former close ally was particularly biting. In response, Bridges was extremely outspoken in accusing the Tacoma local of limiting access to CIO members and of being Joe Ryan's puppet. This antagonism lasted well into the 1950's, when Local 38-97 eventually chose to affiliate with the ILWU, becoming the last cog in the wheel of the coast-wise contract.

ILWU Local 19: Seattle, Washington

Seattle, Washington features a waterfront history that is no less rich than that of Tacoma and in many respects that is far more radical. In Seattle the effects of the Wobbly tradition and support for communist revolution, discussed in greater detail herein, was neither skin-deep nor subtle. While for many the union was about bread-and-butter issues, i.e., the achievement of better wages and working conditions, for many others it was an instrument of social change and political action. This legacy was borne out with

¹⁷ "Immediate Disassociation Ordered for Local 38-79 ILA," (letter from Edward Vandeleur, Secretary, California State Federation of Labor, to Ivan F. Cox, Secretary, Lonshoremen's Local 38-79) The Voice of the Federation, 12 August 1937.

* Expulsion from the AFL was tantamount to expulsion from the ILA, which was, at the time, a firm AFL member. Indeed, while the ILA never formally expelled the west coast longshoremen, the division became formal when, on September 27, 1937, the members of the San Francisco local (ILA 38-79) dissolved their ILA affiliation and became ILWU Local 1-10.

** Tacoma, though the sole port of significance to eschew CIO affiliation, was not the only port to do so. On Puget Sound both the Port of Port Angeles and the Port of Anacortes did not affiliate with the ILWU. These ports remained in loose independent affiliation with the Port of Tacoma, as longshoremen moved between the ports to find work under the auspices of the ILA, and then under its successor the International Brotherhood of Longshoremen (IBL). (Schwartz, ed., "Oral History of Phil Lelli, May 18, 2004".) Nonetheless, the relatively small volume of work in these ports (most was in locally-consumed general cargo) does not justify an in-depth examination of their internal politics at this time.

the disillusion of affiliation with the ILA in 1937. It continues to this day with the very different attitudes and cultural traditions in the Seattle and Tacoma waterfront unions.

The first waterfront union in Seattle was founded in 1886. The Stevedores, Longshoremen, and Riggers Union of Seattle (SL&RU) was similar to the unions of its time throughout the West Coast. It was relatively small, industry-focused, and not particularly radical. It borrowed slogans from the Knights of Labor, such as “an injury to one is the concern of all,” that would become a big part of the union culture of the coming years, and was successful in resolving limited disputes with dispersed employers on the Seattle waterfront. In 1894, the union struck over employer plans to reduce wages by 10 cents per hour and change hiring practices to favor the employer. While the union was unsuccessful, eventually accepting both the wage concessions and employer-controlled hiring, the experience helped illuminate the need for coast-wise cooperation on waterfront contracts.¹⁸ Indeed, it was at this time that the Western Central Labor Union (WCLU) first advocated the amalgamation of western waterfront unions into a central bargaining district. Though the idea went nowhere at the time, it was prophetic.

The prosperity that came with the First World War led to greater radicalization of the West Coast waterfront despite dramatically declining union membership rolls following the cessation of hostilities. Many within the Seattle union were either overtly radical or openly communist. In 1919, United States Army Intelligence reported that 75% of the ILA membership on the Seattle waterfront were members of the International Workers of the World (IWW).¹⁹

Conflict with the federal government was neither infrequent nor dispassionate. In September of 1919, the membership of ILA 38-12 voted overwhelmingly to cease arms shipments to Russia in support of anti-red military activities. On August 3, 1918, President Wilson had ordered American Expeditionary forces, along with British and Japanese assistance, to land at Vladivostok in support of the former-imperial White

¹⁸ Magden, Ronald E., *A History of Seattle Waterfront Workers, 1884-1934*, (Seattle: Trade Printery, 1991) 34.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 117.

Forces fighting Lenin's Red Army in the Russian Civil War.²⁰ Because of geography, many of the arms and rolling stock necessary for support of the operation and as support for the Whites was shipped through the Port of Seattle and other west-coast docks. In 1918, the Seattle Central Labor Council had voiced support for the Bolshevik revolution. Many in Seattle saw it as a key turning point in world history, akin to the end of feudalism, and were not about to support enemies of the revolution with arms.

Support for the Bolshevik revolution in 1918 was widespread among the American intelligentsia, and many American elites visited Russia to lend support to the cause. At the same time, anti-communism was becoming a favorite American pastime, and union support of the Bolsheviks against their government sowed many seeds of later animosity. In the end, the dispute was solved when the employers quietly hired former servicemen to load the armaments. This dispute, however, points to the different focus of Seattle, where union activity is overtly political, and Tacoma, where unionism is typically more economically centered.

One of the major economic issues confronting the 38-12 in Seattle around 1920 was a perennial issue that would not be resolved in Seattle until 1934: hiring practices. Until 1920, the issue of hiring had been largely below the surface in employer-union relations. This was because the union did not have enough membership to prosecute an effective union-controlled hiring mechanism. What had emerged was a system of casual labor by which longshoremen were hired along the docks by employer foremen, a practice that, according to the employers led to greater efficiency, and according to the union led to rampant discrimination and favoritism. Local 38-12's solution to this problem was the Union List. Under the List, laborers were hired off of an alphabetical listing of union members each day. By assuring an orderly and routine system of hiring, with every man given a fair shot, the union hoped to both assure fair wages and assert far greater control over membership.

²⁰ Emory University, "A Brief Chronology of The Events of the Great War", [accessed: 9 September 2003]; available from: <http://www.english.emory.edu/LostPoets/Chronology.html>; INTERNET.

Employers, the Waterfront Employers' Union (WEU)^{*} in particular, vehemently opposed the union list, which, they believed, abrogated the right of the employer to control who worked on their ships and docks. The pursuit of the union list by 38-12 was the first of many hard-fought battles for union control of hiring practices, but was ultimately unsuccessful. In the 1920 contract, wages and working conditions were kept essentially identical to those of 1919, but a new provision was negotiated dealing specifically with the situation in Seattle: "All men employed on board ship, including sling men, shall be picked by the employer and no list system shall be in operation."²¹ The rank and file accused Local 38-12's president of selling out the membership in this contract. Strife followed.

In the first of many revolts against leadership, ILA longshoremen walked off the docks on April 19, 1920, striking over the protection of the union list. This was by no means an orderly measure and led in many respects to self-destruction of a local that until that time had represented over 3000 dockworkers. The Local 38-12 strike was neither authorized by the International nor supported by many of the more conservative members of the union. One particularly conservative group, the Hatch Bosses^{**}, was very upset with what it saw as domination of the union by a radical minority. On May 5, 1920, the Hatch Bosses accepted the contract offered by the employer and, in doing so, fractured union unity on the waterfront.

Meeting on May 25, 1920, the ILA Executive Council considered the action of Local 38-12 and the implications of the unauthorized strike on a carefully choreographed relationship with the WEU. Acting at this meeting, the Executive Council voted to

^{*} The Waterfront Employers' Union (WEU) is the fore-runner of a group of multi-employer bargaining organizations on the Pacific Coast. The WEU later changed its name to the Waterfront Employers' Association (WEA) so as to differentiate itself from organized labor (by not using the descriptor "union"). In 1949 the WEA was refocused to bargain only with few remaining ILA locals, including Tacoma, while a newly formed Pacific Maritime Association (PMA) administered the coastwise contract. The organizations continued to share staff and resources, and the latter remains the administrator of the collective bargaining agreement that now binds both Seattle and Tacoma's longshoremen. (Jones, 180).

²¹ Magden, *A History of Seattle Waterfront Workers, 1884-1934*, 141.

^{**} Hatch Bosses are one of many sub-occupations on the waterfront. Along with sling-load operators, walking bosses, and other specialties these distinctions are not significant to this analysis, as all operated under a common collective bargaining agreement and as part of a common bargaining unit.

revoke the charter of Local 38-12 and assign new charters to the conservative grain handlers (38-11) and longshoremen (38-16), respectively. Although deprived of a charter, 38-12 did not dissolve; instead it sought injunctive relief in federal court. This can be correctly interpreted as either the first in many rounds of worker and grassroots primacy over union hierarchy, or as yet another example of Seattle's inability to function as an effectively organized and cohesive professional organization. In the end, a federal injunction was issued on June 28, 1920, prohibiting the ILA from revoking 38-12's charter but not resolving the issue of union organization on the waterfront. Where for many years amalgamation had been the goal, a coalescence of power against well-organized employers, the labor front was now fractured and unable to effectively represent its membership.

While labor was infighting, the employers created a surprisingly effective and well-organized hierarchic power structure. The WEA effectively united the many employers down the coast into a single bargaining entity. Most of the major shipping lines, with the exceptional few, looked to the WEA as the guarantor of labor quietude, and most paid far more than their minimum dues in support of the organization. The employers had nearly universal control of the hiring situation, and paid virtually whatever wages they wished. While in 1894 SL&RU had struck over a wage decrease from 50 to 40 cents per hour, in 1919 ILA 38-12 had to negotiate *for* 40 cents per hour wages. Fifteen years of stagnant wages was the direct result of employer organization and labor disunion.

One of the most important hiring developments to come to the Seattle Waterfront was directly from the University of Washington, a former professor of Industrial Relations, Frank P. Foisie. Foisie was hired by the WEA to run a new organized hiring regime on the waterfront in Seattle. Attempt to co-opt the loyalty of the men, Foisie quickly set forth applying many of the European labor practices he had studied. He introduced guaranteed hours to steady-men (those who worked set hours each day for a single employer) working on the waterfront, dividing them into company men and dispatch hall gangs.* The company men were just that, workers assigned to work for a specific

* A "gang" is the traditional waterfront work unit, made up of around 10 men.

company with a set schedule and guaranteed earnings. Dispatch hall men worked from Foisie's new Employment Bureau in downtown Seattle. They were dispatched as work became available. This gave workers the possibility of greater earnings when greater amounts of work were available but reduced job security.

Adapting the principles of Taylorism* to the waterfront, Foisie created incentives for workers who consistently exceeded pre-established tonnage standards for loading and unloading ships. While initially highly effective in increasing production, these incentives suffered from a fatal flaw: a focus on immediate production at the expense of long-term well being, and production eventually fell back to relatively normal levels. Foisie was also prolific in his courtship of the major shipping lines. Only a very few of the major shipping lines failed to hire through the Employment Bureau, instead choosing their own employee-employer councils to manage employment internally.

While Foisie's methods may not have been effective in greatly raising production, they were highly effective in undermining union control of the waterfront. The fractured ILA organization, in practice now three separate locals (38-11,38-12, and 38-16), was unable to match the benefits workers achieved working through the employer-controlled hiring hall ("fink-hall"). When the boom of the "roaring Twenties" came to the waterfront, union membership drastically fell off. Members began to see no purpose in paying union dues to an organization that was so fractured that it could not even procure a contract. Union representatives recognized that they needed to begin to rectify many of these problems, and on April 25, 1922, ILA 38-12 was re-chartered to represent all members of the other two union organizations, which disbanded. This was a relatively hollow

* Taylorism, the method of management adopted from the 1911 book "The Principles of Scientific Management" by Frederick Taylor, suggested that efficiency, and thus profitability, could be maximized in the workplace by carefully matching the right worker with the right job. Then, through scientific observation, each job could be carefully choreographed to make it as simple and efficient as possible. Taylor relied heavily on time studies and careful measurement to determine exactly how much work could be expected from an employee. His theories form the basis of the scientific management method adapted to the assembly line during the industrial revolution. (John R. Schermerhorn Jr., *Management for Productivity*, (New York : J. Wiley & Sons, 1993).)

victory, however, as union membership at the end of 1922 was only 295, down from over 3000 only a few years before.²²

The next major challenge to face Local 38-12 was the crossroads 1934 strike. That strike was rooted in the excesses of the 1920's and the sharp economic downturn of the depression. The 1934 strike is important to an understanding of the differing paths of the Seattle and Tacoma locals. In Seattle it was the instigator of a leftist turn, while in Tacoma it contributed to a business-style entrenchment. The strike began in May 1934, when members of both ILA District 38 and the seafaring unions voted to strike. It was sustained despite efforts by the local employers to break it. City leadership called upon Private militias and the National Guard to open the Port of Seattle, but efforts to normalize employment relations on the coast were unsuccessful.²³

The 1934 strike lasted ninety-nine days, until binding arbitration led to a number of concessions by the employer. Among them was the institutionalization of the union-controlled hiring hall and better and more standardized working conditions for the men. Above all, ILA District 38 won recognition as a bargaining unit.²⁴ This was not the end of strife on the waterfront, however. By the end of 1937, ILA District 38 had lost most of its membership to the ILWU and the Pacific Maritime Federation had nearly dissolved, the result of inter-organizational strife and Seattle/Tacoma animosity.

Part II. Great Events

It can be said that history without context is worthless. This is clearly the case when looking for radical determinants within the relatively limited parameters of a comparison of two local labor organizations in a fairly parochial local environment. One runs the risk of donning blinders, looking only to internal goings on and proclaiming them as the root causes of the phenomenon under examination rather than placing them in proper context as symptoms, rather than causes. It is for this reason that this paper is consciously cognizant of external factors that may influence the analysis at hand. In the case of the

²² Ibid., 169.

²³ International Longshore and Warehouse Union, *The ILWU Story* (San Francisco: ILWU) 6.

²⁴ Ibid., 7.

Seattle/Tacoma comparison of the 1920's and 1930's there are a few major external events that must be addressed, lest they be dismissed as potential radicalizing influences. Kimeldorf points to the 1934 West Coast longshore strike as one of these determinants.²⁵ While it acted upon the industry in both Seattle and Tacoma, the outcomes were extremely different. Also important is the influence of the World Wars and the Great Depression. While these events acted more universally upon the locals, as they did the entire nation, the response of each local to these outside stimuli paints an enlightening picture of organizational and cultural differences.

The 1934 Strike

One of Kimeldorf's suggestions is that the crucible of the 1934 strike, with its corresponding violence and length, forged a generation of men far more predisposed than their East Coast counterparts to radicalism.²⁶ The 1934 strike was a profound event in the lives of the men of the West Coast docks, yet it is clear that it was a coastwise struggle. The strike was, however, far more heavily damaging in the Ports of San Francisco and Seattle than in the Port of Tacoma, a legacy of the already-decasualized nature of the workforce of Tacoma.²⁷

The 1934 strike was also one of the most violent labor disputes in American history. Many, including prominent citizen observers, remarked that it more resembled a state of general warfare on the waterfront than a traditional labor dispute:

The casualties were far worse looking than some of the war casualties in World War II. There were many broken arms from forcefully breaking an opponent's arm who was engaged in the attack. There were head wounds caused by the blow of a heavy hand implement such as pick handles. These were common implements of warfare that one saw on the piers, on the ships, and elsewhere.²⁸

²⁵ Kimeldorf, *Reds or Rackets?*, 102.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 102.

