

Cooperative Association proposed to cut cargo handling costs a flat 25 percent below the rates charged by private firms. "It is," declared Robert Bridges, "the same policy which I followed while a member of the port commission, when shipments at the port docks were always handled cheaper than at the private docks."⁵¹ The *Seattle Union Record* stated editorially that if the steamship lines stuck by the private companies at the higher rate "we will have the question of who really cares for efficient and cheap transfer of goods answered forevermore."⁵² There was no answer from the steamship companies.

The cooperative association continued to meet until the end of December 1920, but it was obvious that the attempt to compete with private stevedore companies had ended in failure. Percy May left the waterfront during the fall. At the same time Robert Bridges entered the race for governor on the Farm-Labor ticket. Local 38-12 was split so seriously that fourteen years passed before the factions reunited. The Seattle Waterfront Employers' Union installed their joint employer-employee committees with comparative ease. For Seattle longshoremen the glory days of the general strike, closed shop, and advocacy of liberal causes was over for a decade.⁵³

CHAPTER IX

DECASUALIZING THE
SEATTLE WATERFRONT

We are reaching and maintaining the position where the property class and the employed class are not separate, but identical.

— Calvin Coolidge 1919¹

After a short post-World War I economic depression, Americans enjoyed a decade of prosperity. To a large extent the automotive industry spawned what citizens in the 1920s called the New Era. In 1920 there were 9 million cars. By 1925, Detroit had produced 20 million, and in 1929 the total had risen to 26.5 million.² In the growing urban areas the auto truck replaced the horse in the construction and home delivery industries. On the nation's docks the two-wheel hand truck gradually gave way to the auto jitney with its series of four-wheel trailers. On the same piers, cranes with sixty tons' lifting capacity began to replace chain and rope slings. The new technologies lessened the need for dock workers. From an all-time high of 86,000 American longshoremen in 1920, the number dropped to 74,000 in 1930.³

During the 1920s, control of a majority of American corporations passed from owners to managers. The managerial revolution brought with it welfare capitalism. To insure that employees identified their economic and social benefits with the corporation and not the union, corporate executives built plants that included cafeterias, lounges, and recreational fields. Group insurance, profit-sharing options, and joint employer-employee committees became bywords of the New Era.⁴ Worker income rose 11 percent from 1923 to 1929, but corporate profits rocketed 62 percent and dividends 65 percent.⁵

The strategies of industrial relations' managers proved successful. Union membership fell from a wartime high of about 5,047,800 to 3,442,600 in 1929.⁶

There were pockets of impoverishment. The American farmer, coal miner, and textile worker suffered through difficult times. From 1919 through 1922 nationwide strikes occurred in the steel, coal, and railroad industries. Workers lost all of these major strikes. One notable labor victory occurred in New York. On October 6, 1919, 25,000 ILA men struck. The longshoremen totally shut down the port until November 5 when employers increased wages to 80 cents an hour and overtime to \$1.20.⁷

On the West Coast shipowners and stevedore companies "busted" longshore unions one by one. In a struggle watched closely by Northwest waterfront businessmen, San Francisco bosses defeated the Riggers and Stevedores' Union in 1919.⁸ The foremen created a Blue Book Union that supported the employers. One thousand company union men held steady jobs, while 4,000 casuals looked for work at shape ups. Seattle employers smashed Local 38-12 into three pieces in 1920. Portland and Anacortes locals lost the following year. San Pedro, Everett, and Vancouver, British Columbia unions suffered similar fates in 1923. Everett, Seattle, Grays Harbor, Portland, and San Pedro were corralled into fink halls. Tacoma's two ILA locals escaped destruction.⁹

