

CHAPTER XI

TECHNOLOGY AND CHANGE ON THE TACOMA WATERFRONT

Throughout their long history Tacoma longshoremen have generally refrained from participating in national protest movements. The waterfront workers were not prominent in either the Populist or Progressive crusades. Nor were they involved in the anti-imperialist campaign during the War of 1898. The men were not active in the pacifist movement during World War I, nor did they take a stand when President Wilson sent troops into Siberia in 1919. The Japanese invasion of Manchuria and eastern China in the 1930s did not evoke a response from Local 38-97 until June 23, 1939.

Tacoma longshoremen were busy that afternoon, working a dozen ships anchored in the harbor. One of the vessels was the *Bonnington Court*, a British freighter bound for Japan. The longshoremen were almost finished loading flour, logs, and lumber on the *Bonnington*. Suddenly, twenty-five Chinese men, women, and children began picketing on the railroad tracks beside the ship. The young people carried signs "STOP SCRAP IRON FROM TACOMA." "UNCLE SAM WANTS PEACE IN CHINA." "WHY BOMBS TO JAPAN?" "BANDAGES TO CHINA." "EACH SHIPLOAD MEANS MORE WAR!" Worried about hitting the protestors, rail engineers stopped moving nine carloads of scrap metal from the Milwaukee siding to shipside. The pickets remained by the rails throughout the night. They built a bonfire in the yard next to the tracks where the iron-laden freight cars stood. As the longshoremen gangs came off the *Bonnington* from the hoot owl shift, they talked with the Chinese. The working men were impressed with the quiet determination demonstrated by the pickets. They told the marchers they would not return to load the scrap iron.¹

The next day a reporter asked Local 38-97 Business Agent Steven Reay if the longshoremen had quit working the *Bonnington*. Reay replied, "There will be no orders here. We don't tell the men what to do. It's up to them — individually." At 8:00 a.m. not one longshoreman showed up to work the scrap iron. The *Bonnington* moved to Seattle where longshoremen also refused to load the ship. The freight forwarder obtained an injunction against Chinese pickets.² Protestors disregarded the restraining order and were arrested. Also under court order, Seattle longshoremen turned to and finished the *Bonnington* on July 3. The next day she sailed for Japan.³

The *Bonnington* incident occurred nine weeks before Germany invaded Poland, the direct cause of World War II. During the first two years of the war



When Tacoma longshoremen honored this picket line June 24, 1939, and refused to load the scrap iron, the *Bonnington Court* moved to Seattle, where the courts ordered the ILWU to load the cargo.
(Tacoma News Tribune, Tacoma Public Library)

Tacoma tonnage dropped significantly: from 4,179,611 tons in 1939 to 2,626,876 in 1940.⁴ Suddenly, during July 1940 the cargo trade boomed. The Waterfront Employers Association pressured Local 38-97 to add forty-six permit men.⁵ By late fall 1941, foreign trade stagnated again. The United States Maritime Commission had directed most overseas cargos to be funneled through San Francisco.⁶ New permit men languished on the benches in the Tacoma hiring hall.⁷ When war came to America on December 7, 1941, Local 38-97 members did their bit for the cause. Five days after Pearl Harbor, the entire membership of the union volunteered to guard the waterfront for the Tacoma Citizens' Defense Committee. However, cargo work on the piers was deemed essential. The government assigned coast guardsmen to patrol the barricades erected at key points on the perimeter of the port.⁸ War caused the immediate suspension of management-labor arguments on the Tacoma waterfront. Nationally, the leaders of industry and the AFL and CIO pledged on December 17 there would be no lockouts or strikes for the duration. Similar to World War I's National Adjustment Commission, a National War Labor Board was created to resolve disputes between management and labor.⁹

Wartime proved to be "feast or famine" years for Tacoma waterfront workers. During the first six months of 1942 docks were deserted on Commencement Bay, necessitating an exodus of registered and permit men to the armed forces and the shipyards. Those who left the front were instructed to get a withdrawal card and notify the dispatcher five days before they returned to work. By July 1942, the pendulum had swung in the opposite direction. The shortage of longshoremen was so severe, Local 38-97 took drastic action. The membership placed a notice in the *Labor Advocate* calling on all registered longshoremen to return to the hiring hall because "Vital war cargoes have been delayed as a result of manpower shortage." If the absent stevedores did not return by November 15, they would be removed from the registration list.¹⁰ By March 1943, a surplus of longshoremen existed on the front. This time Seattle had garnered most of Puget Sound's share of the navy and army business. The Tacoma Chamber of Commerce, Port of Tacoma, and Local 38-97 sent a united protest to Washington, D. C. about the slight.¹¹ The situation did not improve. By March 1944, only half of Local 38-97's 400 members earned a fair week's wages.¹²

Part of the problem was the new machines appearing on Port of Tacoma docks. The United States armed forces spent liberally on the latest equipment to speed up the loading of cargo. Forklifts replaced jitneys as the primary machines to move cargo from warehouses to docks. The "bulls" made possible the widespread use of pallet boards. Sacks of flour, which had moved previously by conveyor belt from storage to ship's hold, were now stacked by the ton on pallet boards. Pallets were taken by forklift to shipside, placed in a sling, and lifted aboard by ship's gear or dockside crane. Each year larger cranes appeared on the waterfront. Every time a new crane was installed, the men knew the loads would be heavier.¹³

Ship design also changed. Although most marine technology was dedicated to warship construction, freighters were modified to meet the cargo needs of the war effort. No longer did ships have separate decks. There was one massive hold. Instead of loading logs one-by-one the men now hooked large bundles of lumber. The new freighters made the longshoremen's job both easier and safer. His major responsibilities became driving the forklifts, hooking, and releasing slings. The men quickly realized that the new methods of handling bulky cargo was both a blessing and a curse. There was less manual labor, but the new technology reduced the number of men needed. The standard gang size dropped from thirteen to eight men.