²⁷ Tacoma Public Library Collection, "The Longshoreman's Strike of 1934," Unsettling Events Series [electronic publication], 1999-2005 [cited 21 May 2005]; available from <http://www.tpl.lib.wa.us>; INTERNET.

²⁸ Kimeldorf, *Insurgent Workers*, 26; from Frederick Chiles, "General Strike: San Francisco, 1934 An Historical Compilation Film Story Board." *Labor History* 22 (Summer, 1981), 449.

There was also an important component of state action in the 1934 dispute. Rather than merely a dispute between capital and labor, state organs, including the police and National Guard, were used to actively put down longshoremen engaged in the struggle. When the docks finally re-opened in Seattle after the strike, it was under the watch of heavily armed Seattle police officers and national guardsmen.²⁹ The effects of the oppressive nature of this state action were two-fold: 1) Workers were far more socially ostracized from the rest of the community than they would have been had the state not intervened. This is because of the *de-facto* legitimacy given to the employers by the state in taking sides. 2) Longshoremen began to view themselves in class-conscious terms rather than as part of the middle class. This also generated insular social ties that would begin to pit longshoremen, as a group, against the rest of society.

The importance of the rise of class-consciousness cannot be understated. Fundamental to the hopes of the radical communists on the coast, the class-consciousness of the 1930's is also at the heart of Harry Bridges' ability to consolidate his own power and influence, which, in turn, was a precondition of the leftward swing of most of the coast in favor of the CIO in 1937. Sociologist Charles Walker writes:

The working class...develops ideas of its own interest apart from the middle class, and the faint beginnings of an original culture. It produces leaders, thinks up fresh forms of organization and strategy, and above all scans skeptically its own relation to the rest of society.³⁰

While violence on the waterfront during the strike was most profound in San Francisco, Northwest ports were not immune. In July 1934, just before the re-opening of the Port of Seattle, a longshoreman was shot and killed during a dispute at a Standard Oil depot north of Seattle.³¹ This killing had been preceded by a standoff between longshoremen and national guardsmen at Pier 41 in Seattle. Where city government attempted to open the Pier to traffic, the attempt was greeted by an angry mob of workers who attacked replacement longshoremen and scuffled with the authorities. Days later, under a virtual

²⁹Kimeldorf, *Insurgent Workers*, 36.

³⁰Kimeldorf, *Insurgent Workers*, 27; from Brecher 1972, 301.

³¹Kimeldorf, *Insurgent Workers*, 36.

state of police and military occupation, the Port of Seattle was reopened. Though longshoremen were reported to have taunted police, the re-opening of the port was largely peaceful, a result, many argued, of the horrific violence that preceded the event.³²

The 1934 strike was the apex of influence for Local 38-97. Though only recently united with warehousemen, the local wielded an unprecedented amount of power over the coast. This was in great part a result of the personal clout of 38-97's later president, William T. (Paddy) Morris.³³ Morris, then an officer of ILA District 38, was a pivotal figure in the strike, traveling to Washington to negotiate with shipping representatives and liaison with ILA President Joe Ryan. Tacoma also contributed its local president, Walter Freer, as chairman of the Northwest Joint Strike Committee.³⁴

Despite the leadership of its sons, the strike experience in Tacoma was less of an extraordinary experience than elsewhere on the coast. The opening of the Port of Tacoma was far less dramatic than in Seattle. Police, who had occupied ports up and down the coast, actually retreated from the waterfront, allowing workers to peaceably return to work.³⁵ The Tacoma experience was not particularly noteworthy because, in contrast to the rest of the coast, employers never attempted to use replacement workers in the Port of Tacoma. Where in other ports, replacement workers served as a virtual magnet for worker animosity and violence, in Tacoma there was no such target, and workers did not have to suffer through replacement. Because of this, there simply were not violent confrontations on the Tacoma waterfront, and the radicalizing effects of violence were not felt.³⁶

³² Ibid., 36.

³³ Harvey Schwartz, ed., "Oral History of Phil Lelli, May 18, 2004" vol. 7 part 3 of the ILWU Oral History Project; [accessed 21 May 2005]; available from <http://www.ilwu.org/history/oral-histories/phil-lelli.cfm>; INTERNET.

³⁴ Tacoma Public Library Collection, "The Longshoreman's Strike of 1934," Unsettling Events Series [electronic publication], 1999-2005 [cited 21 May 2005]; available from <http://www.tpl.lib.wa.us>; INTERNET.

³⁵ Kimeldorf, *Insurgent Workers*, 36.

³⁶ Tacoma Public Library Collection.

The sociological effect of the 1934 strike is a very important, if irreplicable, factor in the development of radicalism on the coast. Not only does it provide the basis of legitimacy upon which then-San Francisco leader Harry Bridges built his organization (the ILWU), his career, and his reputation (as a nationally-renowned radical labor leader), but it also plays into the other determinants of radicalism on the waterfront. Indeed, for the rest of his career the “ ‘34 Men” would be to Harry Bridges what the “rough riders” were to Teddy Roosevelt: brothers in arms who came of political age in conflict and remained loyal backers through the ensuing decades. The 1934 strike was the catalyst, taking the ingredients of decades of social, political, and economic development and molding them into the very concrete radical organization that became the ILWU. Kimeldorf argues:

The consolidation of radical leadership on the West Coast was rooted in the social conditions surrounding its emergence in the course of the 1934 walkout.³⁷

In comparative terms, the 1934 strike was felt differently in Seattle and Tacoma. Because of this, the sociological outcomes are similarly different. First, the Seattle dispute was more violent, though still not comparable to the carnage in San Francisco. Second, the winnings in Seattle were greater than in Tacoma, giving greater gravitas to Bridges, among others, as the liberator from the dreaded “shape-up.” Third, where Tacoma’s longshoremen were not radicalized by violence, their leaders, by virtue of their coastwise leadership, became very close with the upper echelon of the ILA. This is vitally important. As the separation from the ILA progressed elsewhere on the coast, the personal relationships between Paddy Morris, in particular, and the ILA leadership helped steer Tacoma’s local down a more loyal road.³⁸

Ultimately, the 1934 strike can be seen as a sort of coming of age for organized labor on the West Coast. Demands were made, a program was effectively prosecuted, and concessions were won. The most important of these winnings was the recognition of the ILA as a legitimate bargaining unit. Despite the leadership of Tacoma’s officers in the coastwise dispute it was Seattle and San Francisco that suffered through most of the

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

³⁸ Schwartz, ed., “Oral History of Phil Lelli, May 18, 2004”.

violence. These differing experiences of Seattle and Tacoma in 1934 were fundamental to the differing courses they would choose for decades to come.

The World Wars and Depression

There are three events that shaped the first half of the Twentieth Century in America: the two World Wars and the Great Depression. As the waterfront unions of Seattle and Tacoma came of age during this period, it is critical that these external historical factors be analyzed as contributors to the ultimate profiles of each local. Though clearly these events acted equally on each organization, as they did on the nation as a whole, the response of each to these external stimuli, while not profound, does provide insight into both the evolutionary development of each organization and its contemporaneous organizational culture.

The First World War

The impact of the First World War on the development of unionism on the West Coast was not nearly as interesting as that of the Second World War. In part this was due to the limited nature of the United States' involvement in the conflict. With the relatively low number of American casualties and the naval chase of Germany's East Asia Fleet in the Pacific over by the time the United States entered there was little opportunity for the war itself to greatly influence the West Coast labor movement. Furthermore, the loose organization of the labor movement during the war period produced limited opportunities for conflict.

At that time, shipping was a critical national industry. However, it was not immune to economic conflicts. A key component of this was the U.S. War Shipping Board. The Board was charged with administering the shipping industry, regulating rates, and assuring a steady flow of war materials to the combat zones. Following the armistice in November of 1918, the Board continued to operate.³⁹ The result was a federally mandated drop in the longshore

³⁹ Markholt, Maritime Solidarity, 26.

wage rate in 1922, returning longshoremen to the wage rate they had suffered under prior to the signing of the 1920 wage agreement.⁴⁰

Following the conclusion of the war, the communist revolution in Russia created the first real opportunity for labor on the West Coast to pursue a real social agenda. The Seattle Central Labor Council endorsed the Bolshevik revolution in 1918. Meanwhile, the American government's policy of providing military support to the anti-Bolshevik forces in Siberia outraged many in the local labor community. The ensuing conflict, with longshoremen refusing to load military material bound for the war, was resolved easily enough when former military personnel loaded the vessels, but was the first in a long line of social policy motivated maneuvers that became commonplace in Seattle, if less so in Tacoma.

As the American economy boomed following the War, union activity began to decline on the waterfront and throughout the national context. Work was so plentiful, as shipping in the Pacific exploded, that men began to feel they did not need union protection in the workplace. The result was a catastrophic collapse of all that had been won by the ILA in the previous decade. With no union opposition, the employers' union was free not to renew the 1920 wage agreement with the workers, abandoning previously agreed to load limits, working-hour limits, pay rates, and general compensation rules. With the development of the employer-controlled hiring hall in Seattle (though not in Tacoma) the employers were able to further consolidate control over their workforce.

Depression

Given the vulnerable position longshoremen fell into during the 1920's, the stock market crash of 1929 could not have come at a worse time. The market crash was catastrophic for a fragile and already less-than-profitable shipping industry, which responded with ruthless disregard against its workers. Between 1929 and 1933,

⁴⁰ Ibid., 26.

wages in Seattle dropped 57%.⁴¹ Dropping wages were complemented by a severely increased focus on productivity as a means to reduce in-port costs and increase efficiency. In the same period (1929-1933), work throughput on the Seattle docks increased 87%. In lumber, for example, where 80,000 board feet of lumber per day had been the standard in 1929, by 1933 it was customary for a gang to handle over 150,000 board feet. While the wage concessions occurred virtually all down the coast, the line was held more firmly against eroding working conditions in Tacoma because of the strong organization of Local 38-97 and its institutionalization in a union-controlled hiring and dispatching hall.

As the crackdown on workers continued longshoremen became increasingly unhappy with the labor situation. Seeing the employer and his control of the hiring hall as a further mechanism of degrading working conditions, former members of the ILA began to revolt against the employer controlled halls. Seeing the writing on the walls, the employers began working to further consolidate their position with respect to organization, beginning in Tacoma. As the sole union organization that held the line against the ILA disorganization, Tacoma was a thorn in the side of the Waterfront Employers' Union. In 1932, American-Hawaiian Steamship Company attempted to form a separate, company-controlled and operated longshore union. In response, ILA Local 38-97 expelled the 34 workers who had become involved in the organization, solidifying its presence as the sole bargaining representative and ending permanently the overt attempts of the steamship lines to replace legitimate organized labor in Tacoma.⁴²

Buttressed by the more inviting political environment created by President Roosevelt's National Recovery Act (NRA) and the collapse of confidence in the prevailing work conditions on the waterfront, the ILA began to make a comeback, gaining strength enough to soon effectively prosecute one of the most protracted and violent labor struggles in American history: the 1934 strike.

⁴¹ Markholt, *Maritime Solidarity*, 144.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 49.

The Second World War

The West Coast had survived the settlement of labor hostilities, the breakup of the ILA, and the leftward swing of the newly created ILWU as the 1930's drew to a close. Yet those farsighted among America's leaders saw new troubles brewing in Europe and Asia that would have a profound effect on the development of radical maritime unionism on the West Coast.

Initially, the outbreak of war in Europe put leftist unions and their Communist components in a difficult position. The Molotov-Ribbentrop alliance between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany produced a Soviet foreign policy that strongly discouraged communist groups from outright opposing Germany. While it seems clear that there was not Soviet domination, in any respect, of West Coast unions, those communist elements that looked to Moscow for leadership were not in a position to strongly condone action against Germany.

Whether for ideological or political reasons, Harry Bridges looked with apprehension to a coming war in Europe, and American involvement therein. Bridges was afraid early on that American foreign policy under the Democrats would be to provoke American involvement to defeat fascism. After the 1936 re-election of Franklin Roosevelt, Bridges remarked warily, "with the re-election of President Roosevelt we are well on our way to that kind of a setup."⁴³

1941 changed everything for Bridges and created a lasting impact on the development of local union culture. Following the June 22 invasion of the Soviet Union, and the United States' declaration of war against Japan and Germany later that year, there was a real push within the worldwide communist movement to form a broad front against Fascism. Class struggle was put aside for the sake of survival.⁴⁴

⁴³ Bruce Nelson, Workers on the Waterfront, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988) 264.

⁴⁴ Kimeldorf, Insurgent Workers, 49.

Possibly responding to a call from the Soviet Union, Bridges began to crack down on radical work stoppages and labor strife throughout his organization. In one instance, he ordered that workers in Hawaii return to work after a local strike had been called, in another he actually provided a replacement gang when workers in San Francisco refused to work a merchant ship.⁴⁵

By far, Bridges' most controversial measure was his introduction of what came to be known as the "Bridges Plan."⁴⁶ The Plan called for cooperation between management and labor to greatly increase productivity on the waterfront. It declared that there would be no strikes, but compromised in creating a joint worker/employer council charged with maximizing efficiency at all cost to aid in the war effort.

After the struggle of the 1934 strike against joint organization, the longshoremen in Seattle were not particularly receptive to the Bridges Plan. As men were called up for military service, workers in America were in by far the best bargaining position they had seen in years. Furthermore, the greater federal regulation of the maritime industries during war time coupled with the exploding need for longshore services in the Pacific led to generally good conditions for the average longshoreman. It was unthinkable, to the Seattle men, to give this up in favor of the joint organization they had just overcome.⁴⁷ Ultimately, the Bridges Plan was not adopted in Seattle.

In Tacoma, still a part of the ILA, the result of the wartime crisis was less straightforward. On the East Coast, the ILA approach was to aid the war effort at all costs. The union made concessions to the employers wholesale, wages stagnated, and men who refused to participate in the program were removed from the docks. Army and Navy personnel were used in many places on commercial

⁴⁵ Ibid., 49.

⁴⁶ Kimeldorf, *Reds or Rackets?*, 133.

⁴⁷ Ibid.,133.

docks to load both war material and consumer goods bound mainly for Britain and the Soviet port of Murmansk.⁴⁸ The Tacoma local, though ILA, did not make the same concessions made in the east. Though work rules were relaxed during wartime, a result both of union patriotism and federal mandates, there was not the sort of blanket deference given to employer demands. This is an example of a situation where the Seattle and Tacoma locals, coming at the same situation from very different perspectives and presented with very different choices, nonetheless arrived at virtually the same conclusion: sidestepping the preferences of their respective Internationals in favor of pursuing local prerogatives.