In Seattle, the waterfront employers' victory over Local 38-12 proved difficult to maintain. The open shop system was not working out the way WEU had hoped. On the docks, ILA hatch bosses hired men from locals 38-12 and 38-16 at gate line ups instead of calling the employer's hiring hall. On May 19, 1920, WEU President Gibson called a special meeting of eighteen bosses and their thirty-four stevedore foremen to discuss hiring on the waterfront. Gibson suggested that foremen and employers "throw out the undesirables and make the rules such that they were lived up to." The WEU president recalled that high wartime pay had attracted hundreds of unskilled

radicals who took over Local 38-12 for their own purposes. Gibson advised bosses and foremen not to employ too many returning ILA men. Such action would lead to the loss of all that had been gained. Foremen should assert themselves and not leave picking to hatch bosses.¹⁰

Dodwell Manager K. J. Middleton told the May 19 gathering that the Seattle waterfront needed a joint employer-employee shop committee that would make future conditions so satisfactory that strikes would be unnecessary. Middleton asked foremen to forget petty jealousies and hire men strictly on their merits. Middleton's remarks drew universal applause, but no action.¹¹ ILA hatch bosses kept on hiring favorites, and Gibson continued to complain of the poor support given to the Employment Bureau by members.¹² On June 1, 1920, WEU members resolved that "Each employer designate one man to employ all men for his company, and take the authority away from Straw Bosses, and that all men shall be employed through the Employment Bureau."¹³ When only one employer sent the name of his hiring officer to the bureau, Gibson hired A.A. Paysee to recruit companies to use Employment Bureau men.¹⁴

The Seattle Waterfront Employers' Union changed its name on July 1, 1920, to Waterfront Employers' Association of Seattle (WEA). The next day WEA formally opened a large Employment Bureau at University and Post streets. The facility was designed to "establish a better feeling between the employer and employee and to make our hall more attractive than any Union Hall would be."¹⁵ WEA appointed Paysse manager and Merl G. Ringenberg dispatcher. The bureau staff handed each registered longshoremen a brass check to show to the hatch boss at the work site. Most union men, including old timers Dan Connell, Harry Griffiths, and Ed Walen, passed through the interview without detection. Stevedores Nick Peris, E. L. Ridley, William Veaux, Thomas Wadum, and Arthur Whitehead told Paysee they were members of Local 38-16. The employment manager refused to register all

five, but the men appealed to private employers who got the ILA men registered.¹⁶

Because locals 38-11 and 38-16 men successfully obtained bureau registration numbers "under false pretenses," George Bordeaux replaced Captain Paysee on August 10.¹⁷ Thomas E. Smith became first assistant and Merl Ringenberg second assistant. Manager Bordeaux reregistered the longshoremen, truckers, and checkers. WEA assigned Bordeaux the task of analyzing maritime company payroll slips in order to chart the seasonal fluctuations of the demands for waterfront workers. Bordeaux's studies brought him into contact with payroll officials at the various maritime businesses. By November 1920 Bordeaux had persuaded thirteen shipping and stevedoring companies to use the hall's central pay office.¹⁸ The men no longer traversed the waterfront to pick up their pay envelopes. Each man showed the paymaster his dispatch brass check and named the ships he had worked. Most longshoremen double checked the figures of the paymaster with their own time books that listed the names of ships and hours worked. The paymaster always paid in cash.¹⁹

Although steamship line officials, railroad superintendents, and the United States Shipping Board regional office professed support for WEA's open shop, their dock agents and foremen picked men at the gates.²⁰ Gang bosses insisted they were choosing the skilled men so that ships would leave on schedule. Two major steamship line superintendents selected gangs in ILA halls whenever they had a ship in port. Alaska Steamship and Admiral Line each worked fifteen steady gangs independent of the ILA and Employment Bureau halls. Assistant manager Cantelow admitted 65 percent of Admiral Line 350 cargo handlers were ILA "conservatives."²¹ Port of Seattle Traffic Manager Einar A. Pedersen diplomatically called both the employers' bureau and the ILA longshore hall when he needed extra men. More than half of his steady work force were members of the Riggers and Stevedores. Local 38-12 had vigorously supported Colonel George B. Lamping during

early November 1920 in his successful bid to become a port commissioner. Lamping had assured the union he favored the closed shop.²²