When the war ended in 1945, the Port of Tacoma and Local 38-97 entered an era of great uncertainty. International, intercoastal, and coastwise maritime trade plummeted below the 1930 tonnage level in 1948.¹⁴ Longshoremen found themselves with little work. In particular, the demand for wood products went into a steep decline.¹⁵ Many Tacoma dock workers moved where new job possibilities existed. For those who stayed on the waterfront, the removal of wage and price controls after the war let loose inflation, seriously affecting the value of take-home pay. It seemed to the men that they were reliving their post-World War I experiences.¹⁶

The struggle to keep wages even with the rising cost of living plagued the nation. There were 4,630 strikes in the United States, the greatest number in a single year in American history. The American public reacted to the wave of strikes by electing anti-labor Senators and Congressmen. The Eightieth Congress enacted the Taft-Hartley Bill over President Truman's veto during June 1947. This Labor-Management Relations Act banned the closed shop except in the construction and maritime industries. The new law also opened the door for states to enact right-to-work laws, and gave the President power to stop strikes for an eighty-day cooling-off period. Taft-Hartley also required all labor officials to sign anti-Communist affidavits. Local 38-97 officers promptly submitted the required paperwork.¹⁷

Among unions that struck in 1946 was the ILWU. During this fight with employers, the ILWU organized marine cooks and stewards, marine engineers, ferryboatmen, ships' radio operators, and East Coast sailors into the Committee for Maritime Unity. The longshoremen emerged from the fifty-two-day strike with pay increased from \$1.15 to \$1.52 an hour.¹⁸ Tacoma, Anacortes, and Port Angeles signed a contract before the ILWU returned to work, but with a proviso. If the ILWU received a better agreement, the ILA contract could be reopened.¹⁹ Seattle ILWU Local 19 passed a resolution condemning Tacoma's phoney contract. Whatever thaw that had started between the West Coast ILA and the ILWU during the war ceased as the two longshore unions returned to peacetime feuding.²⁰

In 1948, the ILWU struck again for higher wages. This time Puget Sound ILWU locals made a determined effort to get Tacoma to join the strike. Reminiscent of the eve of the 1919 General Strike, a Seattle delegation came to Tacoma to ask Local 38-97 to shut down the port. This time the Tacoma men turned down the ILWU.²¹ The strikers persisted. Throughout the 95-day work stoppage, Seattle longshoremen came alongside Tacoma docks in rowboats. The ILWU men carried banners and picket signs urging ILA members to join their union brothers. ILWU longshoremen even went airborne. A plane pulling strike banners passed over vessels being worked by ILA men. The copilot leaned out a window with a loudspeaker calling for Tacomans to support the strike. ILWU efforts failed. Tacoma refused to join the ILWU strike, preferring to wait for the settlement. The pattern had been established that Tacoma would receive the same wages as the ILWU.²²

Nonetheless, the Tacoma local's position was not as ideal as it appeared on the surface. The Port of Tacoma and private piers were in the midst of an economic recession. Longshore work became scarce. Tacoma ILA members found it increasingly necessary to search for work in other ports. Travel was restricted because ILWU ports were off limits. The men could work at Port Angeles and Anacortes in Washington State and a few Alaskan ports. Since all three ILA ports suffered from a lack of business, traveling ceased to be a viable option. During 1949 Local 38-97 adopted a policy of encouraging members to take jobs in other industries.²³

The Road to Reunion

The long-standing tension between the Tacoma ILA and the West Coast ILWU eased during the summer of 1952. Tacoma longshoremen Carl Engels, Ray Feely, Edwin M. Peterson, Lee Reichl, and Barney Rucker met with a Seattle ILWU Local 19 committee to work out a program for the interchange of work gangs between ILWU and ILA ports. Seattle longshoremen wanted ILA workers to see firsthand that ILWU men were not devils. Local 19 would not cast a magic spell to turn anyone into an instant Communist. On July 7, gangs of Tacoma longshoremen traveled to Seattle and other ILWU ports on Puget Sound. Lee Reichl recalled the situation:

Once we had the interchange of gangs, then we could exchange information, and some of those dyed-in-the-wool AF of L men, of course, they didn't actually want this. And I wouldn't say they threw too many roadblocks in there, but they kind of ridiculed some of these other ports. It was not the most difficult thing to sell to Tacoma because Tacoma wasn't doing that much work. It wasn't too prosperous. Now, the first time that we traveled, I made in six month's time, I made a thousand dollars. I don't know what it was for the whole year, but that was a lot of money for half a year.²⁴



The new ILA Local 38-97 hall at 1710 Market Street was dedicated May 7, 1952, with 2,000 people present. On the walls are pictures of ships painted by Fred Zinn. (ILWU Local 23 archives)

A month after the travel program with the ILWU had been in operation, Local 38-97 learned that the International Longshoremen's Association had been expelled from the AFL for corruption and gangsterism. It was not a

surprise. For years the AFL national headquarters, as well as federal and state government officials, had been investigating eastern ILA locals. The agencies found the charges true. The ILA joined the ILWU as a pariah. In 1950, the ILWU and ten other unions had been expelled from the CIO for being Communist dominated.

A new longshoremen's international, the ILA-AFL, was quickly formed by Great Lakes, Alaska, and Pacific Northwest locals who repudiated the Ryan administration. Led by Ed Slaughter of Duluth, Minnesota, this tiny union established headquarters in St. Louis and tried to attract additional locals with the slogan, "American Unionism." Because of confusion with the old ILA, the new AFL affiliate changed its name to the International Brotherhood of Longshoremen (IBL).²⁵ Local 38-97 became a member of the IBL-AFL, and maintained its travel arrangement with the ILWU. Work continued to be scarce. Local 38-97 members had to rely more and more on travel to make enough money to provide for the necessities of life. The time came during December 1953 that the local asked employers to pay half the expenses of the hiring hall. It was a painful concession for the longshoremen.²⁶ Two years elapsed before negotiations were completed on the joint hiring hall. Local 38-97 problems mounted. After a year of traveling, the ILWU demanded that Tacoma take a vote on joining the ILWU. The ILWU lost the election. Travel ended. Attendance at the monthly Tacoma IBL meetings went into a steady decline. A jackpot — you must be present to win — was tried and failed. A committee was established to study the attendance problem, but no report was issued. Even the Executive Board could not get quorums to attend its meetings.²⁷

The situation faced by the Tacoma local made possible a second look at the ILWU. The old core pro-ILWU men, Tanner, Jensen, and Sellers, gradually gained supporters. The lack of work and losing travel produced skepticism among the younger members who saw dock workers in other ports working regularly and making a living wage. On the piers at lunch, affiliation with the ILWU became the major topic.²⁸

The official debate began on November 1, 1955, when a motion was introduced to vote on whether or not to drop affiliation with the IBL. The motion lost, but the men ordered the motion reconsidered at a compulsory meeting to be held in December.²⁹ The December meeting approved the idea of discussing IBL or ILWU affiliation. March 2 was set as the date for resolving the affiliation question. The local delayed the vote in order to see if the merger of the AFL and CIO would have any effect upon the Tacoma situation.³⁰ On March 2 Local 38-97 voted "by a safe margin" to stay with the IBL. Yet the drive to get the Tacoma local into the ILWU was only temporarily sidetracked.³¹