The effect of two great wars and a depression on the fabric of American history and culture is incalculable. The effect of these events on the development of differing cultures in the West Coast labor movement, while less profound, is no less important. From 1915 until 1945 the ILWU and Pacific Coast division of the ILA were involved in virtually constant political combat:

- Surviving the first war,
- Fighting the use of West Coast ports as staging grounds for fighting the Bolsheviks,
- Fighting both the boom that dissipated union power and the economic collapse that threatened the livelihood of the worker,
- Enduring three years of labor disputes that fractured coastwise solidarity and helped build the CIO,
- Opposing the pressures for appeasement of the capitalist in his fight against fascism.

The respective political cultures of the longshore locals in Seattle and Tacoma were forged through these crises. In response to these crises their respective values were tested.

Part III. Environment

⁴⁸ Nelson, 264.

In analyzing the differences in outcome of longshore unionism in Seattle and Tacoma, it is beneficial to highlight the subtle differences of input that may have contributed to the manifest outcomes in both ports. While there is no question that Seattle and Tacoma's longshoremen and their unions share a great deal, there are also several key distinctions that, when examined, yield insight into the different attitudes and institutional cultures at play. While both unions share the experience of working with a public port authority, the length of that experience and the different approaches taken led to very different outcomes. Both unions similarly lived through the decasualization of work, that is, the transformation of the longshore industry from one featuring impromptu employment to regular employment, but did so at different times, under different conditions, and with very different results. These and other case studies of differences are perhaps the most effective way of highlighting the evolution of two different forms of socially conscious trade unionism.

The Kimeldorf Determinants

Kimeldorf pays special attention to the impact of environmental factors on the development of radical and conservative tendencies on the west and East Coasts of the United States. Astute as his environmental observations may be, many provide little in the way of analytical value in the Seattle/Tacoma comparison as these two ports have more environmental factors in common than in contrast. While it may be that these factors do contribute to the far more conservative nature of the East Coast in contrast to the *west*, Kimeldorf's analysis also benefits from the very striking differences between the two coasts. Causation is among the most difficult phenomena to prove and there is an understandable tendency to equate *differences* with *causes*. While that tendency remains in the Seattle/Tacoma comparison, it is diminished by the conspicuous similarity of the two labor organizations.

Kimeldorf sets forth several apparently inapplicable factors. Among these are ethnicity, nationality, and relative levels of unemployment. Most of these factors, having to do with the make-up and quantity of the available labor pool, are not readily applicable to the Seattle/Tacoma comparison simply because of proximity. A large discrepancy in

unemployment between the two ports would, absent organizational rules adopted under decasualization, have naturally balanced out as men moved between ports. The ethnic makeup of the cities of Seattle and Tacoma, while not identical, was not nearly so different as between Puget Sound and the East Coast of the country.⁴⁹ Kimeldorf writes that some of the East Coast conservatism may have been a result of the high proportion of workers of Irish descent. Irish workers, virtually all members of the Catholic Church, were necessarily influenced toward conservatism by the relatively conservative, anti-communist teachings of the Church and the social pressure exerted by a relatively insular social environment.⁵⁰ Neither can nationality be pointed to in contrasting terms on the West Coast. While on the East Coast, three-quarters of dockers were of immediate foreign descent, on the West Coast exactly the inverse ratio prevailed.⁵¹ Moreover, there was no statistically significant difference between the populations of Seattle and Tacoma.

While some of Kimeldorf's identified radical determinants are not readily applicable, there are several environmental factors, both among those he identified and not, that may have influenced the evolution of each of the organizations under examination. These, when combined with other differences present in the Seattle/Tacoma comparison, but not in Kimeldorf's east/west comparison, form the environmental basis upon which a radical movement can be built.

Source of Labor

On the American West Coast, virtually all workers had migrated to the longshore industry from either the seafaring or logging industries.⁵² This was of particular importance during the times of extremely casual hiring, when loggers and seamen moved freely between those professions and the longshore industry. Given that one of the major commodities shipped through West Coast ports was lumber, it is not surprising that lumber handlers were able to easily transition from handling lumber on land to loading it into ships. Moreover, ports with highly transient workforces, such as Seattle, often saw

⁴⁹ Lester Rubin, *The Negro in the Longshore Industry*, The Racial Policies of American Industry Series, Report No. 29, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974). 138.

⁵⁰ Kimeldorf, *Reds or Rackets*, 42.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 20.

longshoremen hired on the spot to serve as seamen aboard ocean-going and inter-coastal craft.⁵³

Kimeldorf points to this workforce source in stark contrast to the American East Coast, where extractive industry was far less important; few, if any, bulk commodities were shipped through the major ports; and seamen were unwilling to work on the docks.⁵⁴ The latter of these phenomena was actually the result of labor success. Seamen, well organized on the East Coast, were unwilling to work in the relatively deplorable conditions on shore. Thus workers on the East Coast tended to be from lesser professions or more socially ostracized groups, such as newly arrived immigrants.

While Kimeldorf argues that the seamen and loggers moving into the longshore industry were more predisposed to radicalism, the comparison is of little value in the Seattle/Tacoma comparison. It is true that, especially in the West Coast logging industry, there was a much deeper history of radicalism, syndicalism, and even communism⁵⁵; it is also the case that Seattle and Tacoma, in the early days, shared a common labor pool. Furthermore, with the casual nature of hiring and the proximity of the facilities, it was not uncommon, in the early days, for men to move between the two ports.⁵⁶

A key difference that Kimeldorf fails to highlight but that follows his analytical model is the window of time within which workers from other industries easily transitioned into the longshore trade. Earlier installation of decasualization in the Port of Tacoma, coupled with the professionalization that came from steady-man hiring (in which workers are hired for extended periods to work for a single employer) by a public port authority in 1918 ended the practice of men moving into and out of the industry.⁵⁷ While Tacoma had largely decasualized by 1910, Seattle would not reach the same point until nearly

⁵³ Magden, *A History of Seattle Waterfront Workers, 1884-1934*, 44.

⁵⁴ Kimeldorf, *Reds or Rackets*, 38.

⁵⁵ Robert L. Tyler, *Rebels of the Woods: The IWW in the Pacific Northwest* (Eugene, Oregon: University of Oregon Press, 1967) 7.

⁵⁶ Paul Gillingham, "The Early History and Development of Industrial Relations in the West Coast Longshore Industry, 1919-1934," (MA Thesis, University of Washington, 1970) 7.

⁵⁷ Robert Levy, "The Relationship of U.S. West Coast Port Authorities to Longshore Labor and the Multi-Employer Bargaining Group," (MA Thesis, University of Washington, 1988) 22.

fifteen years later. Moreover, even after the institution of the union-controlled hiring hall in 1934, union density in Tacoma was far higher than in Seattle, where non-union workers were allowed to compete for work on an even playing field. While it may seem that higher union density would yield more pronounced radicalism, the exact opposite seems to have happened in the longshore industry, where union membership seems to have served more as a stabilizing force.⁵⁸

Demography

A key distinction between Seattle and Tacoma's longshoremen is one of demography. While virtually all were initially white men of working age, the populations of the Seattle and Tacoma ports differ in important respects. In many ways, and as a result of the demographic differences, Local 38-97 in 1937 (the year the Seattle union broke away from the ILA to form the ILWU) looks far more like Local 19 in 1957. This is the result of both the aging of the working population, and the institutionalization of the union-controlled hiring hall.

In 1937, the average age of a longshoreman working on the Tacoma waterfront was 55. In Seattle it was 35.⁵⁹ The importance of this demographic difference cannot be overstated. With age comes a certain amount of personal stability, social entrenchment, and economic complexity. One of the most adhesive stereotypes about longshoremen was the contention that they were roving bands of ne'er-do-wells, drunkards, and bustling confirmed bachelors who traveled from port to port working the incoming ships.⁶⁰ In Tacoma, this could not have been further from the truth. In fact, Tacoma longshoremen were overwhelmingly family men, tied to the Tacoma port, and unlikely to travel to neighboring ports when work was scarce.⁶¹ This was of particular economic disadvantage for them in light of the relatively cyclical nature of longshore work in Tacoma, but it was an advantage from an organizing perspective.

⁵⁸ Kimeldorf, *Reds or Rackets*, 29.

⁵⁹ Gillingham, 16.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 16.

One reason for the demographic difference in age was the continuity of union institutionalization, or, more correctly, the lack of it in all Puget Sound ports except Tacoma.⁶² By the end of the 1934 strike, Tacoma had experienced unionism, and the union-controlled hiring hall, since 1909.⁶³ The rest of the coast, however, had seen a stark decrease in union activity in the longshore trade after 1918. This hiatus from militant unionism was a result of the boom in productivity in the 1920's, a result of the exploding economy that brought ever more casual laborers into the ranks of the longshore trade making work plentiful. It was also the product of the employer effort to crush waterfront unionism on Puget Sound in 1918. The 1909 formation of the Longshoremen's Union of the Pacific (LUP), one in a long line of quasi-federative organizations attempting to link the ports of the West Coast, was a thorn in the side of the employers. Isolated as small, relatively insignificant stevedoring companies against the specter of a monolithic labor organization, the employers formed the Waterfront Employers' Union (WEU) in that year. Though the impetus for coast-wise labor organization was strong, the interests of the employers in coast-wise unity was stronger. As is often the case in labor organizing, though the longshoremen had far more to lose to economic isolation, the employers had far more to gain from unification. The crackdown on waterfront unionism in the Puget Sound and down the coast that began with the formation of the WEU literally broke the back of the fledgling LUP.⁶⁴

When coast-wise unionism reconstituted itself in 1933, under the auspices of the ILA, it and its locals emerged as very different organizations than they had been just 15 years earlier. In Tacoma union organization was a constant, not subject to the same cyclical swings in influence that were experienced elsewhere on the coast. As a result, in 1933, the memberships of the locals in Seattle, Portland, and San Francisco were overwhelmingly younger, made up of people who had entered the longshore trade since

⁶² George Michael Jones, "Longshore Unionism and Puget Sound: A Seattle-Tacoma Comparison" (MA Thesis, University of Washington, 1957) 164.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 164.

⁶⁴ Rubin, 137.

1920, and who did not share the relatively conservative values and craft-union tendencies of Tacomans.⁶⁵

The age disparity was in fact so great that when representatives of the Waterfront Employers Union of San Francisco, unaccustomed to dealing with old-guard trade unionists, visited the Tacoma and Seattle docks at the end of the 1934 strike, one remarked with respect to Seattle that:

The Board on its visit could not but be impressed by the age of the men in the hall, which makes more vivid...testimony that the men dispatched to the employers in Tacoma were made up in a large degree of men no longer qualified to work because of age.⁶⁶

Though overall longshore age was skewed in favor of older workers in the 1930's (when the pension first came to the Seattle waterfront over 200 men had already reached the qualifying age of 65⁶⁷), it was far more pronounced in Tacoma than in any of the other West Coast ports.

Decasualization

Decasualization, the process by which workers become regulars rather than *casual* workers in the longshore industry was a multi-decade process on Puget Sound. In this analysis it is important to distinguish the *process* of decasualization from the *outcome*. The former is discussed in this section, the latter in the next. The architect of the Seattle experience, Frank Foisie, described the process of decasualization:

“Decasualization” means the process by which an organized port controls the intake of men so that there are enough for the ships but no surplus, and distributes the work available so that all the men needed get as good a living as the industry affords. It is a problem of balancing the constantly changing and intricate needs of the ships for men and the needs of men for jobs, complicated by

⁶⁵ Jones, 164.

⁶⁶ Jones, 163, from op.cit p. 52-53 Waterfront Employers Union of San Francisco.

⁶⁷ Gillingham, 16.

differences in skill, types and human preferences. Reduced to the essentials, the problem is the orderly control of the necessary reserve of men to meet the fluctuations of port needs.⁶⁸

Decasualization on the waterfronts of Puget Sound was a problem for both the employers and the men. It was a fundamental reorganization of the nature of work in the longshore trade, and is referenced in several other sections of this analysis as one of the most momentous changes in the industry, and as such, the precipitant of vast changes in labor organization.

Prior to the decasualization initiative, work on the waterfront had been at the behest of the employer and under its total and absolute control. Much as agricultural work is hired today, workers in the longshore trade were hired through the casual shape-up. Men had no formal employment relationship with any particular company and were paid on a day-to-day basis. This relationship created both hardship and instability on both sides of the employment relationship. The docker, understandably, was unhappy with a situation under which he had no employment stability, no welfare benefits, and was subject to the whims of a foreman or other official. On the side of the stevedoring companies, the shape-up, while maintaining low general wages, also fostered a great surplus of labor. This led, as Frank Foisie explained to the employers, to men with little to do except agitate and resulted in strikes and labor unrest on the waterfront.⁶⁹

Establishment of the union-controlled hiring hall in Tacoma was a gradual process beginning in 1907, when a crippling longshore strike first forced the employers to accept a closed shop.⁷⁰ The gang rotational system of dispatching (through which work is evenly divided among a standing group of union work gangs) was the prevailing means of gaining work on the Tacoma waterfront from this time until the union accepted joint organization of the hiring hall in 1956.⁷¹ The major test of decasualization came, however, in 1920, when the employers up and down the coast pushed de-organization

⁶⁸ Foisie, Frank, Decasualizing Longshore Labor and the Seattle Experience, (Seattle: The Waterfront Employers of Seattle, 1934) 6.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁷⁰ Markholt, Maritime Solidarity, 26.

⁷¹ Jones, 190.