The Employment Bureau did have steady demand for its services. Gibson's International Stevedore Company averaged ten gangs a day; followed by Bartlett and Griffiths & Sprague, four gangs each; W. C. Dawson three gangs; and Clapp and North Coast, two gangs each. The other stevedore companies, Puget Sound, Ostrander, Rothschild, and Terminal delegated hiring to straw bosses who picked at the gates.²³

A severe summer maritime business slump continued into the fall of 1920. The tonnage handled dropped from 5,626,322 in 1919 to 5,210,382 in 1920.²⁴ Enforced idleness led to constant bickering between superintendents, straw bosses, former strikebreakers, and ILA factions. At the end of the year, WEA members reflected glumly on the future. Since the declaration of the open shop in May, employers felt they had been "living more or less on a volcano." It was only a question of time until "We are going to be forced to sign up with the ILA unless in the meantime we succeed in establishing a plan."²⁵

Joint Longshore-Employer Representation Plans

Only at Admiral Line's Pacific Steamship docks did managers and foremen claim to have "exceptionally good relations" with the company's longshore gangs. Employers attributed harmony to the implementation of a Dock Council. Industrial engineer Joseph C. Lindsay had based Admiral Line's council on the employee representation model recommended in 1920 by President Wilson's Second Industrial Conference.²⁶ This conference declared that neither the open nor the closed shop had proven satisfactory in settling industrial disputes. On the other hand joint shop committees had solved not only employee grievances, but also production problems. The industrial conference report concluded that employee-employer committees were a "means whereby sincerity of

purpose, frank dealing, and the establishment of common interests, may bring mutual advantage."²⁷

Admiral Line inaugurated on October 1, 1920, a super-efficiency bonus for waterfront workers. Management guaranteed stevedores extra pay if they loaded or discharged cargo faster than the manhour-per-ton average from January to October 1920. At first gang efficiency rose, but within six months fell back to normal. According to the manager of the efficiency program, "The men, overtired from extraordinary exertion, balanced this unaccustomed fatigue against their extra earnings, and concluded the latter was not worth the former."²⁸

On October 4, 1920, WEA hired Frank P. Foisie as industrial relations manager to institute "the principle of 'Employee Representation' of longshoremen in their relations with the members of the Seattle Waterfront Employers' Association."²⁹ To accomplish this goal WEA assessed the membership \$4800 for Foisie's salary and \$17,696 for hiring hall expenses.³⁰ Foisie was a newcomer to the waterfront. As an industrial relations instructor at the University of Washington, Foisie knew in a scholarly way the postwar attempts of European nations to decasualize longshore labor. From London, Foisie borrowed the idea of guaranteeing permanent dockers a weekly wage. From Liverpool, England, he adopted the concept of dividing registered waterfront workers in two groups, company men and dispatch hall gangs.³¹

From October 1920 through February 1921 Foisie carried on an education campaign among the 1,420-man waterfront work force. He held informal meetings with small groups of foremen and workers to establish new attitudes and relationships.³² Each man would have a choice on whether he worked in a company gang or out of the Employment Bureau. If workers agreed with management to decasualize the waterfront, Foisie predicted that a longshoremen working twenty-six eight-hour days a month would make \$187.20. For the same hours and days a trucker would receive \$166.40.³³

After conferring with Foisie, WEA Employment Committee Chairman Joseph Weber wrote on November 15, 1920, to twenty-two waterfront shipping line agents, stevedore companies, and dock managers. The maritime businessmen were asked to accept or reject the following WEA employment committee recommendations:

1. All employers to pick all men from the Employment Bureau.
2. All men working along the waterfront must be registered at the Employment Bureau.
3. Each employer to designate one man as his hiring agent or delegate Employment Bureau Staff to hire, thereby eliminating picking by straw-bosses.³⁴