In addition to the dyed-in-the-wool IBL advocates and the pro-ILWU men in the Tacoma local, a third group began to recommend total independence. In two anonymous "Open Letters" issued during March and April 1956, independents argued for leaving the IBL, but not affiliating with the ILWU. Tacoma had never fared as well as the stronger and larger ILWU in getting fringe benefits. The writers charged that the division between Tacoma and the rest

of the West Coast longshoremen was being kept alive by shipowners and pie-cards. The "Open Letters" ended with appeals to the membership to support independence from both the IBL and ILWU.³² Phil Lelli remembered his thoughts on the affiliation question:

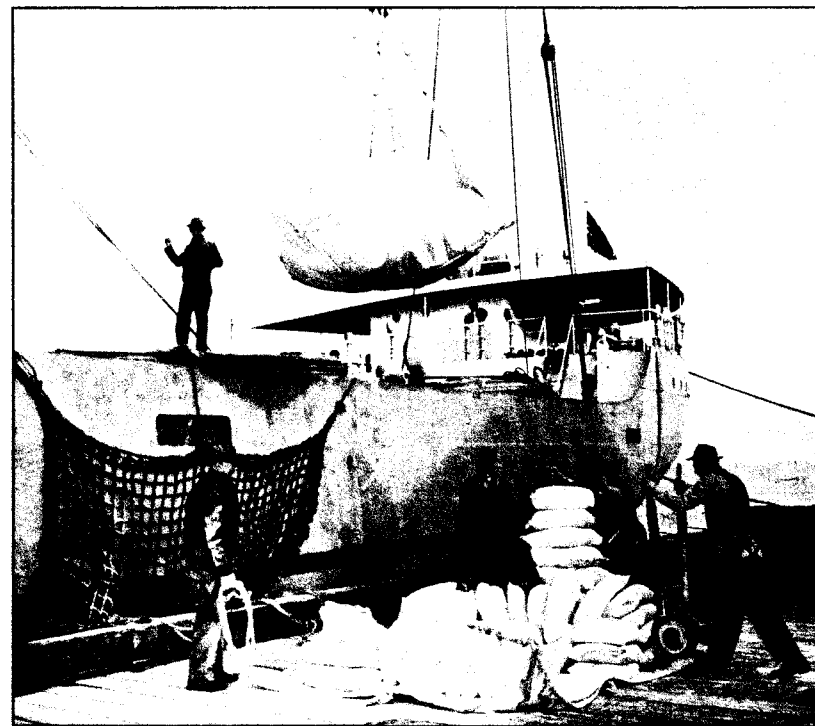
I wanted the local in Tacoma to have the best of both worlds, and the best of both worlds was to remain independent, but make some type of alliance or agreement with the ILWU which would allow us to travel to all the rest of these locals and yet make our own decisions about what we were going to do. I now would perceive that as not being right, but at the time that's the way I felt.³³

During the summer of 1956, the ILWU issued another invitation to Tacoma to attend negotiating sessions on a new contract. Tacoma accepted and attended the negotiation sessions. After listening to a report by the union negotiators, Tacoma longshoremen voted in November 1956 to go along if the ILWU voted to strike.³⁴ Obviously, the IBL hold on Tacoma had substantially weakened. On August 6, 1957, Tacoma longshoremen voted in favor of a motion to withhold per capita tax from the IBL, a step guaranteed to get their charter revoked.³⁵ Within six months, Tacoma Local 38-97 was kicked out of the IBL. Shortly thereafter, the ILWU invited Tacoma longshoremen to caucus on combining the Tacoma local's pension and welfare programs with the ILWU. The invitation was accepted. Paper work was set in motion to merge the two benefit systems. On December 10, 1957, by a vote of 262 to 35, Tacoma men decided to vote again on joining the ILWU.³⁶ Although the official tally on affiliation with the ILWU has been lost, a "substantial majority" of the members agreed to ask the ILWU for a charter.³⁷ On January 7, 1958, ILWU Vice President Germain Bulcke installed the charter of Tacoma Local 23. Among the guests were eighty Seattle Local 19 members and forty Tacoma retirees.³⁸

The effect of the change from IBL to ILWU was immediate. ILWU Local 23 member Wardell Canada recalled the moment:

I remember distinctly when we got into the ILWU. I think we had thirty-one or thirty-two gangs, twelve-man gangs, and the very first day after we got into the ILWU, all the gangs were out but one. All going different ways, traveling.³⁹

Thus ended Tacoma's twenty-one years of separation from the main West Coast longshore union. The propaganda wars of the 1930s and 1940s between Bridges and ILA longshoremen had given way to peaceful coexistence in the 1950s. Moreover relations between the ILWU and management had been transformed after the 1948 strike. The shipping lines and stevedore bosses had adopted a new name, Pacific Maritime Association, and a new style of negotiating. The highpoint of ILWU-PMA cooperation occurred during January 1961, when J. Paul St. Sure of the PMA and Harry Bridges of the ILWU signed an agreement on Mechanization and Modernization (M&M) of the California, Oregon, and Washington waterfronts.⁴⁰



Fred Schroeder's gang loading flour with a balloon sling at the Sperry dock, 1961.

(Richards photo, ILWU Local 23 archives)

The Mechanization and Modernization Agreement

The ILWU-PMA Mechanization and Modernization contract provided that shipowners and stevedoring contractors would be free of restrictions on the introduction of labor-saving devices in exchange for no layoffs of fully registered longshoremen. Furthermore, the men would be guaranteed a thirty-five hour work week or the equivalent in pay. M&M also included an early retirement incentive for longshoremen with twenty-five years' service and aged sixty-two, or a cashout of \$7,920 if the worker was sixty-five years old. To cover the costs of early retirement and payout bonuses, a \$27.5 million fund was established by the shipping industry.⁴¹

The Mechanization and Modernization Agreement between the ILWU and the PMA had been several years in the making. Informal discussions started in 1956 and official bargaining in 1960. After considerable discussion, the men ratified the contract, 7,882 to 1,695, on June 30, 1961. The impetus behind the contract was the arrival on the West Coast waterfront of new equipment that radically altered the traditional methods of loading and discharging cargo. Bulk ships allowed sugar, wheat, ore, and other loose, voluminous commodities to

be stowed and unloaded directly to and from holding areas by means of large hoses. Men no longer carried sacks, hoisted slings, or stacked tiers in the hold. One man was necessary to watch over the operation at each end, and a small clean-up crew to blow out corners when the hold was almost empty.⁴²

Containers were even more innovative. Except for odd-size cargos such as logs, tractors, and steel beams, freight could be stuffed inside a 20- or 40-foot container at the point of manufacture or at a distribution warehouse. Once the container arrived at the pier, it could be lifted off the truck by a straddle carrier positioned directly below a mammoth crane. The crane lifted the container into the hold or onto the deck of a ship. All the manpower needed was one man to drive the straddle carrier, two men to lash the container to the crane, one man to operate the crane, and two men to unlash the box once it was aboard ship. An average container held twenty tons and could be loaded aboard ship in five minutes. A standard container ship in the 1960s carried 296 boxes below and 140 on the deck. The turn-around time for a container ship averaged forty hours, while the old style of loading a conventional freighter took 124 hours.