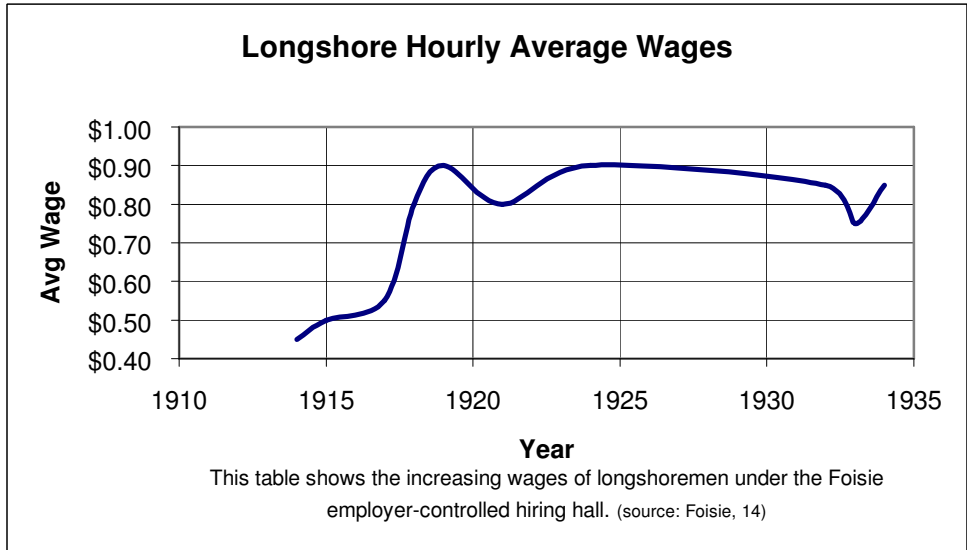
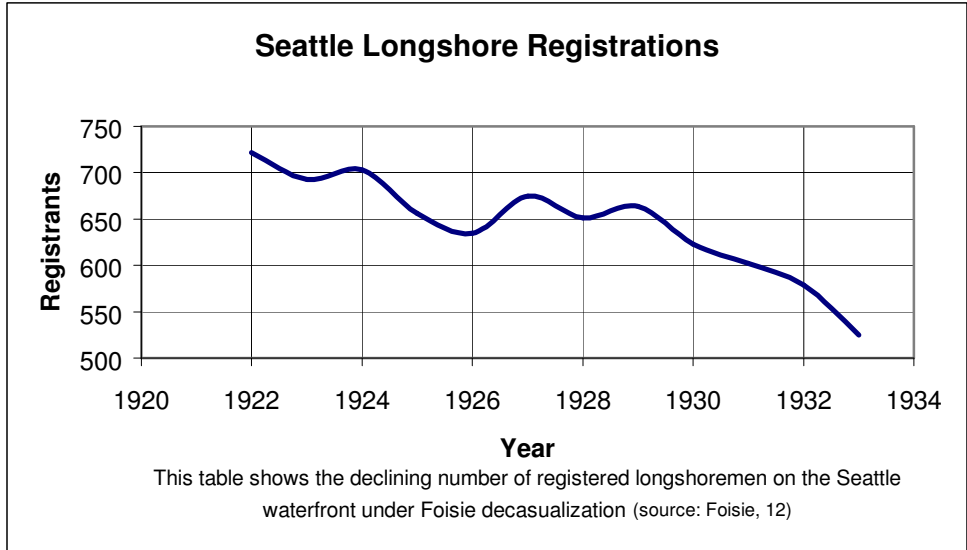
and wage concessions. Tacoma remained the only port on the coast to maintain union administration of the hiring hall, a key determinant of later action, but was forced to accept wage concessions for the first time.⁷² The continued union administration of the hall, under the gangs-based dispatching approach, was in stark contrast to the rest of the coast. Indeed, by 1923 the bulk of ILA registrants on the West Coast were in Tacoma.⁷³

When Frank Foisie was given the task of decasualizing the Seattle waterfront, he brought with him an academic understanding of labor relationships. His understanding of the basics of labor decasualization rested on two concepts: central registration and central dispatching. He recognized that the pre-organization labor force in Seattle was roughly double what was needed. His approach to solving this problem was to centrally register men under a registered list system. He also required that men leaving the trade not be replaced, and ended the practice of allowing men to leave the Seattle area and later return to their jobs later. This requirement of continuous employment largely ended the phenomenon of roving bands of longshoremen moving from port to port and institutionalized a regular cadre of men on the Seattle waterfront.

The result of the implementation of the Foisie model was a relatively rapidly declining rate of longshore registrants. This is even more striking when one considers that just before Foisie came to the waterfront, longshore registrations were actually increasing drastically each year.

⁷² Markholt, *Maritime Solidarity*, 26.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 26.



Limits on registration had the dual impact of more evenly distributing work and of raising general wages. Indeed, over the 17-year period from 1914 to 1933 average straight-time wages on the Seattle waterfront increased 88%⁷⁴. More important, work was far more evenly distributed, allowing the men who stayed on the workforce to gain the stability of employment already found in Tacoma. This should have been a de-radicalizing force, but only a year later, in 1934, one of the greatest labor strikes in history shook the waterfront and completely dismantled the Foisie model of the employer-controlled hiring hall. For the first time, the union and union officials were put in charge of dispatching

⁷⁴ Foisie, 14.

and registering workers. Perhaps a testament to Foisie, the union list system adopted coastwise in 1934 was essentially the Foisie method. Oddly, those men who in the 1920's had decried the Foisie method as a "shape-up with a roof over it" now embraced it, albeit under union administration.

The Union-Controlled Hiring Hall and Differing Styles of Work

One of the most striking phenomena in the comparison of the Seattle and Tacoma longshore locals is the impact of the hiring hall on union culture and ideology. Union-controlled hiring first came to Puget Sound in Tacoma. Evidence suggests that it has its roots as far back as the late nineteenth century, but was in use, as the virtual exclusive instrument of hiring, beginning in 1909.⁷⁵ This is in stark contrast to the rest of the coast. As explained in the last section, the hiring hall did not come to Seattle until Frank Foisie introduced the employer-controlled version in the 20's that was referred to by some as "the shape-up with a roof over it."⁷⁶ In Tacoma, the hiring hall was a sacred and instrumental part of union control of work. It is also at the heart of the union's success during difficult times for labor on the West Coast.

Where up and down the coast the hiring hall, if it existed at all, was maintained by the employers' union, for their benefit, Tacoma took a different path: the union-controlled hiring hall. Foisie's Seattle methodology relied on a foreman's acumen in appointing longshoremen to employment. This led to favoritism, cronyism, and a disincentive for union membership, as members looked to the employer, rather than the union, for employment. From 1909 until 1955 in Tacoma, the hall was operated under either exclusive union control or union-employer joint control (always under the direction of a union dispatcher).⁷⁷ This hall was so advanced for its time that when the arbitration award that ended the 1934 strike was handed down in October of that year it explicitly exempted Local 38-97 from the provisions regulating equalization of earnings, allowing

⁷⁵ Jones, 184.

⁷⁶ Gillingham, 10.

⁷⁷ Jones, 187.

Tacoma to continue dispatching according to its existing system, rather than by default to the then-imposed Foisie registered list system.⁷⁸

While the very nature of the hall differed from Seattle to Tacoma, so did the style of work and work dispatching. Uniquely organized, Tacoma dispatching relied heavily on the practice of organizing men into "gangs." The hall dispatched ten-man gangs without discrimination, in a rotationary manner until each gang's earnings had equalized, and then rotation was begun again from the beginning. In 1934 there were 24 such gangs. Each gang was represented in the hall by a paddle. As the gangs were dispatched to work, a union dispatcher recorded its earnings in chalk on the paddle. With weekly earnings recorded on the paddles, representing each of the 24 gangs in the union hall, each man was publicly assured earnings that were roughly equal to his comrades.⁷⁹

The presence of the gang method of dispatching is in stark contrast to the more individualistic methodology prevalent in Seattle. By the time the union took control of that hiring hall in 1934, the hiring method, which still is in practice to this day, had evolved. Under this methodology, men put pegs into holes in a dispatching board to signify their presence and willingness to work. As the employer requested longshoremen they were dispatched to the docks in roughly alphabetical order. Each man was thus given an equal chance at work by virtue of the dispassionate nature of dispatching. The difference between this and the Tacoma method, aside from the obvious differences in methodology, was that men were not working side-by-side with the same group day in and day out. Rather, they were constantly handling different types of cargo, with different cohorts.⁸⁰

This is not to say that the hiring hall systems were entirely different; indeed, they were more alike than anything else. However, the key differences in methodology created an opportunity for extremely different union cultures to develop. That said, in 1957, a year

⁷⁸ Ibid., 163.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 185.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 186.

before the ILWU absorbed Local 38-97, over 50% of the men, including "B" men^{*}, dispatched in Tacoma were part of a semi-permanent gang. In Seattle, that number was less than 20%.⁸² More tellingly, under the 1947 Labor-Management Relations Act (commonly referred to as the Taft-Hartley Act), both unions were required to allow and dispatch, without discrimination, any man who wished to work as a longshoreman, regardless of union affiliation. Here an interesting difference emerges, perhaps the result of the small but significant difference in dispatching. In Tacoma in 1957, not a single registered longshoreman was not also a member of Local 38-97. In Seattle, by contrast, it was extremely common for men to not be members of Local 19, and those who were not were dispatched without prejudice.⁸³ This may be the result of, among other things, the gang system, with men in Tacoma feeling more a part of a community, and thus feeling either an obligation to join or intimidation to do so. It may also, however, be a result of the more bread-and-butter focus of 38-97. In contrast, more people felt antipathy toward joining Local 19 on political grounds. This is a classic risk of radical unionism. The bread-and-butter union, though often less effective in waging the struggle, runs far less risk of alienating its own membership. Though a man may disagree on tactics, he will not often disagree with demands for better wages and working conditions. By contrast, the more politically aggressive ILWU, under Harry Bridges, ran a risk, which may have been realized in the Tacoma situation, of alienating otherwise loyal fellow labor warriors due to verbose, explicitly political rhetoric and action. Sociologist Selig Perlman argues that the stability of conservative unionism is at the heart of the early success of the American labor movement:

* Where once egalitarianism had served as the guiding principle of the organization of formerly casual workers on the waterfront, by 1957 a strict hierarchical structure had developed. This system, which perseveres to this day, breaks registered men into the categories of "A" men, "B" men, and "Identified Casuals." Generally "A" men are the most experienced workers, having risen through the ranks over a long period of time, and are the only members given voting rights within the union. "B" men, though protected by the coastwise collective bargaining agreement, are not voting members of the organization. As a usual rule they are not allowed to participate in meetings of the local or serve as officers of the local or International. "Identified Casuals" are not still casual workers. Though registered with the union and paid according to the rules for casuals subscribed in the collective bargaining agreement, they are not given many of the same benefits as "B" men, and may be laid off when work is not plentiful. In time each group can generally expect to rotate up to the next level, though advancement is not guaranteed. (International Longshore and Warehouse Union, "The IWLWU" [accessed 21 September 2004]; available from <http://www.ilwu.org>; INTERNET.)

⁸² Ibid., 187.

⁸³ Ibid., 187.

The unionism of the American Federation of Labor was born of a “left wing” movement which gradually turned from socialism to a wage conscious and non-socialistic unionism, eventually so hardy that it survived even depressions mainly because it knew how to resist the lure of politics.⁸⁴

The Local Labor Community

Since the late part of the Nineteenth Century, the longshoremen of Seattle and Tacoma have lived far different experiences. The earlier historical chronologies of each certainly give an understanding of this, but it is important also to recognize the very different experiences of the membership vis-à-vis the rest of the labor movement. In Seattle longshoremen were isolated. Viewed by the community as largely vagabond, single, half-drunk, unskilled men, they were treated in the community as second-class citizens.

Even within the labor community of Seattle, longshoremen were seen as rather undesirable rabble-rousing remnants of a Wobbly day-gone-by. Tacoma longshoremen, less infiltrated by the IWW historically and more in line traditionally with the AFL-style trade unionism that was prevalent at the time, were far more able to cultivate a good working relationship with the rest of the labor movement.⁸⁵ In 1889, the then-existing longshore organization, the Stevedore, Longshoremen and Riggers Union, was instrumental in the creation of the Tacoma Central Trades Council, an inter-labor organization that persists in influence.⁸⁶ Deeply embedded in the trade-union tradition, and safely housed in a well-managed union hiring hall, Tacoma longshoremen thus felt less isolated and more a part of the community than did their Seattle brothers. This can be recognized as a real key to understanding the differences in the experiences of each of these unions.

Type of Work

⁸⁴ Selig Perlman, *A Theory of the Labor Movement*, (New York: Kelley, 1968) 219.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 124.

The impact of the type of work on hand at the various ports plays greatly into their unions' organization. Seattle traditionally fared better, with more regular work, and less erratic patterns of incoming and outgoing tonnage. This was primarily the result of the omnibus nature of the cargo handled on the Seattle docks. The varied cargos were a result of the nature of the ports. Seattle had positioned itself well by the 1920's to handle shipments of general cargo from the Far East and of coastwise consumables destined for cities, towns, and markets throughout the Pacific Northwest.⁸⁷ By the same token, Tacoma, with Commencement Bay as the new terminus of a new transcontinental railroad, was well positioned to handle raw materials, cargo that flowed through the Tacoma port with far greater regularity than in Seattle, but nonetheless in a rather irregular pattern.⁸⁸

General cargo, in contrast to major commodities, can be counted on for a more regular supply of work, as consumer demand for products is far more regular, and the supply of consumable goods is more inexhaustible. Major commodities are more volatile. Tacoma was particularly proud in the 1920's of its preeminence in the shipment of forest products for export. This was one of the most profitable products to move through the Port of Tacoma and was also one of the most reliable. Other commodities, namely wheat and grain in addition to general farm products, are more seasonal and are shipped not on a regular schedule but as crops ripen and are harvested. This created a cyclical labor market where demand for labor could be unquenchable one day and non-existent the next. The result was the sort of unreliability of work that contributed to the radicalism within the longshore industry generally. Without the tempering influence of a well-entrenched, institutionalized trade union in Tacoma, this could have led to more radical and revolutionary outbreaks. This is one of many seeming contradictions in terms. Sociologists would suggest that the unreliable nature of work in the longshore industry contributes to radicalism. Indeed, when writing about the longshore industry in general, many a scholar has made this claim.⁸⁹ On the other hand, within the industry the ports with far more reliable port operations, namely Seattle and San Francisco, are also the

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

most radical. There is no apparent explanation for this seeming incongruity, and it can be assumed that either the impetus of radicalism rests elsewhere, or some other unidentified factor is at work.

Another key difference with respect to the type of work handled at the Seattle and Tacoma ports follows from the general type of cargo handled. While the general cargo handled in the Port of Seattle tends to be of relatively standard constitution, the commodities flowing through the Port of Tacoma in the 1920's and to this day are far more likely to be so-called "penalty commodities." A penalty commodity is one for which handling presents some inherent or potential danger to the longshoreman. Many of the major commodities flowing through Tacoma, especially those from extractive industries (including submerged timber, mining ore, and submerged farm products) posed a danger by virtue of their weight, cumbersomeness, or inherent makeup (primarily in the case of mining products).⁹⁰ The impact of handling penalty commodities on the labor force of the port in question is uncertain.

With respect to penalty commodities, there has been one constant in the Port of Tacoma since 1909: no man has been required to move a penalty commodity without volunteering to do so. In fact, under the union-controlled hiring hall situation in Tacoma men always had the right always to refuse work for any reason without losing their shot at gaining access to the remaining work on the docks.⁹¹ This was particularly advantageous for men who were burdened with a certain inability to handle a certain type of cargo. A longshoreman with a wheat allergy, for instance, would be perfectly within his rights in declining to handle wheat commodities in the Port, without forfeiting his place in line for work. Men who did choose to work penalty commodities received penalty pay in the form of hourly cash bonuses. The system operated well because of the close camaraderie fostered by the gang-based dispatching mechanism, and as a result of penalty pay for commodities that men would typically be willing to turn down.

⁹⁰ Gillingham, 11.

⁹¹ Jones, 189.