Seventeen maritime businesses accepted the three recommendations unconditionally.³⁵ Five large employers, Admiral Line, Alaska Steamship, Rothschild's, Griffiths & Sprague, and the Port of Seattle, indicated they planned to continue hiring their own longshoremen and truckers.³⁶ In their written responses Admiral Line and Alaska Steamship criticized the Employment Bureau for arbitrarily denying registration to their gang bosses.³⁷ Admiral Line Assistant General Manager H. C. Cantelow insisted on maintaining his own casual list. If the WEA bureau had exceptionally efficient men to place, Cantelow promised Admiral Line would give them a tryout.³⁸

In a series of meetings held during December 1920, Bordeaux, Foisie, and Ringenberg met with nineteen designated waterfront company hiring agents at the Employment Bureau to establish uniform hiring policies and practices. Foisie stressed that relations between employment agents and dispatch-hall staff must be one of mutual cooperation, not subordination of one group to the other. The brass check would continue to be used instead of a photo-identification card.³⁹ Since work had become scarce on the front during

December, bureau staff and employment agents decided to dispatch only married men with families for the next thirty days.⁴⁰

WEA members formally voted on December 21, 1920, to institute a joint employee-employer representation plan as soon as all companies registered their employees at the Employment Bureau.⁴¹ Nine days later, Foisie reached a compromise with the holdout companies. Admiral Line, Alaska Steamship, Rothschild, Griffiths & Sprague agreed to send the names of foremen, seventy-three longshore gangs, and key truckers to the bureau for registration. None of the company men had to personally appear for examination at the employers' hall. Foisie also agreed to register in *absentia* all future Admiral, Alaska Steamship, Rothschild, Griffiths & Sprague, and CMSPRR preferred men.⁴²

Local 38-12 Versus Local 38-16

While WEA moved to consolidate job control, the factional struggle between ILA locals 38-12 and 38-16 shifted from the courtroom to the Central Labor Council. On June 30, 1920, delegates from Local 38-12 asked the council to place rival Local 38-16 on the unfair list.⁴³ The council formed a special investigative body that recommended to ILA President O'Connor that the Seattle Riggers and Stevedores be given a fair and impartial trial.⁴⁴ O'Connor referred the council resolution to district ILA officers. District Secretary Marshall Wright invited the council to participate in an upcoming hearing concerning Local 38-12. The Riggers and Stevedores asked the council to invite President O'Connor to come to Seattle to settle the dispute.⁴⁵

Local 38-12 trustees secured on September 30 a sixty-day restraining order prohibiting district officers from holding a trial to determine whether or not Local 38-12 should be expelled from the ILA.⁴⁶ In the meantime, President O'Connor agreed to visit Seattle on December 8 to resolve the jurisdic-

tional problems between locals 38-11, 38-12, and 38-16. At the last minute, O'Connor cancelled the trip, dashing hope for an immediate settlement of the longshore dispute.⁴⁷

On December 21, a Waterfront Employers' Association committee picked fifty longshoremen and truckers to work with Foisie in planning the structure of a joint organization. Fred Carl, president of Local 38-11, and George Kennedy, president of Local 38-16, agreed to serve with Foisie.⁴⁸ Dave Madison of Local 38-16 contacted President Tom Mason of Local 38-12 to stave off the formation of the shop committee, but the Stevedore and Riggers' membership rejected Madison's plea.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, Foisie assured employers that a majority of Employment Bureau men expected a permanent employer-employee committee.⁵⁰

WEA called a mass meeting at the Crystal Pool auditorium on January 18, 1921, to put the concept of a joint organization before Seattle truckers and longshoremen. K. J. Middleton gave the principal address. At the conclusion of the meeting, the men cast secret ballots. Waterfront workers approved the creation of a joint organization 319 to 209.⁵¹ A Temporary Joint Committee cochaired by longshoreman Dave Madison and employer Middleton drafted a constitution, by-laws, and standard practice handbook.⁵²

Five days after the Crystal Pool session, organized labor called a mass meeting of all waterfront workers at Longshoremen's Hall. State Federation of Labor Secretary L. W. Buck exhorted the men to unite: "You fellows are fighting over which of you is right, Local 38-12 or Local 38-16, the O.B.U., the I.W.W., or some other plan, and while you are scrapping the boss comes along, organizes his shop committee system and carries off the bacon."⁵³ Central Labor Council Secretary James A. Duncan rapped self-styled radicals who agitated for the breakup of the AFL. Changes should take place behind a solid front, Duncan declared, without playing into the hands of the bosses' "wonderful scheme" to keep waterfront workers divided.⁵⁴ Representatives from locals 38-