Many of these automated changes were still rare on the Tacoma waterfront in 1961, but they were spreading rapidly across the nation. Inevitably, the new inventions would be commonplace on Commencement Bay. ILWU leadership feared that if the union did not compromise on mechanization, shipowners would impose automation and manning reductions regardless of union concerns.

On the surface M&M looked like a very good deal, but Tacomans were skeptical. The men were concerned about the provisions in M&M that freed employers of restrictions on the introduction of more machines, "mechanization," and the introduction of new work rules, "modernization," designed to achieve greater efficiency. Employers would control the size of loads, limited only by safety and onerous conditions. Critics in Local 23 pointed out that there were no controls over speedup. And if the men held a work stoppage, they were penalized by the Retirement Fund. George Ginnis, who was ILWU Local 23 Business Agent at the time, described the coming of M&M to Tacoma:

They attempted speedups, although it was written in the contract — less manning with no speedup — but they attempted it, sure. That's the nature of the beast. We never did have too much trouble. Tacoma's always been pretty consistent on production anyway. A man can only do so much, you know. They do a fair job. I don't think they speeded up. When I became involved they tried it. We'd get some extra people to help. That's how we alleviated speedups.⁴³

A sizeable number of the ILWU membership remained openly hostile after the agreement went into effect. Waterfront workers one step away from being A Men were particularly upset.⁴⁴ B Men had to do the most onerous work, usually in the hold with the heaviest break bulk cargo. A longshoremen took the skilled jobs on the decks and piers. Only the As received the 35-hour work guarantee. B Men were supported by those who believed Harry Bridges had sold out to the PMA. This anti-Bridges faction thought the old way of loading and discharging cargo should have been fought for rather than simply given away. The coalition

opposing M&M lost. The retirement incentive to longshoremen, whose average age was fifty, was the decisive factor. The greatest change in the history of West Coast labor relations had been accomplished without a strike.

Early Technology and the Tacoma Waterfront

Down to 1920, the Tacoma longshore work force moved most of the general cargo in a rope or wire sling attached to a hook. In that year 1,100 Tacoma longshoremen, hand truckers, and warehousemen handled 2,705,217 tons of foreign and domestic merchandise.⁴⁵ When the first sixty-ton Colby hammer-head was installed in 1921 on Pier 1, Tacoma longshoreman Ed Kloss climbed into the cab and experimented until he had the "hang" of driving the behemoth. Since the crane could hoist far more than the sling, stevedore bosses introduced heavy loads. Warehousemen piled as much freight as they could on a board eighteen inches wide and seven feet long. The board usually sat on a four-wheel flat car. An auto jitney pulled a series of the cars to shipside. Here a dock gang attached the hook. In the hold eight men guided the load onto a cart that was pushed to the place where the cargo was hand stowed.⁴⁶ In 1929, 600 Tacoma longshoremen moved 6,405,759 tons of cargo.⁴⁷ The crane and the sling board had reduced the number of two-wheel hand truckers to 100.⁴⁸

During World War II, the U. S. Army conceived unitized cargo packaging. The military in the South Pacific created floating warehouses on ships. In the holds of the ships were six-foot by four-foot wooden boxes filled with construction materials, clothing, and food supplies. Each container could be hoisted by ship's gear to landing craft for delivery to the beachhead. In March 1950 Alaska Steamship Company applied the unit load to northland cargo. Alaska Steam converted the *Susitna* to hold eight-foot by twelve foot crib boxes placed on cargo boards. To keep cribs in place, engineers installed a metal framework in the hold. During the 1960s Seattle longshoremen usually stowed or unloaded six containers an hour.⁴⁹

In 1951 Coaly Watson loaded out of Seattle the first container on a van body for Alaska Freight Line. In Tacoma, Alaska Freight began stowing military materiel in semi-trailers that were placed on barges bound for Alaska. At its destination, a shoreside crane lifted the semi from the ship to the dock. A truck backed up to the trailer, hooked up, and drove off. Gradually, Alaska Freight adapted the semi-trailer concept to civilian cargo.⁵⁰

The new technology did not cause an immediate revolution in port facilities. Finger piers and shed-style warehouses continued to dominate cargo handling up and down the coast in the 1950s. It was not until E. L. "Roy" Perry became general manager of the Port of Tacoma on July 1, 1964, that Tacoma became involved in the new technologies. Perry recognized the key to Port prosperity lay in dredging and widening the Hylebos and Blair Waterways to attract the new generation of deep-water freighters. At the same time Perry pushed for speedy construction of a terminal to increase the number of berthing spaces. During the mid-1960s the Pierce County Terminal evolved into a complex of berths, ware-

houses, and areas designed to handle specialized cargo, such as foreign automobiles and logs. Under Perry's direction, plans were drawn for the creation of an intermodal yard to serve ships, railroad companies, and trucking lines. In the meantime, warehouses and piers capable of handling container cargo were added at Terminals 4 and 7.⁵¹ Tonnage handled jumped from 952,000 tons in 1964 to nearly 3,500,000 tons in 1973.⁵²

Roy Perry also brought to the Port a new era in labor-management relations. When Perry walked into his office the first day on the job, no longshoremen welcomed him. As an old-timer observed, the last time a waterfront worker had been in the Port's main office probably occurred on April 18, 1924, the day Ed Kloss resigned as Port Commissioner. "Before Roy Perry came in," recalled George Ginnis, "you couldn't talk to the guys who ran the Port. In fact, you weren't even welcome in their areas, in their offices, or anything."⁵³ Perry overcame longshore alienation by involving the men in planning and decision-making. Perry's personal touch built confidence and trust. Carl Engels, Local 23 Business Agent in 1964, remembered:

We used to meet once a month with him and all the stevedore companies. We had the meetings up at the Port Industrial dock and we'd talk over the problems, what we could do to improve, and by God, we made her go ... Once in a while he'd put in the paper what a great job the longshoremen were doing, you know. Hell, it was the only thing we ever saw in the paper except that some longshoreman got picked up for being drunk or getting a divorce. That does wonders, you know. You can catch a lot of bees with honey. You can't catch any with vinegar. None.⁵⁴



Unloading bales of rubber from Malaysia at the Port of Tacoma Pier 2, 1970s. (Richards photo, ILWU Local 23 archives)