Under both the union-controlled hall in Tacoma and Frank Foisie's hall in Seattle, extra pay was set aside for longshoremen handling penalty commodities. Though working penalty commodities had been mandatory under the shape-up system of hiring, and those who refused to work them were subject to loss of work opportunities, the union and employer administrators of the hiring halls found that there were advantages to paying a bit extra for the handling of these often-dangerous goods. First, by paying a premium to those who volunteered there was no negative effect on productivity in the handling of these commodities. Second, the extra pay and voluntary nature of the work made penalty commodities very attractive to skilled longshoremen, resulting in better trained longshoremen working the commodities and reducing waterfront injuries and fatalities.⁹²

Relationship to the Port

A common relationship in both Seattle and Tacoma is with a public port authority. The Port of Seattle and Port of Tacoma, respectively, are both *public* facilities, arguably dispassionate about labor concerns and run by elected officials. This creates an interesting dynamic under which organized labor must operate. Each port authority is charged with a double-mandate of an overlapping nature. First, the port is supposed to literally maintain and manage public port facilities on a day-to-day basis. Second, it is supposed to promote trade, attract business, and generate trade-based revenue for the community. These overlapping mandates create an interesting dynamic, which is magnified by the specter of public elections in which both parties to labor disputes (union members and business leaders) can play a role.

The Port of Seattle was created on September 5, 1911 by a public vote of the citizens of King County.⁹³ In a good sign for organized labor, the first three commissioners elected to the Port Authority were solidly pro-labor, even mandating that stevedore companies utilizing the new public port facilities use union labor exclusively. Commercial response to this new force on the waterfront was profoundly hostile. As shipping companies threatened to leave public port facilities in favor of private facilities in Portland and Los

⁹² Foisie, 17.

⁹³ Magden, *A History of Seattle Waterfront Workers, 1884-1934*, 70.

Angeles, the overall tonnage shipped through the public Port of Seattle continued to climb. By 1914 more vessels called upon the Port of Seattle than any other port facility in the nation, save the Port of New York.⁹⁴

The Seattle Port Authority created in 1911, however, is very different from what could be found on the waterfront only two decades later. This was the result of a shift in purpose for the public port authority on the coast. Initially envisioned as an entirely public organization, which would employ workers directly and essentially end the commercial stevedoring trade, public ports evolved to be a sort of public landlord authority.⁹⁵ The initial drive behind creating the public port facility was to capture the explosion in international trade during the first part of the Twentieth Century for public good. After all, it was argued, the seas belonged to the collective citizenry of the various communities where ships called. Therefore, just as local government maintained roads and highways for the commercial benefit of the region, it would maintain ports to similar ends. The problem, of course, was that commercial companies already existed on the waterfront and were not willing to simply disappear in the interest of public good. Faced with threats of disappearing commercial activity, the public port authority of Seattle was forced to enter into “preferential relationships” with various existing companies, in a pattern that eventually led to the present long-term lease.⁹⁶

The public Port of Tacoma was formed through a vote of the citizenry of Pierce County on November 19, 1918, some seven years after the founding of the Port of Seattle. In forming the Port of Tacoma, local interests responded to the success of the Port of Seattle, and the great capital development that was occurring on Harbor Island and around that Port to the north. Greater capital investment in Seattle hurt, to some degree, the Port of Tacoma’s competitiveness in the regional marketplace. Spurred by the development of a new transcontinental railroad spur ending in Commencement Bay, the citizens of Pierce County pushed to develop a new public port authority. It was seen as a possible benefit for both city dwellers, benefiting from increased trade and business in

⁹⁴ Magden, *A History of Seattle Waterfront Workers, 1884-1934*, 73.

⁹⁵ Levy, 22.

⁹⁶ Levy, 23.

Tacoma, and county residents, gaining greater access to public warehousing and port facilities through which to ship farm products.⁹⁷ Far different from the public port initiative in Seattle, the Port of Tacoma drew great support both from organized labor and from business. Local 38-97 pushed the Tacoma Central Trades Council to pass a resolution favoring the creation of the Port, encouraged by the fact that, in the early days, the Port of Seattle employed over 400 longshoremen daily in a closed-shop environment (though this was a very short-lived experience).⁹⁸ Commercial stevedoring companies liked that the Port of Seattle had taken great capital losses that resulted in greatly increased profitability for the private enterprises that acted as tenants.

Despite early support for labor, the public port facility is not a fundamentally pro-labor organization. Driven by its first mandate of operating the facility, the port is primarily interested in maintaining stable and effective employment relationships in its facilities. This is complicated by the fact that the port facility in Seattle does not employ longshoremen in any real sense of the term. Rather, employment in Seattle's facilities is by the commercial stevedoring companies, originally organized as the Waterfront Employers' Union (WEU) (later the Waterfront Employers' Association and presently the Pacific Maritime Association (PMA)). In the best of times, this employment situation allows the public port facility to act as a sort of mediator in the public interest. The public has a fundamental interest in keeping port facilities open but also in assuring reasonable standards of living for port workers. Public port facilities can, and have, acted as mechanisms for public input into labor disputes and negotiations. In the worst of times the port facilities act as extensions of the employer with the tools of a government actor and in the clothing of elected legitimacy.⁹⁹

In Tacoma, the public port was a slightly different creature. Despite not being a party to the contract negotiations regarding waterfront employment, the Port of Tacoma engaged in actual employment of longshoremen on the waterfront.¹⁰⁰ This model of so-called

⁹⁷ Magden, *The Working Longshoreman*, 94.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁹⁹ Levy, 2.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

“direct employment” is uncommon on the West Coast, but common in the relatively smaller ports of Tacoma, Grays Harbor, and Longview.¹⁰¹ One of the reasons for the disparity is the type of cargo handled in the port. As discussed herein, the Port of Tacoma handles a great deal more bulk and break bulk cargo than does Seattle.¹⁰² Containerization, though a far-off notion in the early 1900’s, came to Seattle for purposes of transporting general cargo in the 1960’s, but did not arrive in Tacoma until nearly twenty years later.¹⁰³ Nonetheless, commercial stevedoring companies handled most of the cargo shipped through Tacoma, but the fact that *the Port directly hired some longshoremen* had important implications.

In the early days of longshore labor on the West Coast this difference in employment was very important. Rather than being outspoken enemies of the employer, longshoremen employed directly by the Port Authority were actually *constituents* of the employer. Selig Perlman suggests that one of the de-radicalizing, anti-revolutionary aspects of American society is the ability to at least be perceived to be able to influence change.¹⁰⁴ That is to say that democratic institutions, however disliked, are far less likely to be at the receiving end of revolution.¹⁰⁵ This is very likely a contributory factor in explaining why Local 38-97 was not as overtly revolutionary as its Seattle counterpart. In Tacoma the employer, whether public or private, was seen as more a part of the solution than a part of the problem. This is not to paint a picture of a utopian situation. ILA 38-97 was a militant labor organization but not one that overtly called for the elimination of the employer, a common cry in Seattle.

The Private Employers

The relationships between Local 38-97, Local 19 and their respective employers are of critical importance. One of the distinguishing characteristics of a trade union, in contrast

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 34.

¹⁰² Ibid., 34.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 35.

¹⁰⁴ Perlman, 250.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 250.

to a Marxist social revolution, is recognition of the employer as an essential and indispensable part of the employment relationship. However, key to the Marxist ideology is recognition of the employer as part of the superstructure of capitalism, reinforcing an exploitative relationship to the means of production. Here again there is stark disagreement between the men of the Seattle longshore trade and those working the docks in Tacoma.

Organization of the Employers

Among Kimeldorf's theories of radicalism, organization of the employers is key. Shipping is one of the most competitive industries in the United States. In terms of organization of a market economy shipping is a nearly perfect industry. The product (i.e., transport of goods) is nearly identical, with little variation between companies. Since the early part of the Twentieth Century there has also been far more transport capacity than demand could fill. Shipping rates are also commonly known, published periodically, and, during wartime, regulated by the U.S. War Shipping Board.¹⁰⁶

The result of this nearly perfect competitive environment has traditionally been a virtually morbid focus on controlling those costs that are reducible, as a means to reduce rates, attract business, and maximize a limited profit margin. While the costs of ships and material are typically fixed, areas of expenditure related to labor were, during the 1920's and '30's, viewed as ripe for cost reduction.

Cost reduction in labor was not limited to wage reductions. One of the highest costs associated with loading and unloading ships were the fees paid to dock a large vessel in port. These costs could be limited by minimizing the amount of time taken to unload and turn around an ocean-going vessel. To accomplish this, Employers traditionally placed a focus on speeding-up worker productivity, often with worker safety taking a back seat to the focus on increasing throughput.

¹⁰⁶ Markholt, Maritime Solidarity, 26.

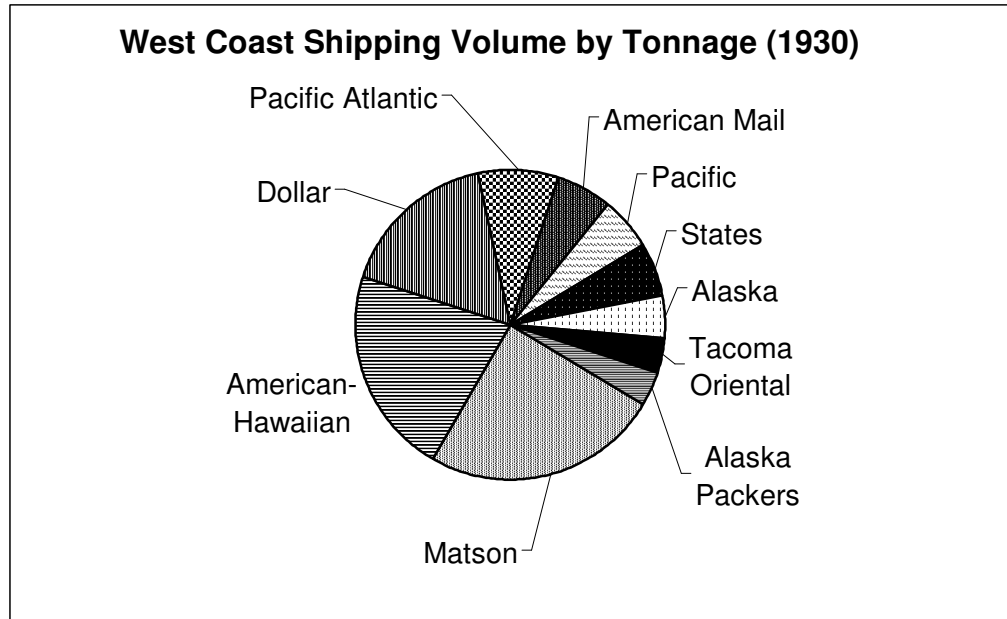
To focus on productivity and assure continuity of conditions in the various West Coast ports patronized by their ships, the various employers of the West Coast have, from a very early time, organized into an employer's collective. Through this organization they have been able to prevent venue shopping by workers, an unlikely scenario, and also guarantee that shipping lines would not undercut each other's bargaining position vis-à-vis the longshoremen.

Kimeldorf argues that it is the nature of this employer organization that contributes to the development of a radical or conservative response by organized labor. On the American East Coast there was, during the 1920's, a plethora of small, marginally competitive shipping lines. The sheer number of lines made the coordination of a common bargaining position unworkable. The restricted profitability of the lines prompted a situation where few were able to sustain a prolonged labor stoppage.¹⁰⁷

On the West Coast, the employer situation was far different. While a large and diverse number of shipping lines still existed, these were typically lines specializing in bulk or break-bulk extractive commodities. Among those shipping general goods, three (the "Big 3") represented over 63% of the total gross tonnage shipped into and out of West Coast ports. American-Hawaiian Steamship Company, Matson Navigation Company, and the Dollar Steamship Company held a virtual stranglehold on West Coast shipping, and thus were able to easily coordinate common policy.¹⁰⁸ Smaller shippers were more willing to fall in line with their major competitors because they did not run the risk of being the sole target of devastating labor strife.

¹⁰⁷ Kimeldorf, *Reds or Rackets?*, 56.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 56.



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The importance of employer organization is clear in an East Coast/West Coast comparison such as Kimeldorf's. The greater organization of West Coast employers, backed by the Big 3, was able to wreak havoc on worker wages and conditions after World War I, radicalizing the workforce. Though wages similarly fell on the East Coast, less organization meant that workers could not look to one entity as the cause, as they did in the west. This prompted a more conservative approach to unionism, working, in many cases, *with*, rather than *against*, the small shipping lines.

In the context of a comparison of Seattle and Tacoma's experiences this analysis is not particularly helpful. Employer organization on the West Coast was coastwise. There was little, if any, variation in employer constitution between Seattle and Tacoma. It is clear, however, that the *approach* of this employer behemoth was tailored to the situation and local environment of each of the West Coast ports. For instance, in 1924 there was a coastwise push to reduce the

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 58.

longshore wage scale and push for what was called “joint organization”^{*} in each port.¹¹⁰ Both the Seattle and Tacoma port workers fell subject to the wage reductions, which, partly instituted by the still-operating U.S. War Shipping Board, were virtually unavoidable. Seattle also was forced to accept joint organization, fashioned by Frank Foisie on the Seattle Waterfront. Tacoma, by contrast, did not see joint organization because the employers did not push for it. In July 1921, the Waterfront Employers’ Association admitted:

[I]f an attempt were made to introduce joint organization at this time it would be against the wishes of organized labor with possibly a lack of understanding by the business interests of Tacoma, and the public press.¹¹¹

It is striking that, while business was pushing concessions up and down the coast, there was concern that in Tacoma the business interests would misinterpret such a move. This shows the far more community-integrated nature of Tacoma’s longshore union. In this situation, however, it was not the organization of the employers but rather the organization of labor that prompted the case-by-case approach to prosecuting cost-restricting measures. The 1920’s were a pivotal moment in the development of the two labor organizations under analysis. The entire approach of the employers seems to have been dictated more by the respective differences of labor organization than of some disparity in organization on the other side of the bargaining table.

In the final analysis, employer organization, while perhaps a key indicator in other industrial situations, was not a significant determinant of organizational differences between the longshore locals in Seattle and Tacoma.

^{*} “Joint Organization” is a term used repeatedly in the west coast context with different meanings. When introduced in the 1920’s this was essentially a euphemism for employer-controlled hiring, with a limited role for worker councils. In 1956 when Local 38-97 accepted “Joint Organization” with the Waterfront Employers’ Association (WEA) it was organization of a wholly different nature, with the union controlling most hiring but much of the cost of the hiring hall borne by the employers.

¹¹⁰ Markholt, *Maritime Solidarity*, 26.

¹¹¹ Minutes of the Northwest Waterfront Employers Association, Apr 18, 1925. From Markholt, *Maritime Solidarity*, 26.

Relationship to the Employer

In a 1936 speech at the University of Washington, ILWU International President Harry Bridges remarked that shortly there would "no longer be private employers on the waterfront."¹¹² This was not a pipe dream, as efforts had been made, and would continue to be made in Seattle and down the coast to eliminate the employer by substituting union-affiliated "cooperatives" for the commercial stevedoring companies.