12 and 38-16 as well as nonunion men also spoke. All agreed that a single longshore organization should be formed immediately.⁵⁵

Eight hundred Seattle longshoremen and truckers assembled again in Longshoremen's Hall on January 25. This time locals 38-12 and 38-16 established joint committees to bring about one solid organization.⁵⁶ On February 5 the committees announced they could not settle their differences. At the same time Local 38-12 declared its intention to put on an organizing drive among nonunion men working Seattle docks.⁵⁷

Implementation of the Seattle Joint Representation Plan

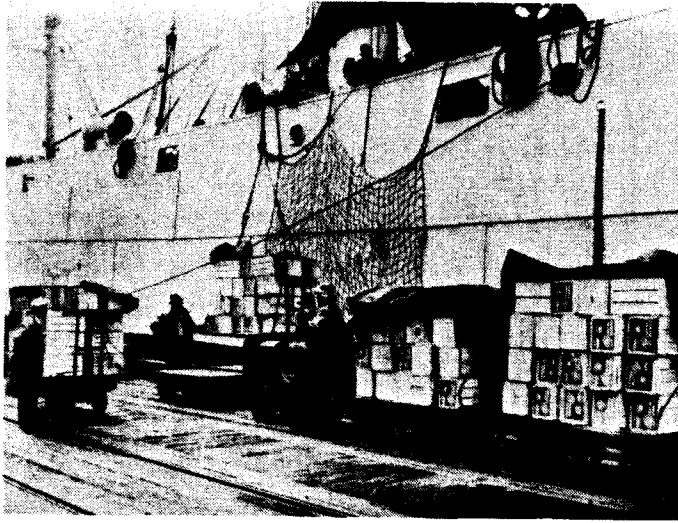
The Temporary Joint Committee presented on February 26 drafts of a constitution, bylaws, and a standard practice handbook to longshoremen and employers. Both groups approved the three documents by secret ballot during early March 1921. According to the constitution, the goals of joint organization included industrial peace, wage stability, and the improvement of conditions for each other. Wages and working conditions would be equal to other Pacific Coast ports. Freedom of speech and outside activity guaranteed for both parties. Neither the employee nor the employer could be discriminated against because of race, creed, color, union, or nonunion affiliation. In case of a dispute there would be no stoppage of work. Either party to a dispute could appeal to the appropriate joint organization committee. Voting power on all committees would be divided equally between workers and management. In the event of disagreement, the matter would be referred to an arbitration board.⁵⁸

The bylaws provided that men registered at the Employment Bureau had the right to vote and hold office as committeemen. An Employee Central Committee, composed of one representative from each company and hall gang, would shape general policies. The Joint Executive Committee con-

sisted of fifteen workers elected for eighteen-month terms to serve with the same number of appointed employers. The purview of the executive committee included all questions of mutual interest, particularly wages, hours, and working conditions. At the monthly meetings the chairmanship would alternate between a representative of the men and employers. The by-laws contained a clause prohibiting publicity of joint organization activities.⁵⁹

The Standard Practice Handbook codified existing longshore and trucker wages, hours, working conditions, and safety rules. Ninety cents an hour was set as regular scale for longshore work from 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. Mondays through Saturdays. All other hours, Sundays, and holidays counted as overtime at \$1.35 an hour. Truckers received 80 cents an hour for straight time and \$1.20 overtime. Hatch tenders, double-winch men, and donkey drivers received 10 cents above the base wage. Handling penalty products such as sacked asbestos, creosote, explosives, and damaged cargo also paid an extra 10 cents an hour. Men received pay for up to two hours standby time. Employers guaranteed transportation to and from jobs outside the Seattle city limits.⁶⁰