During Perry's tenure as Executive Director, Local 23 membership elected officers who believed in cooperating with Port staff. Philip Lelli, who was often president of the local from 1966 to 1984, thought that "if you helped the Port of Tacoma grow, you naturally helped the union." Longshore and Port representatives travelled around the country studying new methods of handling bulk cargo. In the case of rubber, Tacoma longshoremen learned how to increase their productivity level from eleven tons to twenty-four tons an hour. The men reduced the time to move rubber from ship to railhead from thirty days to ten.⁵⁵

While an era of good feeling prevailed on the Tacoma waterfront, other ILWU locals found it difficult to adjust to mechanization. Ironically, the container both promoted and threatened jobs. On the one hand, the twenty-ton boxes required skilled workers operating sophisticated machinery. On the other hand, cranes and containers reduced the need for unskilled dock workers. The time-honored sling and hook passed from the scene into history. Rank-and-file dissatisfaction over mechanization ran deep enough to cause 16,000 ILWU men to walk out of twenty-four ports on July 1, 1971.⁵⁶

The 1971 Strike

Although negotiations had started during January 1971, by the July deadline agreement had been reached on only one item. The employers consented to a joint request to the federal government to exempt the ILWU from President Nixon's wage freeze. Along with the issues of wages and benefits, the ILWU sought to gain from the strike a higher guaranteed wage for members. The union also wanted exclusive jurisdiction over stuffing and unstuffing containers. However, the Teamsters' Union also claimed the right to fill containers. The bosses declared that the ILWU should settle the stuffing issue with the Teamsters. Employers pressed for a clause in the contract to permit companies to hire steady men on a permanent basis. According to the PMA, the hiring hall could not provide enough trained men on a daily basis.⁵⁷

The ILWU argued that containerization had already reduced the number of men loading and discharging a ship. If the ILWU lost stuffing, there would be even fewer jobs. Moreover, management demand for steady employees undercut the eighty-five-year-old principle of the hiring hall, that is, that all union members rotated jobs so that earnings would be equal.⁵⁸

At one point in the long strike, Frank Fitzsimmons, president of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters, met with Harry Bridges. Fitzsimmons offered to arbitrate the container stuffing issue, but Bridges declined.⁵⁹ Labeling the strike a danger to national welfare, President Nixon invoked the Taft-Hartley Act. This law forced longshoremen back to work after being out over three months.⁶⁰ At the end of the eighty-day cooling-off period, the strike resumed with another walkout. By that time, longshoremen were experiencing severe economic hardship. Tacoma waterfront workers survived by handling strike-exempt military cargos and by moving merchandise from warehouses to railroad cars or trucks. Roy Perry disregarded PMA requests to cut longshore jobs at the Port. Local 23 rotated the Port work among the membership so that the men had a grubstake.⁶¹

After 134 days on strike, PMA and the ILWU announced a settlement during February 1972. Longshore pay increased 72 cents an hour. PMA guaranteed workweeks of thirty-six hours for A men and eighteen hours for B longshoremen. A tax of \$1.00 was levied on each container stuffed or unstuffed by nonlongshore labor within a fifty-mile radius of a port. Employers were allowed to request steady men on a company-by-company, port-by-port, basis with local union approval.⁶²

In the final analysis, the only immediate gain the strike produced for longshoremen was the wage increase, and even that turned out to be a partial victory. The president's Pay Board, of which Teamster President Fitzsimmons was a member, denied the full wage raise. The container tax did not lead to more stuffing jobs for the ILWU. And longshoremen would not know how much impact the steady-man settlement would have until employers exercised their option. Harry Bridges expressed unhappiness with the pay board. The ILWU president threatened to lead the men out again, but he did not. Tacoma longshoremen accepted the results of the strike stoically. The dramatic defeat of 1916, and the climatic victory of 1934, marked highpoints not to be relived by the younger generation.⁶³

Port-Longshore Cooperation in the 1980s

The close cooperation between longshoremen and Port staff begun by Roy Perry continued after 1976 with his successor, Richard Dale Smith. From



Business Agent George Ginnis presenting plaques to veterans of the 1934 strike at the 50th anniversary commemoration at the Longshoremen's Hall on May 10, 1984.

(Robert Kroeger photo)

informal conversations over cups of coffee to formal discussions with prospective Port customers, the longshore voice was heard. One of the best examples of this working relationship came in 1976. Local newspapers played up intercity rivalry when Totem Ocean Trailer Express (TOTE) shipping line announced it was considering moving to Tacoma. In reality, the Port of Seattle's Pier 47 did not have enough space to accommodate TOTE's roll on/roll off vessels that carried semitrailer vans and containers mounted on wheeled chaises. Seattle longshoremen could use only the stern ramp to work the ship. In Tacoma, all three of the ship's ramps could be used at the same time.⁶⁴

TOTE management met with Port of Tacoma Director Richard Smith, Port Commissioner Robert Earley, and Local 23 Business Agent George Ginnis to discuss the possibility of TOTE moving to Tacoma. Ginnis recalled that the question was asked: "Can we [TOTE] train your drivers at our expense and will you guarantee trained drivers?" With a simple yes, TOTE was on its way to Tacoma. The first TOTE ship docked in Commencement Bay on June 4, 1976. The men loaded the ship in fourteen-and-one-half hours. Since that impressive beginning, the company has continued to be highly satisfied with Tacoma longshore productivity. In 1981 TOTE awarded Local 23 a plaque for outstanding service in setting a world's record for loading the ship *Westward Venture*. Today, longshoremen routinely turn TOTE vessels around in twelve hours, twice weekly.⁶⁵



ILWU Local 23 dedicated this anchor and gravestone in the Tacoma Cemetery on February 13, 1986, at the site of the union plot where thirty-one members are interred. The inscription on the stone reads: "Dedicated to the memory of the past members of the Stevedore, Longshoremen and Riggers' Union of Tacoma, March 22, 1886-March 22, 1986. Presented by the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen Union, Local 23, Tacoma" The anchor was donated by Daryl Hedman.