In 1919, members of Seattle Local 38-12 formed the Seattle Longshoremen's Cooperative Association. The cooperative was a direct competitor to the commercial stevedoring companies. Union leaders hoped that by running a non-profit organization, they could guarantee better wages and working conditions to the men. Also a benefit was the fact that a labor organization could guarantee the shipping lines a stable source of labor and guarantee against labor unrest.¹¹³

Shipping companies, however, were not willing to associate with what was deemed to be "the radical class,"¹¹⁴ and the Cooperative won not a single stevedoring contract. With little fanfare, the organization disbanded in December of 1920, and the last best effort of the Seattle longshoremen to *replace* the employer was thwarted.¹¹⁵

The cooperative approach was not pursued in Tacoma in part because of the lack of joint organization. It would be overanalyzing to read too much into the push for joint organization in Seattle and not in Tacoma. Indeed, it may be that this difference of approach was more a symptom of organizational culture than a cause. Nonetheless, it was the case that joint organization prompted a situation where radicals were largely marginalized from the industry in Seattle. With this, they were *forced* to try to develop some form of competitive industrial apparatus,

¹¹² Gillingham, 2.

¹¹³ Magden, A History of Seattle Waterfront Workers 1884-1934, 124.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 148.

or look for other work. The same situation did not exist in Tacoma, where joint organization never set in. Where dissenting Seattle longshoremen were ousted from the hiring hall, dissenting Tacoma men were dispersed to various gangs in the port where they were literally “hidden” from the employers.

Nonetheless, the men in Tacoma were not actively hostile to the cooperative approach. The short-lived nature of the Seattle cooperative and its failure to win contracts did not impress the men in Tacoma. Thus, there was not a major push for collective organization of competitive stevedoring firms in Tacoma. Furthermore, the guarantee against strikes proved to hold little weight with the shipping companies, which were cognizant of the weak organization on the waterfront and the tenuous nature of the guarantee. Thus, the collective proved to be perhaps ahead of its time and unworkable in the present organizational, economic, and political environment. With its collapse fell perhaps the greatest hope of true revolution on the part of the ultra-leftist elements of coast organization, as well as what seemed to be the best approach to cracking joint organization in Seattle.

Part IV. Culture

A significant component of an understanding of radical tendencies in the union movement is recognition of organizational culture. Culture as a radical determinant is not an end in-and-of itself but rather, generally speaking, a manifestation of other more elemental contributors. Nonetheless, certainly cultural contributors and cultural legacies can explain, to an extent, the relative radicalism of the West Coast in contrast to the far more conservative rest of the nation. In a more micro-level examination, these cultural factors play a role in the development of the contrasting organizational prerogatives of the Seattle and Tacoma locals.

Democracy and Leadership Preferences

The degree to which cultural factors play a role is key to understanding the development of democracy, or the lack thereof, in any particular labor setting. Union democracy, as a

radical determinant, is a factor that has not been exhaustively studied in the past. Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin completed one of the most prominent studies of the propensity for union democracy in the United States, in response to the then-prevailing theories of Michels and Lipset, Trow, and Coleman from earlier in the century. As Stepan-Norris and Zeitlin correctly observe, the question of to what degree there is member participation in union decision-making goes to the heart of understanding the very institution of the American labor union. They acknowledge that:

[T]he question remains whether a labor union “ought to” be democratic, and if so what that means in practice. For the union’s sine qua non is that it is supposed to be a fighting organization of workers that is in constant readiness to defy the “sway of property” over their daily working lives.¹¹⁶

The significance of the question “how much democracy is appropriate?” and the degree to which a union operates democratically is inescapable. This study attempts to add reason and rationality to the processes contributing to the very different cultures and varied levels of radicalism in the Seattle and Tacoma longshore locals. The respective cultures are controlled, in large part, by these aforementioned factors: level of democratic involvement, socio-political culture (the major focus of this section), and membership rationality.

The focus here is not on decision making internal to the labor organization, other analyses better address this question, but rather on the degree to which member preferences effected actual organizational outcomes and policies: namely strikes and affiliations. Any analysis of this type, however, must focus on the degree to which rank-and-file preferences were effectively translated into local action. A high degree of democracy and participation is necessary for any of the environmental, cultural, or social factors identified herein to be looked at as *causes* of the stated outcomes. If the resulting organizations under study were developed merely by the dicta of oligarchic leaderships, then the sociological significance of these member-level analyses is questionable.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 58.

In the early days, namely prior to the 1934 strike, the loosely organized locals of the ILA were undoubtedly democratic. Member preferences were directly translated into policy. This is clear both from the policy statements of the time, and from the staggering number of uncalled strikes on the waterfront. “Quickies,” strikes called at the spur of the moment in one particular situation and for a limited amount of time, were so prolific during the 1910’s and ‘20’s that they often outraged even union leadership.¹¹⁷ One reason for this was the disorganization of the ILA, with most workers on the West Coast dispatched from company-controlled hiring halls. Workers who could not rely on the organization of the ILA, but nonetheless radicalized by their previous union experience, took action into their own hands.

As the 1934 strike came to an end, a new era of organization on the waterfront began. When in 1937 the bulk of the Pacific Coast District left the AFL and became the ILWU, new organizational relationships were instituted that greatly changed the nature of the relationship of the rank-and-file worker to his union leaders. Throughout the disaffiliation process, the shadow of the 1934 strike, and those leaders who had served during it, continued to loom large over the former ILA locals. Harry Bridges, as a result of the strike, had reached almost heroic status and can trace much of his gravitas to the ‘34 conflict. From a democratic perspective this can often be dangerous. Michels writes:

In the object of such adoration, megalomania is apt to ensue. ... This overweening self-esteem on the part of the leaders diffuses a powerful suggestive influence, whereby the masses are confirmed in their admiration for their leaders, and it thus proves a source of enhanced power.¹¹⁸

Not only did Bridges play a pivotal role in the strike, but San Francisco was also center stage for the epic waterfront battle. This translated into a deep desire in many ILA locals to imitate the organization in San Francisco and created a danger that the direction taken by the union would not be dictated by the evolution of culture and in response to environmental stimuli, but rather by fickle leadership preferences. Theorist Bruce Nelson explains:

¹¹⁷ Kimeldorf, *Insurgent Workers*, 49.

¹¹⁸ Robert Michels, *Political Parties* (1911; reprint, New York: The Free Press, 1968) 97.

When the Pacific Coast District of the ILA became the ILWU, the Union's top leaders were firmly committed to emulating the San Francisco example throughout the organization.¹¹⁹

This was not the case in Tacoma, very likely the result of the nature of the 1934 strike experience in that city. With leadership in Tacoma who did not follow Bridges in the same way as elsewhere on the coast, the process of CIO affiliation began. Nonetheless, as the process went forward there was a sense in the Tacoma local that Bridges was exercising near dictatorial powers over the union, and the local chose not to go along with it. In a very real way, democracy and participation were on the minds of the men making the decision against CIO affiliation. In an open letter published in the *Voice of the Federation* Local 38-97's leadership quipped:

Dear Brother Bridges:

We don't believe the time has come YET when you will refuse to answer the honest questions of a group of rank and filers who believe that perhaps you, too, don't quite see the danger of the Lewis-C.I.O. movement, and what it is leading us into. ...The [United Mine Workers/John L. Lewis] regime has thrown hundreds of thousands of [UMW] members and their families into the depths of poverty and destitution. Election stealing, convention packing, and slugging of delegates have reduced the old-time democracy of the union to a ghastly farce.¹²⁰

At the same time, the casting of the dissent of the Tacoma local as a purely rank-and-file inspired stand on democracy may have been partially disingenuous. It is clear that through their involvement with ILA leadership, including Joe Ryan, 38-97's leaders Paddy Morris and Walter Freer developed both a close working relationship with and a deep loyalty to the ILA.¹²¹ Later Tacoma local president Phil Lelli reported "Morris...feuded bitterly with Harry Bridges in the late 1930s. As an ILA loyalist, Morris felt Bridges was too radical."¹²² It is no mere coincidence that Tacoma, a local with perhaps the most outspoken leadership support of the ILA, was one of the

¹¹⁹ Nelson, 260.

¹²⁰ "An Open Letter to Harry Bridges" *Voice of the Federation*, Sept 23, 1937. *Emphasis taken from original document.*

¹²¹ Tacoma Public Library Collection.

¹²² Schwartz, ed., "Oral History of Phil Lelli, May 18, 2004".

“exception ports” not to join the CIO and ILWU. Clearly there was strong coercion by leadership in pursuit of this outcome, yet this pressure likely was not decisive, especially when one considers the outspokenly independent nature of the membership of the local.

Harry Bridges acknowledged in later years that the building of the CIO on the West Coast and its embodiment in the ILWU was controversial. It seems clear in retrospect that member preferences at the local level were very important in dictating the direction of each local. This is evidenced first and foremost in the very fact that Tacoma did not join the ILWU. Local preference took precedent over coastwise concerns. It also seems clear, however, that a clash between the local leadership in Tacoma and the coastwise leadership of Bridges strongly contributed to the outcome. Bridges suggested that while the CIO initiative ripped the coast apart, it also allowed for each local to pursue its own agenda according to local preferences, many of which were staunchly anti-CIO. He once said: “We built the CIO on the West Coast and in doing it we built a hell of a lot of AFL unions.”¹²³

One contention has been that the differing approaches of the Seattle and Tacoma locals were the result, almost exclusively, of leadership preferences. The suggestion is that personal animosity between Paddy Morris and Harry Bridges resulted in the division and that once that personal acrimony had cooled, in the 1950’s, the organizations were reunified under the ILWU banner. In this model, the rank and file memberships, particularly in Tacoma, are not given credit for active participation in union decision-making. It is suggested that members were more interested in benefits than politics. This was true to an extent.

Nelson writes that, “[i]n the day-to-day routine on the docks...longshoremen’s actions were governed more by reflex than strategy.”¹²⁴ Day-to-day decision-making was indeed reflexive, reacting to the situation at hand with responses of varying appropriateness.¹²⁵ It was more that leadership could not control members, however, than a situation where

¹²³ Nelson, 270.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 261.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 261.

decisions were left to leadership. Between 1930 and 1948, there were over 1400 work stoppages on the West Coast, with the majority occurring the mid-to-late thirties.¹²⁶ Far from evidence of authoritarian control, the proliferation of these uncalled strikes shows that membership often disobeyed leadership. Thus, even if the decision in Tacoma not to join the ILWU was made by leadership, without rank and file support such a decision would have been meaningless.

Once the decision had been made, however, a different set of organizational factors came into play. Even if the Seattle and Tacoma locals were culturally different, why did their common economic goals not bring them together before 1956? Even when the division became a serious liability to the detriment of Tacoma's longshoremen in the 1950's, was the continued decision to sacrifice economically to avoid membership in the ILWU a leadership or membership prerogative? On the part of the ILWU, was the move to cut out the ailing ILA local from transit between ports in the 1950's the result of leadership animosity or membership preferences?

Michels comments on the nature of institutionalization:

It is organization which gives birth to the domination of the elected over the electors, of the mandarines over the mandators, of the delegates over the delegators. Who says organization says oligarchy.¹²⁷

Following the upheaval of the late 1930's there was an institutional retrenchment in both the ILWU and the Tacoma ILA local. The new institutional framework created by the arbitrator's decision ending the 1934 strike provided a new context within which Bridges could institutionalize his own power. The decision specifically exempted the Tacoma local, which continued to operate under its old system of dispatching.¹²⁸ Following what was then relatively common practice within the CIO, Bridges quickly acted to prevent the unauthorized wildcat strikes that had crippled the former ILA. He ordered that workers

¹²⁶ Ibid., 261.

¹²⁷ Michels, 15.

¹²⁸ Kimeldorf, *Insurgent Workers*, 43.

in Hawaii return to work after Local 142 called a strike over working conditions. In San Francisco, he actually provided a replacement gang when an ILWU gang refused to work a ship.¹²⁹

There is no question that the ILWU quickly became far more centralized than the old Pacific Coast ILA District had been. This alienated the Tacoma local, which believed that ILWU membership would soon eliminate local preferences as the primary decision making apparatus of the organization. In many respects, however, Bridges further liberalized the democratic nature of the organization. It was a give and take. In 1937, while arguing for revision of union officer recall rules to provide that a petition of only 15% of members was grounds for a recall election, Bridges argued that, “the present recall provision be liberalized and strengthened, making it easier to immediately suspend or remove any official.”¹³⁰

From a disinterested perspective, it is clear that the transfer of workplace and dispatching administration from the employers to the union following the 1934 strike served, in large part, to re-institutionalize powers previously held by the employer with the union leaders. This is in spite of Bridges’ efforts to liberalize and democratize union policies. Where before, foreman and employer administrators had held absolute power over the jobs of the men, now union hatch bosses and leaders exercised similar power. Throughout the transfer of these responsibilities, however, it was the nature of the men themselves, rather than any sort of institutional check, that provided for the extreme rank-and-file nature of union decision-making. Members were willing, and often eager, to buck not just the decries of the employer, but also those policies of the union leadership that they found undesirable.

In the final analysis, the degree to which rank-and-file preferences molded the policy of the Seattle and Tacoma locals is not easily distinguishable. It is clear that the Seattle local was far more in line with the coastwise program, yet was not unwilling to pursue a

¹²⁹ Kimeldorf, *Insurgent Workers*, 49.

¹³⁰ Nelson, 264.

different policy when it believed its interests dictated. This can be seen with the opposition to the “Bridges Plan” for labor/management cooperation during the Second World War. The local in Tacoma, while clearly guided by Paddy Morris’ leadership, was also very much driven by the rank-and-file. The high number of uncalled wildcat strikes evidences this during the late 1930’s. Thus, it seems, while it is certainly the case that the Tacoma local was guided by its leadership to avoid entanglement with the emerging CIO initiative, it is also clear that such a move could not have been executed without the support of the membership. Similarly, the failure of Seattle longshoremen to reach out to their brothers in Tacoma, while certainly a result of the oligarchic tendencies of leadership adulation within the ILWU, also could not have been supported without rank-and-file support.

The Wobbly/Communist Legacy

One of the great assumptions of similarity between the longshore local in Seattle and that of Tacoma has been the similar history of influence of the International Workers of the World (IWW or Wobblies) and the Communist Party (CP). It is indeed true that each of these organizations played a role, and continues to play a role, in the development of union culture and socio-political attitudes.

Throughout the west, the development of the IWW had its roots in anti-eastern-establishment populism and progressivism. Coming to power around the turn of the last century, these sentiments are widely viewed as a response to the rapid industrialization of the west. Where once farmers and small entrepreneurs had plied their trades, now eastern industrialists, spurred by a growth in rail transportation and international trade with the Far East, came to towns and cities across the west. The result was a sort of cultural clash. Westerners, intrigued by the new consumer products coming to market and a rapid rise in the collective standard of living were at the same time apprehensive about the disruption of the institutionalized farm-to-market cultural hierarchy that then existed.¹³¹

¹³¹ Tyler, 3.