Employment Bureau longshoremen and truckers elected forty-seven committeemen to the Employee Central Committee on March 15, 1921. The men also nominated forty candidates to fill fifteen seats on the Joint Executive Committee. Of the forty, twenty-two came from locals 38-11, 38-12, and 38-16. Eighteen were nonunion. Fifteen union men received the highest number of votes. Nine represented Local 38-12, three were members of Local 38-16, and two came from Local 38-11.⁶¹ David Madison received 326 votes, more than any other candidate. Local 38-16 President George Kennedy served on both the central and executive committees. Fred Carl, president of Local 38-11, also served on the executive committee. At the first Joint Executive Committee meeting, Madison and Middleton were elected alternate chairmen. Foisie was appointed permanent secretary. The executive committee ap-



*Loading apples for Europe, 1929, Asahel Curtis Photo,
Courtesy Virgil Bauman*

pointed standing committees for employment, safety, and standard practice.⁶²

Foisie recommended the Joint Employment Committee meet immediately. Bordeaux's studies revealed that the Employment Bureau work force should be cut from 1,400 to 850. The employment committee voted to cancel the brass checks of 554 men who had left the waterfront during the slack winter months. This left 496 longshoremen and 350 truckers.⁶³ Since the March cargo trade had not picked up, Foisie suggested another 25 percent cut of the longshore force and 33 percent of the truckers. The employment committee suspended single men with low earnings and all those registered after the May 1920 strike. Foisie calculated the remaining 372 longshoremen would average \$77.00 a month. Two hundred and sixty-three truckers would take home \$37.00 each.⁶⁴

The employment committee divided the Employment Bureau's 372 longshore work force into thirty company and hall gangs. In coordination with maritime employers' agents, dispatchers divided the men on the basis of individual work skills, length of service, family status, and citizenship. Foisie

stressed to steamship line employment agents and stevedore company managers that gangs be formed "without the knowledge or influence of straw bosses."⁶⁵ International Stevedore, Bartlett & Company, Griffith & Sprague, and Terminal Stevedoring & Contracting reserved twenty steady stevedore gangs. North Coast Stevedoring and Rowland C. Clapp & Company held first preference on four hall gangs. The remaining six gangs comprised the bureau's reserve force. Merl G. Ringenberg made certain each hall gang included a mix of both union and nonunion men.⁶⁶

Sixty-two hall men chose to be on the extra list. These men had to be skilled in all aspects of rigging, winch driving, and hatch tending. Extras also worked lumber schooners, packed grain ships, and handled special cargos. The extra board included thirty-six union and twenty-six nonunion men.⁶⁷

All company and hall gangs associated with the Employment Bureau operated on the principle of equalized earnings. Company gangs had a maximum earning limit beyond which they could not work as long as the wages of hall gangs fell below a minimum figure. Low-earning gangs replaced company gangs until all longshore pay became roughly equal. If a longshoreman wanted to take several days off, his pay was not figured into the monthly average.⁶⁸

When a registered longshoreman entered the hall, he walked over to the dispatch board. Beside his name and registration number the worker plugged a nail in a hole. When he left the hall for a job or to go home, he pulled the nail out. On the opposite side of the board was a corresponding set of names. From looking at protruding nails a dispatcher could tell who was waiting for work, and from this he filled orders. On the dispatch slip appeared the man's name and registration number. The dispatcher handed the slip to the hatch tender who called the men together. At the dock, the hatch boss handed the slip to the general foreman. The paymaster and Ringenberg received carbon copies.⁶⁹

For gangs working out of the bureau, Foisie and Ringenberg devised a telephone dispatch system. Call-in-times were 6:15 to 7:00 a.m.; 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 Noon; and 4:00 to 5:00 p.m. Foisie attempted to persuade deep-water steamship lines to communicate ship docking time at least three days in advance, but with little success. Three gangs had to standby in the hall around the clock.⁷⁰

Early Crises in Joint Organization

During the second month of joint organization, longshoremen and truckers tried twice to achieve control over the registration process. At the Joint Executive Committee session on April 6, 1921, longshoremen Carl, Kennedy, Ryan, and Varlack insisted that twelve veteran longshoremen rejected by the employers' hiring hall receive registration brass checks. Nine of the old timers were members of Locals 38-11 and 38-16. Among them was Dan Connell, last link to SLRU, the first Seattle longshore union.