(ILWU Local 23 archives)

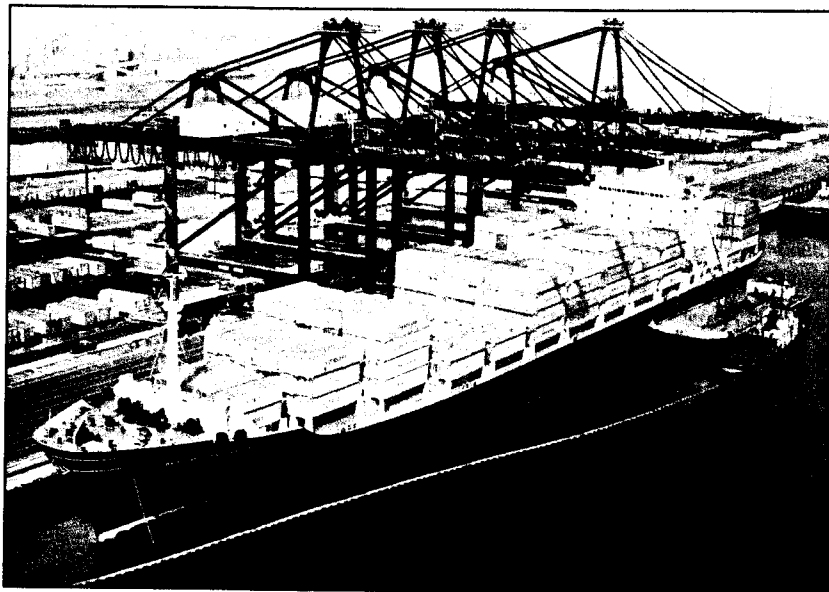
Sea-Land Moves to Tacoma

During 1982 Sea-Land, one of the largest container shipping lines in the world, decided not to renew its Terminal 5 lease in Seattle. Instead, Sea-Land

announced it would sign a thirty-year contract with the Port of Tacoma. "Room to grow, labor productivity, and economics," recalled Jack Helton, Vice-President of Sea-Land's Alaska Division. "It was," he added, "a business decision based on economics. We will save a million dollars a year in operating costs. Tacoma's new rail yard will greatly reduced costs of moving containers."⁶⁶

Dozens of engineers and hundreds of workers spent three years planning and constructing the \$44 million Sea-Land an TOTE ship/dock/rail linkages which replaced old and distant railroad storage yards. At 7 a.m. on May 13, 1985, Sea-Land began operations at its new Sitcum Waterway Terminal. Sixty longshoremen divided into four gangs started discharging 481 containers from the *Endurance*, the first of the Sea-Land fleet to call. On the ship, eight men unlash containers as cranes lifted the forty-foot-long boxes from the *Endurance* and lowered them to chassises pulled by tractor trucks. Four longshoremen secured each container to the chassis. Hustlers transported the boxes to the intermodal yard. Here, teamsters hooked onto the chassises carrying the containers. In minutes the boxes were placed on double-decked railroad cars. In just six hours the *Endurance* cargo was unloaded and transferred to rail.⁶⁷

Sixty-six hours later the containers arrived in Chicago. In thirty-four more hours New York City warehousemen began unloading the remainder of the time-sensitive cargo. Three hundred and twenty-two hours had elapsed since the cargo left Yokohama, Japan. In contrast, a cargo of tea took 1,348 hours to travel the same route during July and August 1885. One hundred years of improvements in maritime technologies equalled a saving of over a thousand hours of shipping time.⁶⁸



The Sea-Land *Endurance* at the Port of Tacoma loaded with containers for Alaska, late 1980s.
(Port of Tacoma archives)

During the 1980s, containers emerged as the major means of shipping general cargo. Tacoma longshoremen handled 150,300 boxes in 1981, 505,000 in 1984, and 924,974 in 1989. During the nine years the Port rose from nineteenth to sixth largest container port in North America.⁶⁹ Soon after Sea-Land announced that it was moving, the Danish shipping line Maersk named Tacoma its West Coast terminus. On May 15, 1985, the *Maersk Charlotte* loaded with 659 containers called at Tacoma's Pier 7D. These were the first of an estimated 50,000 Maersk containers destined to pass annually through Tacoma to and from New York, Chicago, and the Far East. General Manager Mogens Lauridsen stated that Maersk chose Tacoma because of its intermodal yards, productive longshoremen, and aggressive sales staff.⁷⁰

In 1984 Richard Dale Smith retired as the Port's executive director. His successor Lawrence Killeen recognized that the maritime industry was rapidly changing. "If the Port of Tacoma does not keep pace with technological change, it will be left behind," Killeen told the port community in 1984. The new Port executive director accelerated expansion of the south intermodal yard serving Sea-Land and the creation of a north yard dedicated to Maersk.⁷¹ In a presentation to world maritime leaders Killeen stressed that the Port of Tacoma had three major advantages — longshore productivity, two competing transcontinental railroad companies, and 800 empty acres of prime waterfront land. The Port of Tacoma executive director pointed out that on February 3, 1987, fourteen straddle drivers of Local 23 set a productivity record in the north intermodal yard by performing 937 container lifts in one shift. "No other intermodal operation anywhere in the United States has come close to that level of productivity."⁷²



Crane driver over the open hold of a ship at Pier 7, 1988.

(News Tribune photo, ILWU Local 23 archives)

For their part Tacoma longshoremen learned how to operate the high-technology equipment necessary to load and discharge container and roll on/roll off ships. On their own time and at their own expense, seventy-two men acquired proficiency in handling container cranes, 140 in learning to drive yard tractors, and forty in operating special computer programs. Preparing to serve large container shipping lines demonstrates one of the most distinguishing characteristics of Tacoma longshoremen. They have survived by controlling technological change rather than fighting its introduction. Johnny Now, grand old man of the Tacoma waterfront, talked about changes on the waterfront: "We never did strike when the bosses put new equipment on the docks. I pushed a two-wheeled hand truck from 1912 until 1923. Then I drove a Model T Ford jitney truck that pulled four small trailers. We saw mechanization coming and negotiated in the contract that we got the right to handle the gear first."⁷³

The revolution in cargo handling in Tacoma is epitomized by the history of three generations of the Anderson family. John and his son Harold began longshoring in the early 1940s. They shovelled ore, packed flour, and stowed lumber. Tom Anderson is the third generation of the family to be a Tacoma longshoreman. Tom started in the warehouse but began driving crane in 1978.

*When I first started on the cranes, I was extremely nervous. I wanted to do a good job. The tension was there. You always push yourself to do the best possible job you can. On the other side you have to keep constantly in mind that you must drive safely. Safety is number one. We are constantly counting heads. We have to make sure the longshoremen under us are always in a safe position.*⁷⁴

The foreman has control of the container operation. He stays aboard the ship and is in direct communication with the cranemen and the lashers. The foreman has a computer printout that lists the order containers are to be unloaded. He tells the crane operator which boxes are "hot loads." This special cargo is hoisted out first and placed in the yard. Teamsters take the hot loads from the yard directly to the train where the important boxes are side-loaded and strapped down. In 1990 a twelve-man container operation loads an average of thirty boxes an hour. In an eight-hour shift 240 containers are unloaded.⁷⁵

Speed is a measure of progress that accelerates impersonal working conditions. Frank Reichl, who worked in the old gang system and later as a straddle carrier driver, reflected on the difference between the two systems:

*The traditional method of gangs working together in close quarters has declined. Now there is a feeling of isolation when we work containers. We are too far apart to speak without shouting, too high up in a straddle or crane to see what is going on below. Consequently, the new machines have broken down the team spirit which was the essence of the longshore tradition.*⁷⁶

Facing the Future

Forecasters estimate that between 1992 and 2000 world trade will increase 5 percent annually. The implementation of the European Common Market on December 31, 1992, means Western Europe will become a single trading bloc. The Port of Tacoma will compete with other Pacific Coast ports to become the transfer center for Asian cargo going to Western Europe and Common Market goods bound for Asia. To be ready for the increased business and Pacific trade growth, the Port of Tacoma has embarked upon the 2010 Plan. This \$450 million development of 600 acres adjacent to the Blair Waterway includes four new container terminals with eight berths as well as a range of facilities to handle breakbulk cargos and automobiles. Construction will be accomplished in phases geared to demand. "The \$450 million is not a bet on the future," Executive Director John Terpstra, recently declared. "It will be spent as the market proves itself, so if the forecasts are wrong, we will not have lost."⁷⁷



Waiting for the dispatch at the union hall, 1990.