The classic ideology of the Wobbly movement was the advancement of the idea of “one big union.” This ideology, based on a foundation of class struggle, promoted a sort of “hub and spokes” organization, wherein all workers were organized into a sort of collective “hub,” which in turn interacted with dispersed business interests.¹³² In the 1920’s, this was precisely the opposite of the organization of the west-coast longshore industry.

The Wobbly movement was by no means mainstream, however. The impact on the more business style unions of the West Coast (of which both Seattle and Tacoma could be considered a part) was that of a radical minority on a more conservative majority. The Wobblies despised the AFL, the ILA, and all other “collaborators” with industry as the real class enemies.¹³³ Because of this radical nature, however, the Wobblies were most effective in organizing members of closely-knight, socially isolated communities.¹³⁴ This is in accordance with the theory of social isolation that is at the heart of the radical nature of the longshore industry.

One of the most successful organizing drives of the IWW was into the lumber industry.¹³⁵ This is particularly important because lumber and lumber products were the primary commodity shipped through the Port of Tacoma from the 1880’s until the 1950’s.¹³⁶ The Pacific Coast lumber industry of the early 1900’s was particularly volatile. This volatility created chronic over-production punctuated by periodic price crises and industry collapse. The IWW was not all together successful in curbing this tide. Indeed, the lumber industry was more of a model for what was to come in the longshore industry. Where in 1880 the logging industry was a loose amalgamation of small private logging companies working on federal lands, in 1907 the Washington Log Brokerage Company was founded to unify industry in the face of increasingly organized labor.¹³⁷ This

¹³² Ibid., 9.

¹³³ Ibid., 27.

¹³⁴ Tyler, 7.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 7.

¹³⁶ Magden, *The Working Longshoreman*, 52.

¹³⁷ Tyler, 8.

organization can be seen as a sort of equivalent of the Waterfront Employers' Union, formed in the 1920's.

One classic distinguishing ideological characteristic of both the IWW and the CP was skepticism of those not actually involved in labor themselves. Within the IWW movement on the West Coast, there was a deliberate internal stratification of those with "true" proletarian credentials and those "fair-weather friends of labor" and members of the intelligentsia. This was a mark of radicalism. Within more business style unions the use of labor professionals was, even at that time, commonplace.¹³⁸ Where in much later years labor leaders such as Jimmy Hoffa would claim to be in the business of selling labor, professional organizers were shunned within the early Wobbly movements.*

This is not to say that the IWW was not effective in recruiting members. The charismatic organization of the IWW was particularly well equipped for member recruitment, if less focused on winning actual concessions from business. One clear reason is that the Wobblies provided workers with more than the typical AFL-style union. Many of the now-revered labor songs and cultural artifacts of the labor movement have their roots in the Wobbly era. By feeding workers' spiritual needs in addition to promising fulfillment of their economic concerns, the Wobblies were particularly effective in attracting young, transient workers to the cause. In the early years, this would have made longshoremen, as young transients with impeccable proletarian credentials, prime targets for wobbly organization.

Given that there was clearly Wobbly influence and effective organization on Puget Sound, what then was the impact of this cultural legacy on the organization of the Seattle and Tacoma Longshoremens' locals? This question is answered through an examination of the careful timing of organization in the formative years of the early 1900's. By 1907 the Seattle local of the IWW claimed the membership of over 800 people, a large number

¹³⁸ Ibid., 21.

* This is not to argue that unions featuring large communist or Wobbly contingents did not use professional organizers. Indeed, such use was commonplace especially within developing AFL unions. Within the *radical components* of these organizations, however, the use of professionals for recruiting and organization was generally discouraged by member preferences.

for the time, and influence across industry, but primarily in the lumber industry. Tacoma, by comparison, lacked a unique IWW organization, working instead through a branch of the Seattle local. The membership of that organization is unknown, but not assumed to have been very large.¹³⁹ At the time, one of the most hated tactics of the IWW within the labor community was antagonism of fledgling AFL unions on the West Coast. Following a model of “dual unionism,” the IWW organized locals to compete for jurisdiction with already-organized AFL locals. This provoked labor leaders to avoid even-tempered cooperation with the IWW, and led the Wobblies to launch an explosive propaganda campaign against those they deemed to be “misleaders of labor” (i.e., the AFL leadership).¹⁴⁰

At that time the Seattle and Tacoma longshore locals were in vastly different organizational positions vis-à-vis the IWW. The Tacoma local, a member of the Central Trades Council since the late 1800’s, was at the receiving end of IWW antipathy. Already organized in a hiring hall in 1909, and virtually universally organized, the members of the Tacoma local found attacks on their livelihood from enemies in the clothing of allies to be particularly disheartening. Furthermore, as beneficiaries of the lumber industry, the members of the Tacoma local saw the impact of IWW organizing, and the extreme backlash of the Washington Log Brokerage Company. As both sides turned increasingly to violence, the members of the Tacoma local were deradicalized, taking refuge in their relatively good position vis-à-vis the employers. Safely organized and institutionalized in their hiring hall, and with at least a workable relationship with management, the members of the Tacoma local had everything to lose by pursuing a radical agenda in the 1910’s and ‘20’s.

Seattle was in a much different position and there are two competing notions of what occurred in the Seattle experience. One suggests that, largely unorganized at the time, the members of the Seattle longshore industry were more likely to be targets of IWW *organizing* than inter-organizational infighting. Even so, a collapse of IWW membership

¹³⁹ Tyler, 30.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 31.

in 1912, following economic depression that effected union recruiting across the board, left only 68 members of the Seattle chapter of the IWW.¹⁴¹ In contrast, United States Army Intelligence reports that in 1918 “75% of the members...are members of the I.W.W. organization”¹⁴² The Army observed that common Wobbly practice was to infiltrate new organizations to such a degree that they could disrupt business-style union organizations. This is exactly what happened in 1918 when the Seattle local was “taken over” by 2,000 trucker members of the IWW. Outnumbering the contemporarily employed longshoremen these workers managed to re-arrange the Seattle hiring system in their favor, to the great disdain of ILA leadership.¹⁴³ While this sort of ultra-radical anarchic-syndicalism did not take hold amongst the members of the longshore trade, many of the principles of IWW membership did. One in particular, the idea of the “job-delegate” system, is still in practice in the ILWU today.

The job-delegate system relied on the novel idea that *workers* could be both professional organizers and union representatives. This idea took hold most prominently in trades that were characterized by casual labor, such as the longshore industry. Under that model, a worker would work on the docks during the day and in his time off work to organize his brothers and to represent the union in contract and other negotiations with the employers. Clearly based on the IWW skepticism of those lacking “true” proletarian credentials, this model was highly effective. By not relying on professionals to organize or represent the union, members took a far more active role in administration, and gained a much greater sense of ownership in the union.¹⁴⁴

Ultimately, the legacy of the IWW on the longshore locals in Seattle and Tacoma is equally strong in each case, but very different. This is a result of both IWW organizing, and the stage of organizational evolution each union was in when acted upon by IWW radicalism. The ghosts of the IWW legacy could clearly be seen in 1937 when Local 19 broke away from the ILA. Fundamentally, it was a question of who exercised control of

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 30.

¹⁴² Magden, A History of Seattle Waterfront Workers, 1884-1934, 117; from War Department, Intelligence Office, United States Army, Seattle, Washington, File 10110-362, p.50.

¹⁴³ Magden, A History of Seattle Waterfront Workers, 1884-1934, 117.

¹⁴⁴ Tyler, 31.

the union: the Joe Ryan crowd who most certainly did not represent actual workers, or the workers themselves. The Tacoma local would certainly disagree with this interpretation, but the fact remains that of fundamental concern was the question of whether professionals or the workers themselves ought to exercise control of the union.

The impact of the CP on the Seattle and Tacoma locals was much more profound and lasted a great deal longer. Where the IWW had all but evaporated as a political force on the West Coast by 1930, the CP, debatably, retained a great deal of influence into the 1950's, and even to this day. A problem in assessing CP influence is the lack of a clear distinction between those who were *members* of the CP and those who were *Communists* or *Socialists*. The prior, by implication, had some sort of affiliation with the Soviet Union. The latter were either loosely affiliated with some local or international Communist organization or were merely followers of Marxism without real political affiliation. The distinctions become even more intricate when one examines the schisms between the Communists and the Socialists. Some used the terms interchangeably while others viewed them as distinctly juxtaposed or as evidence of animosity between factions within the local Communist movement. One thing is certain, the legacy of Communist influence whether real or imagined, is deeply ingrained on both the Seattle and Tacoma locals.

Socialism, as a political influence on the West Coast, has a long history of disunity. The various factions within the movement were part of the problem, demarcated both by ideology and practical considerations. Many members of the Socialist Party of America (SPA), founded in 1901, subscribed to Marxian ideology while varying greatly in what they thought should be done to implement the philosophy in the United States.

Philosophies toward trade unions as organizations were also split. Vladimir Lenin, leader of the Soviet revolution, generally did not subscribe to trade unionism, believing that trade union consciousness was anti-revolutionary and a reinforcement of exploitative economic relationships.¹⁴⁵ Leaders within the American movement, and Western Europe for that matter, heartily believed in radical unionism as a method of generating ownership

¹⁴⁵ Nikolai Bukharin, Historical Materialism, (New York: International Publishers, 1925) 309-311.

in the means of production. Within Washington State, there was no clear Socialist ideology. Continually escalating infighting led F.J. Dean, leader of the Washington Socialist Labor Party, to famously refer to rival Social Democracy of America members as “damd [*sic*] asses.”¹⁴⁶

Radical socialism in the Pacific Northwest tended toward those who were alienated and isolated. Small farmers and miners were among the most aggressive Socialists.¹⁴⁷ It did, however, spread vigorously through elements of the organized labor movement. At the turn of the century, the AFL did not control member unions on the West Coast the same way it did organizations in the East. Loosely affiliated locals, such as ILA District 38, saw themselves as more of a confederal amalgamation than a unitary labor order.¹⁴⁸ Just as isolated individuals within the labor movement tended toward radicalism, so did the West Coast as a political environment. Relatively isolated, far more dependent on extractive industry than their counterparts in the east, and absent the sort of entrenched oligarchic bureaucracies found in eastern labor establishments, westerners were more open to the call of Socialism.¹⁴⁹

This loose affiliation led to a similar dynamic of anti-AFL Socialism as was present in the progressive movement. Indeed, there was great overlap between those promoting “one big union” and those promoting collective ownership.¹⁵⁰ What resulted was the standoff of the pre-war era discussed previously. Radicals worked to gain jurisdiction from the AFL, engaging in often-bloody battles to organize the unorganized and re-organize those already part of the Federation. While the impact of this radicalism was felt similarly in Seattle and Tacoma the results, again, were quite different.

¹⁴⁶ Carlos Schwantes, Radical Heritage: Labor, Socialism, and Reform in Washington and British Columbia, 1885-1917, (Moscow, ID: University of Idaho Press, 1994) 104.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹⁴⁹ U.S. House Committee on Un-American Activities, Investigation of Communist Activities in the Seattle, Wash., Area. Hearings Before the Committee on Un-American Activities, Eighty-Fourth Congress, First Session, (Washington: GPO, 1955).

¹⁵⁰ Schwantes, 136.

In Tacoma, while it was still likely that members of the ILA would have Socialist leanings, there was far more to lose from overt radicalism. Moreover, a deep history of participation in unionism yielded a better understanding of the give-and-take of labor bargaining. Through active participation one better understands the subtleties of issues, and is less likely to seek a radical (read: black and white) approach to complex problems.

Seattle's relatively unstable union history created a far more fertile opportunity for radical socialism to take hold, though it was not nearly as vertically integrated as many have suggested. Ultimately, the docker on the waterfront is, at the end of the day, concerned about providing food, housing, and life's essentials to himself and his family. It would be incorrect to suggest that these tendencies were preempted by a desire to advance a socialist agenda on the coast. Where radical socialism did occur, it was of a more instrumental nature, excepting the highest levels of the organization.¹⁵¹ Though many a longshoreman undoubtedly subscribed to socialist ideology, leadership influence in the development of the socialist rhetoric of the organization was pivotal. Where extreme socialist organizations in the United States followed their ideology to a point where it distracted from their true goals, it is doubtful that the majority of longshoremen would have followed a socialist program that did not also deliver good contracts.

It is not necessary to go through the entire history of the ILWU, its various expulsions from national organizations for Communist domination, and its leader's several federal indictments on similar grounds. It is enough to suggest that in the continuum of Socialism Seattle's longshore local was far more likely to be of a radical ilk than Tacoma's. Meeting transcripts reveal far greater concern with the issues of the day in this local. At times, international causes, such as support for Greek Socialists or even support for the North Koreans, took precedent over winning and retaining employer concessions. In Tacoma, the focus was much more on winning contracts. It was not that the men in Seattle were inherently more radical, only that the organizations of which they were a part took different paths to similar ends. From 1940 to 1956, the contracts won by the separate organizations, the ILA and the ILWU respectively, were remarkably

¹⁵¹ Jones, 203.

similar.¹⁵² Rhetoric is one thing, but it seems the men of these locals stuck by their leadership because it was good for their wallets.

What then was this Socialist/Communist/Wobbly influence? It seems it was more a symptom than a cause. The seemingly more radical nature of the Seattle local was a direct result of the political conditions and the stage of development at which radicalism acted upon the respective organization. The seemingly more conservative nature of the Tacoma local was a result of the subjectively better social and economic conditions of the Tacoma longshoreman and his desire to maintain that status. This is not a point to be taken lightly, as many have argued, and continue to argue, that Communism was at the heart of the disparity. The evidence, however, suggests that this seeming disparity was more likely a manifestation of differing political and social environments, and the respective tendencies of leadership, another point that cannot be overstated.

The Social Isolation Problem

The examination of the differences between the Seattle and Tacoma locals yields one striking distinction that can be pointed to as an indicator of and contributor to radical tendencies in Seattle. The social isolation of groups has long been hypothesized to contribute to radicalism amongst the membership of isolated groups. A central thesis of this paper is that radicalism in the Seattle local of the ILWU was caused, in large part, by social isolation. This is not a novel theory. Indeed, one could call it obvious, especially considering the volume of literature attributing the overall radicalism of the West Coast longshore industry, relative to the rest of the American industrial labor movement, to the relatively socially isolated nature of the longshore trade there.

The idea of the social isolation hypothesis was best explained by Seymour Martin Lipset in 1960. Lipset argued that social integration, historically and generally, tended to promote de-radicalization, while social isolation tended to support a more radical response.¹⁵³ Longshore work in particular, especially prior to mechanization in the

¹⁵² Jones, 193.

¹⁵³ Lipset, 23.

1960's, was a lonely trade. Longshoremen were viewed both as social pariahs and as a renegade and undesirable part of the labor community. In the early days on the West Coast, they were likely to have come from either the seafaring or timber industries: both of which are the quintessential examples of socially isolated groups given by Lipset.

The social isolation contention is further supported in side-by-side analysis of the Seattle and Tacoma longshore locals. The Seattle local, arguably the more radical, was far more socially isolated. The Tacoma local, instrumental in the formation of the Tacoma Central Trades Council in 1889, was far more embedded in the national and local labor movement. Though not a fan of the Joe Ryan's crowd in the ILA, this local was far more likely to pursue change through internal reform than through a radical departure from history. It was for this reason that in 1922 the employers were not willing to draw a hard line with the union for fear of alienating business interests and the public. Such a concern was simply not present in Seattle.

Recent statistical analyses have drawn the idea of the social isolation hypothesis into question. A 1987 study found "social isolation theories received no support and must be seriously questioned as determinants of leftist radicalism. In fact, the left-leaning turned out to be well integrated into work and family networks."¹⁵⁴ This highlights two different types of social isolation: the isolation of individuals within a group and the isolation of groups, however well internally embedded, from society.

The contention of this paper is that social isolation as a leftist political force not only does not feature work and family isolation, but typically *demand*s a high level of social embeddedness at work and at home. It is not the individual isolation, as Plutzer argues, but rather the *group* isolation that promotes radicalism. This dynamic can be seen at work in the Seattle experience. The contention that longshoremen were individually isolated vagabonds is a mistaken generalization. They were, indeed, very well integrated into family life and many found great networks of friends through the camaraderie of

¹⁵⁴ Eric Plutzer, "Determinants of Leftist Radical Belief in the United States: A Test of Competing Theories," Social Forces, Vol. 65 No. 4, (June, 1987), 1014.

working in often deplorable conditions. It is not isolation at this micro level, but rather the macro isolation of the group that generated fertile ground for a radical response. While it is true that longshoremen working in Seattle were less likely to be part of the union than those working in Tacoma,¹⁵⁵ the total number of longshoremen working outside of the union under normal conditions after the 1920's was so small as to be rather insignificant as a sociological determinant.

Tacomans longshoremen, as a *group*, were far less socially isolated. As herein discussed, they were more acceptable to the rest of the labor community, more involved in AFL hierarchy, and more entrenched in their union-controlled hiring hall. While they shared with Seattle longshoremen the interpersonal solidarity that comes with working in such conditions, they also benefited from more concrete community ties. It is for this reason that the sociological significance of the social isolation hypothesis cannot be understated.

Part V. Findings and Conclusion

In conclusion, there are three simple questions that one must ask to gain an understanding of the Seattle/Tacoma longshore comparison. First, are they different? Do Local 19 and Local 38-97 represent fundamentally different visions of unionism? Second, if so, how? What distinguishes the differences in union philosophy and what identifiers can be used to find other unions that demonstrate similar philosophies or characteristics? Third, why are they that way? What are the factors that *determine* the differences? What is the distinction between a fundamental difference and a symptom? And, what predictors of difference can be taken away from the comparison?

Findings

From this analysis, it is clear that there are fundamental differences between the Seattle longshore local and its Tacoma counterpart. It is not, as many have argued, that Local 19 is the model of syndicalism while Local 38-97 represents the quintessential Hoffa-style business union. The distinction is far subtler, the product of years of slow, fortuitous cultural development. Both unions share a common goal: the provision of wage and

¹⁵⁵ Jones, 190.

benefit privilege for the membership. In Tacoma, this goal is far more on the surface, while Seattle tends to demonstrate a far more social agenda. Nonetheless, the major strikes of the early part of the century, as well as the primary focus of union leadership in both situations seems to be on gaining advantages for the membership. Jones is correct in his observation that the rank-and-file tolerance of the Bridges' socialist philosophy in Seattle was often just that, tolerance, rather than a more substantial commitment to social policy at the expense of wage provisions.

Nonetheless, there seems to be a difference of approach in the early days. By the time the unions were reunified in 1958, these differences seem to have evaporated. Indeed, the ILWU Local 19 of 1958 looks far more like the Local 38-97 of 1937 than it does its previous self. The fundamental difference, in the early years, can be summed up in a single statement: Local 38-97 viewed itself as *part* of an economic system while Local 19 viewed itself as either *apart from* that system, or as a *replacement* for it. Local 38-97 was thus far more willing to work with the employers than was Local 19. It was for this reason that when joint organization was pursued coastwise in the 1920's, it was viewed as unacceptable to the local *business community* to pursue joint organization in Tacoma.

A greater understanding of this difference can be gained from an examination of the second and third questions. There are an infinite number of reasons for the differences between the locals, and just as many manifestations of those differences. Nonetheless, there are five that stand out as primary causes for the disparity:

1. Timing

The importance of timing cannot be understated, as it is the primary determinant of the differences between the two locals. This can be seen clearly through the illustrations above. Local 38-97 was a *fundamentally different union* than Local 19 when any number of social and environmental factors acted upon it. This begins with the union organization itself. Local 38-97 has a much more stable history pre-1956. The union controlled its own hiring hall nearly exclusively

from 1909 until 1956, when it was finally required to accept joint administration as a result of virtual bankruptcy. The 1934 arbitrator decision granting the union control of the hiring hall specifically exempted the Tacoma hiring hall because it was so well established as an institution. The result of this is vitally important in 1937. While the rest of the coast had just come off a radical victory in the 1934 strike, had just gained control of the hiring hall, and was largely unhappy with the ILA; Local 38-97 had neither gained nor lost a great deal.

Even earlier, the respective impact of the Wobbly and Socialist movements on each of the locals was a function of the relative development of the local at the time of greatest influence. Once again, Local 19 was not subject to the same type of anti-AFL antagonism found in Tacoma, but rather was the target of *recruiting*, a far different and less de-radicalizing experience. As such, members of the Seattle local were not under siege from the left, but rather incorporated into it.

At the same time, there was an inverse reaction to the anti-communist red baiting focused on Local 19. Where, attacked from the left, Local 38-97 entrenched in a relatively conservative position; Local 19, attacked from the right, entrenched as a far more leftist organization. This was a direct result of timing, the stage of development of each organization at the time that either a leftist or rightist political environment acted upon it.

The timing issue also affected other key contributors to the differing cultures, including social isolation and demography, as discussed proximately.

2. *Social Isolation*

The Social Isolation problem or hypothesis is a root cause of the most basic nature. As has been previously stated, the idea of social isolation as a root cause of radicalism is relatively controversial. Nevertheless, in Tacoma, where social embeddedness reigned, radicalism was more understated. Seattle longshoremens,

far more socially isolated as a group, were far more likely, again as a group, to practice radical unionism.

Social isolation is a product of timing and chronological evolution. In the history of unionism on Puget Sound, Tacoma was arguably more advanced. Greater evolutionary advancement yielded far greater social connection and a de-radicalizing force de jure. Social and economic embeddedness in Tacoma was manifested in the local's involvement in the founding of the Central Trades Council, the relatively more collaborative relationship with the employer, and the union's presence in the development of the local public port authority.

In Seattle social isolation was not only a function of timing, but also of demography. Tacoma longshoremen were viewed as socially more acceptable, while the local community ostracized the younger members of Local 19. It was also the result of policy. This is a fascinating study in chicken-or-egg analysis. Efforts to eliminate the employer and to implement a new social order on the waterfront had a socially isolating effect. This was a reinforcing social isolating phenomenon, however, rather than a root cause of social isolation. The root of social isolation in Seattle was more grounded in the other factors discussed herein, while social isolation in-and-of-itself was a root cause of *radicalism* in Seattle.

Social Isolation in Seattle was also a function of the nature of dispatching and organization of work. While in Tacoma men worked in relatively stable gangs, the men in Seattle worked in a far more unstable list system. This not only made them less likely to make strong and stable connections with the community (as the casual nature of work was maintained under this system) but also led to a decreased rate of union membership. Here is a dichotomy. Seattle longshoremen were more likely to be radical while less likely to be part of the union. This was the result of group ostracization and the community attitude toward the men of the longshore trade.

As a predictive measure, despite published evidence to the contrary, group social isolation is an effective predictor of leftist radicalism in the labor movement. This can be seen in the Wobbly/Communist history of the Pacific Northwest as well as in the comparison of Seattle and Tacoma. Men who are socially isolated, no matter how well embedded in work and family life, are more likely to tend toward radicalism as an instrument for advancing economic goals. In light of the evidence, however, the true value of this predictor is in evaluating *potential* for radicalism rather than *likelihood* of a radical turn. Men and women in socially isolated work groups, such as longshoremen in Seattle, loggers, or seamen, are fertile ground for the development of leftist radical sentiment, though the actual development of radicalism is case dependent.

3. *Demography*

Demography with respect to the Seattle/Tacoma comparison is primarily important with respect to the particular age demographics of each work force and is also a function of timing and evolution. As discussed previously, the workforce in Tacoma was much older, as a general rule, than the workforce in Seattle. This was a direct result of the stability of the labor organization in Tacoma and its institutionalization in the union-controlled hiring hall.

Men in Tacoma, organized into gangs and housed in the Hall, were more sure of their continued employment. Though work as a whole was less stable, the result of the bulk cargo and commodity nature of Tacoma's port traffic in contrast to the general cargo moving through Seattle, the men were more guaranteed of at least equal wages. Under the shape-up system, and then under Frank Foisie's hiring hall list system, the men were still worked at the whim of the employer. This allowed the employer to call for a younger, abler, but less socially embedded workforce.

As the union movement collapsed in the 1920's, too, men in most of the West Coast ports left union registration lists. In Tacoma most continued to be listed. This contributed to the demographic differences. When unionism was reorganized prior to the 1934 strike most locals were functionally entirely new. They called upon the best and ablest workers, most of whom were previous casuals. In Tacoma, however, the same men continued to hold their union memberships through the 1920's. Thus, they were both more likely to be veteran union members and simply older.

4. Leadership

One factor that cannot be escaped is the importance of specific circumstances and respective personalities. This is not a dynamic of particular predictive or extrapolative value, but is nevertheless a key determinant of the development of different attitudes in Seattle and Tacoma, and a significant suggestion of this analysis. In the Seattle/Tacoma comparison there is no more important a specific circumstance than the relationship between the leadership of Local 38-97 and ILWU International President Harry Bridges.

Without overstating the case, the men of Local 38-97 did not like Harry Bridges. They thought he was irresponsible in undermining the Pacific Maritime Federation. They heartily resented his effort to prevent the seating of Tacoma's delegates to that organization, and they were opposed to Bridges' deconstruction of the nation-wide unification under the ILA and AFL, which 38-97 believed was vital for labor power.

Bridges, in response, believed, or at least articulated, that Local 38-97 was a tool of ILA leader Joe Ryan. He accused them of being enemies of the labor movement, and much of his rhetoric echoed the anti-AFL Wobbly rhetoric of the 1920's. This was in spite of Local 38-97's expressed support for the idea of the

industrial organization advanced by the CIO, and largely in response to 38-97's refusal to support affiliation with that organization in its split from the AFL.

The personal factor, and the degree to which it played a role in this development, is important but difficult to analyze. Despite its import, analysis of personal relationships is not of great scholarly prognostic value because it cannot be applied to any but a single situation in space, time, and circumstances.

Nonetheless, it would not be right to credit personal enmity for the full outcome of the situation. Many point to the fact that the unions were reunified in 1958 as evidence that once personal animosity had faded the organizations came back together. This ignores the fact that reunification in 1958 was forced by the dire economic circumstances at the Port of Tacoma. In the end, while leadership preferences may have played a role in the development of the situation, such preferences could not have been pursued as policy within these organizations without broad rank-and-file support.

5. *The 1934 Strike*

Kimeldorf is correct in his analysis that the 1934 strike was pivotal in the development of radicalism the ILWU. It is similarly important in the development of the rift between the Seattle and Tacoma locals and the emergence of Harry Bridges as the charismatic leader of the ILWU. It was the extreme violence of the strike that forged lasting relationships and admiration. Men who came through the 1934 strike were inevitably drawn to Harry Bridges and were willing to follow him for decades to come.

In Tacoma there had simply not been as much at stake during the strike. Though the outcome reversed years of devolution in wages and work rules, the Tacoma local already had a hiring hall and had not suffered under the same joint organization experience elsewhere on the coast. The strike in Tacoma was also not nearly as violent. The killing of longshoremen at the Standard Oil Depot and

the battle on Pier 41 in Seattle shaped the outlook of both the local leaders and the rank-and-file. Moreover, the violence in Seattle contributed greatly to an alienation of business interests, leaving important relationships in Tacoma largely intact.

The state action factor in the violent strike was also an important radicalizing force. For perhaps the first time longshoremen looked at themselves not as working members of the middle class but rather as a conscious target of the capitalist forces. They developed the sort of class-consciousness that would lead to a far more socially conscious labor organization.

Most important, the members of each organization institutionalized their experiences in the '34 strike by sharing their attitudes with later members. One cannot underestimate the power of the sort of "this is how we do it" mentoring of older members to newer ones. As a result, many of the attitudes developed within the Seattle and Tacoma locals during the strike survive were passed down from one generation of worker to the next. These ideas of social or bread-and-butter focus, and radical or relatively conservative approach, form the cultural and political fabric of each local.

Conclusion

It is impossible to end without acknowledging the individuals and personalities responsible for the development of unionism on Puget Sound. Such an analysis as this tends to reduce the experiences of many to dry statistics, dates, and sociological phenomena. It is important to remember that the men working in the longshore trade on the Sound, whether from Seattle or Tacoma, transformed an industry from a casual one to one of the highest-paid wage industries in the region. The men who worked through the 1934 strike, those who played a role in the 1937 separation of the AFL and CIO, ILA and

ILWU, and disillusion of the Pacific Maritime Federation forever shaped not only the waterfront but also the very nature of American radical unionism.

It is also important to acknowledge that both of the locals analyzed in this study are of a relatively far-left, progressive nature. While Local 38-97 of Tacoma is often portrayed as the more conservative of the two unions, it is a *relative* comparison. In contrast to many other labor organizations in the country, such as the ILA proper or the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, Local 38-97 is a far-left union. The value of the comparison, however, is in analyzing the dynamics that contribute the development of *differences* rather than similarities, of which there are far more of the latter than the prior.

The findings of this analysis are far less than straightforward. On Puget Sound today there are two unions, ILWU Local 23 of Tacoma and ILWU Local 19 of Seattle, with far different histories. Both are radical in their own right, but at a critical juncture of development in the early part of the century each chose a different path of development. Though they may have ended up in the same place and that place may be more conservative than perhaps either could have predicted in 1934, the path they took to their current status is profound. Also profound is the current status of the ILWU, controlling over 7% of the gross domestic product in the import/export industry, and employing thousands of the most well-paid wage earners on the coast. That legacy is the direct result of the development, history, and radicalism described in this analysis.

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