(Gayle Rieber photo, ILWU Local 23 archives)

The first phase will be the building of new container terminals and intermodal rail terminals on 309 acres near the Pierce County Terminal. To handle the cargo increase, the Port will install robotic equipment. A Technology Committee composed of port officials Charles E. Doan, Robert L. MacLeod, and John H. Bush and longshoremen Philip Lelli, Richard Marzano, James Norton, and John Usorac have been examining experiments in automated forklifts, stacking cranes, and transponders for possible application on Tacoma docks.⁷⁸

Already, Rotterdam uses automated forklifts to move cargo to and from the docks. These Automated Guided Vehicles (AGVS) transport containers from storage locations to cranes. The layout includes a grid system installed in the

paving to enable vehicles to check their position frequently. By means of an on-board navigation system, the AGVS is instructed by the Process Control System (PCS) concerning position, direction, and speed. The PCS decides which AGVS has the right of way and reroutes vehicles to prevent deadlocks. As a safety feature, vehicles are equipped with sensors to prevent collisions.⁷⁹

Automated Stacking Cranes (ASC) will be used for storing and retrieving containers as well as carrying out the instructions given by the PCS. The order will specify the location a container must be collected from and where the container must be taken. ASC's are small, unmanned, rail-mounted stacking cranes capable of carrying out a number of monitoring functions independently.⁸⁰

At Bremerhaven all facets of port operations are controlled by computers. When a truck or train enters the yard, the driver gets a punch card, then travels to a designated lane where he inserts the card. The arrival information and the destination of the container appear on a straddle carrier's monitor computer. The straddle can load or discharge trains or trucks so that every movement in the yard is productive.⁸¹

Roy Perry predicts that Post-Panamax ships will inevitably become larger. In a recent speech before the World Bank, Perry noted that studies performed for the Corps of Engineers estimate that the median container ship likely to call at West Coast ports in the year 2020 will carry 5,000 TEUs (twenty-foot-equivalent-units). Validation for larger ships can be found in operating cost studies by steamship lines. Cost accountants have found that ships carrying 1,400 to 1,500 TEUs cost approximately \$15.00 per TEU per ocean transit day. Costs dropped to a little over \$9.00 for ships in the 2,500 TEU range and to \$7.50 for ships in the 4,000 TEU range. Not only are ships growing in size,



Signing in for the pick for dock, lift, and crane jobs, 1990.

(Gayle Rieber photo, ILWU Local 23 archives)

containers are also getting larger. Several container ship lines are experimenting with fifty-three foot long, high cube containers. There are plans for even larger containers in the future. Although much emphasis is being placed upon increased ship and container size, primary emphasis in the future will center on speed and efficiency of all systems working together to provide dependability and reduce transit time for cargo from point of origin to destination.⁸²

To provide for fast recognition of the contents and destination of the container boxes coming off a ship, \$35.00 microchips called transponders are being implanted by American President Lines in each of its containers. Called the Automatic Equipment Information (AEI), the transponder can be read from a distance of forty feet at speeds up to eighty miles an hour. It is vibration-proof and will function from 50 degrees below zero to 165 degrees above zero. The transponder's built-in battery will last ten years. The company operating a computer storage yard can drive by with a mobile reading unit and inventory the whole yard noting the location of each container.⁸³

Tacoma longshoremen are not going the way of the buggy whip maker. The waterfront workers have survived 100 years by demonstrating unity, productivity, and adaptability. They have survived innumerable attempts to break their union. Their record of high job efficiency has been attested to by federal and employer surveys. Local 23 has trained its members for the new technical jobs since the donkey engine burst on the waterfront scene in 1881. Tacoma's waterfront workers will improve technology that is introduced by adding their work-

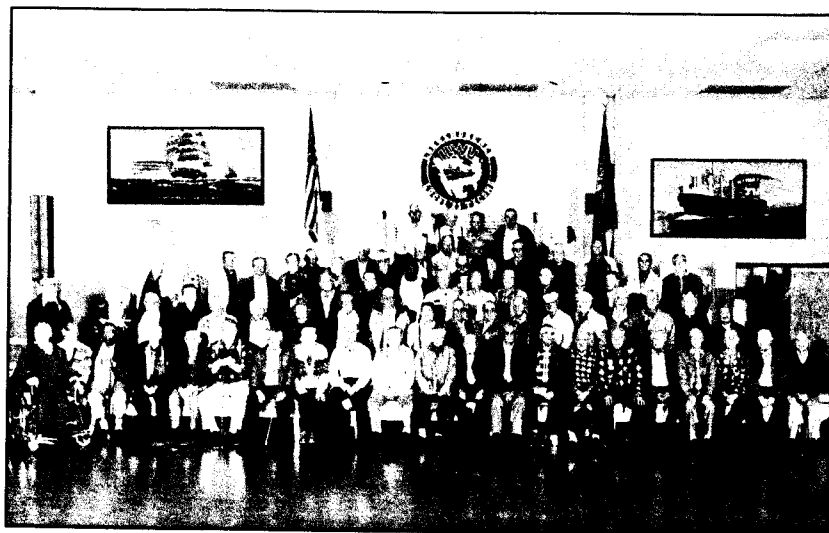


The pick for jobs on the ships, 1990.

(Gayle Rieber photo, ILWU Local 23 archives)

a-day know-how to the new gear. The longshoremen will continue to work as a team with the Port of Tacoma and its customers.

There are predictions that by the year 2025, all major waterfronts will be 100 percent automated. Robots will be discharging and loading ships by computer commands. This prophecy may become a reality, but there is little doubt that Tacoma longshoremen will be the computer operators. The rank and file will still be in command.



ILWU Local 23 Pension Club, 1991. (Gayle Rieber photo, ILWU Local 23 archives)



ILWU Local 23 membership, 1991. (Gayle Rieber photo, ILWU Local 23 archives)

CHAPTER XI MECHANIZATION COMES TO THE TACOMA WATERFRONT

1. TT, June 24, 1939.
2. Ibid.
3. TNT, July 4, 1939.
4. Ibid., April 30, 1940, and September 23, 1945.
5. Letter from M. G. Ringenberg to F. A. Foisie, July 17, 1940.
6. TT, September 3, 1941.
7. MB2, November 4, 1941.
8. TLA, December 19, 1941.
9. Richard B. Morris, Editor, *The American Worker*, p. 221.
10. MB2, July 7, 1942.
11. TT, March 12, 1943.
12. TLA, March 31, 1944.
13. Morris Thorsen Interview.
14. TNT, September 23, 1945.
15. Wytze Gorter and George H. Hildebrand, *Pacific Coast Maritime Shipping Industry*, p. 6. Hereafter cited as Gorter.
16. John Now Interview.
17. TLA, October 15, 1948.
18. Gorter, p. 206.
19. TLA, April 5, 1946.
20. *Seattle ILWU Local 19 Minute Book 3*, March 29, 1946.
21. MB2, October 5, 1948.
22. TLA, October 22, 1948.
23. MB3, March 15, 1949.
24. Lee Reichl Interview.
25. TLA, September 18, 1953.
26. MB4, December 8, 1953.
27. Carl Engels Interview.
28. Jack Tanner Interview.
29. MB4, November 1, 1955.
30. ST, December 7, 1955.
31. TLA, March 9, 1956.
32. *Open Letters* to Tacoma Longshoremen, March and April 1956.
33. Philip Lelli Interview.
34. MB4, November 6, 1956.
35. MB5, August 6, 1957.
36. Ibid., December 10, 1957.
37. TLA, December 20, 1957.
38. MB5, January 7, 1958.
39. Wardell Canada Interview. Wardell Canada served with distinction on the committee that produced the *Working Waterfront*. Wardell passed away December 9, 1984.
40. Paul T. Hartman, *Collective Bargaining and Productivity The Longshore Mechanization Agreement*, pp. 1-3. Hereafter cited as Hartman.
41. Louis Goldblatt and Otto Hagel, *Men and Machines*, pp. 47-48. Hereafter cited as Goldblatt.
42. Ibid., pp. 36-37.

43. George Ginnis Interview.
44. The term "B Men" originated in Southern California in 1950. By 1958, "B Men" had become standard usage everywhere on the Pacific Coast, replacing the term "permit men" in the Pacific Northwest. See Hartman, p. 36.
45. W. G. Rowland, *Trade Analysis*, in Port and City of Tacoma 1921.
46. Chester Barker Interview.
47. *Annual Port of Tacoma Report for 1930*.
48. Reichl Files.
49. Shaun Maloney Interview.
50. Carl Weber Interview.
51. *Port of Tacoma Annual Reports, 1953-1972*.
52. *Port of Tacoma Annual Report for 1965*. *Port of Tacoma Annual Report for 1974*.
53. George Ginnis Interview.
54. Carl Engels Interview.
55. Philip Lelli Interview. Lelli served as president of Local 23 from 1966-1967, 1971-1975, and 1979-1984. He is currently vice president of the local.
56. TNT, July 2, 1971.
57. Ibid., July 6, 1971.
58. *Daily Shipping News*, July 9, 1971.
59. TNT August 28, 1971.
60. PI, October 7, 1971.
61. Roy L. Perry Interview.
62. PI, February 17, 1972.
63. Ibid., April 14, 1972.
64. Shaun Maloney Interview. Maloney was president of Seattle Longshore Local 19 from 1971 through 1975.
65. George Ginnis Interview. Ginnis was President of Local 19 from 1962 through 1964, Business Agent from 1966 through 1972, and again from 1975 until his death in 1989.
66. Interview with Jack Helton, vice-president, Sea-Land.
67. TNT, May 14, 1985.
68. Charles Doan Interview.
69. *Port of Tacoma Annual Reports for 1982, 1985, 1990*.
70. TNT, May 15, 1985.
71. *Port of Tacoma Annual Report for the Year 1985*.
72. Address by Lawrence Killeen, *The Port of Tacoma: Staying on the Right Track*. Delivered at the Third Annual Business Conference of the Ports of Canada, June 14, 1987.
73. John Now Interview.
74. Interview with Harold and Tom Anderson.
75. Interview with Tom Anderson.
76. Frank Reichl Interview.
77. *Pacific Gateway Port of Tacoma*, Winter 1991, p. 4.
78. Ibid., pp. 8-9.
79. Notes by Richard Marzano on the Ports of Bremen, Bremerhaven, Antwerp, and Rotterdam. October 1989. Marzano is the president of Local 23.
80. Ibid.
81. Ibid.
82. Address by Roy Perry to the World Bank on June 11, 1990.
83. Philip Lelli, *Notes on an Automatic Equipment Information Meeting held on July 26 and 27, 1989*.

Sources For The Working Longshoreman Interviews

Tacoma Longshoremen Interviewed:

	Initiation Year		Initiation Year
Lyle Ames	1929	George Ginnis	1957
Harold R. Anderson	1950	Philip M. Lelli	1957
Tom Anderson	1980	George Liefson	1919
Nels Arneson	1929	Paul Lindberg	1930
Al Arnestad	1919	Richard Marzano	1973
Chester Barker	1929	George Mitchell	1918
Lee Barker	1918	John Now	1916
Wardell Canada	1954	Vic Olsen	1926
Les Clemensen	1929	Frank E. Reichl	1940
C. C. Doyle	1928	Lee L. Reichl	1940
Carl Engels	1950	Jack Tanner	1942
Nicholas Engels	1945	Morris Thorsen	1925
Joseph E. Faker	1965	T. A. Thronson	1929

Other Longshoremen Interviewed:

Elmer Barth	1922	Port Angeles
Shaun Maloney	1950	Seattle
Burt Nelson	1933	Seattle
Dewey Duggan	1923	Seattle
Thomas "Teddy" Gleason	1917	New York
Gordon S. Wylie	1931	Seattle

Teamsters Interviewed:

Dave Beck	1917	Seattle
Clyde Black	1927	Tacoma

Others Interviewed:

Elsie Lindskog Burns	Waterfront Employers
John H. Bush	Port of Tacoma
Elizabeth Dawson	Waterfront Employers
Charles E. Doan	Port of Tacoma
Robert E. Earley	Port of Tacoma
Jack Helton	Sea-Land
Craig Johnson	Pacific Maritime Association
Agnes Lindskog Lewis	Waterfront Employers
Gregory Nelson	Port of Tacoma
Richard Dale Smith	Port of Tacoma
Jon Terpstra	Port of Tacoma
Carl Weber	Griffiths & Sprague Stevedoring