The old timers agreed among themselves that L. P. Butler should be reregistered first. Butler had been laid off after being injured in the service of International Stevedoring.⁷¹ Foisie recommended the veterans receive the first brass checks when cargo trade picked up. A motion to register the twelve resulted in a tie. Both sides agreed to arbitrate the issue, but deferred action until the next session.⁷² Before the next executive committee meeting, David Madison called together the longshore representatives for a strategy session. When the May 2 executive committee meeting started, Madison announced that committeemen accepted Foisie's proposition to give the twelve veterans first chance.⁷³

Joint organization faced a major revolt in the form of an impromptu trucker meeting on April 10. Neither Foisie nor Ringenberg were invited. The men composed a list of grievances: An end to hiring at dock gates, the replacement of Ringenberg's preferred trucker list with rotary hiring, and the

recall of trucker representative J. W. Farrar.⁷⁴ Two days later a special session of the Joint Employment Committee admonished the truckers for meeting on the spur of the moment and without preparation. "The discussions of the Truckers' meeting show in several instances a great deal of misinformation."⁷⁵ Furthermore, the recall of a committeeman should only be engaged in after calm deliberation. While denying Ringenberg had a preferred trucker list, the Joint Employment Committee did agree to rotary dispatch. The committee promised every effort would be made to end hiring at the gates.⁷⁶

Nine days after the dock men's revolt, the Joint Executive Committee overhauled the trucker dispatch system. On April 19, Seattle dock operators hired seventy-two truckers as "key" or permanent men.⁷⁷ Similar to the stevedore wage system, dock managers agreed to institute an equalized earnings system for hall and key truckers. Ringenberg was ordered to dispatch the remaining 188 hall dock men in alphabetical order. With the exception of fifty truckers who would always have to be present in the hall, the balance could telephone for assignments. The dispatch staff expected truckers to learn stevedoring skills so that they could fill in whenever a shortage occurred. The Joint Employment Committee set May 26 as the day to implement the new trucker dispatch system.⁷⁸

Employment Bureau longshoremen and truckers complained periodically in joint executive committee meetings about the hiring of casuals at dock gates by WEA members.⁷⁹ E. L. Ridley testified at the 1934 National Longshore Board hearings that casuals were hired "practically every day." Ridley complained to Frank Foisie about an unregistered Alaska fisherman longshoring. Foisie told Ridley, "If you don't like it, you can quit." Ridley resigned from the executive committee, but continued to longshore.⁸⁰

To further complicate the first months of joint organization, employers began to talk about reducing wages. K. J. Middleton introduced the subject at a Northwest Waterfront

Employers' Union meeting on April 20, 1921. A 10 percent cut was needed, Middleton remarked, because of the excessive high cost of operation as against low freight rates and small cargo offerings. Since seamen's wages had been reduced 15 percent, it was the longshoremen's turn. Middleton pointed out that Seattle employers could have forced a wage cutback earlier, but such action would open WEA to charges that joint organization was simply a wage reduction dodge. WEA considered it better to delay until the NWEU meeting so that the reduction would be effective in all Pacific Northwest ports August 1.⁸¹ A general statement was released to the press after the meeting announcing that there must be a curtailment in the expense of handling cargos at all Northwest ports, if they wished to compete in world commerce.⁸²

When the Joint Standard Practice Committee recommended a 10-cents-an-hour reduction to the Joint Executive Council on May 24, fifteen committeemen were prepared to argue against the rollback. The waterfront workers reported their monthly earnings were insufficient to permit a wage reduction. They suggested eliminating penalty pay for everything except big sacks, oil, and shovel work. Employers noted the cost of living in Seattle had dropped 15.6 percent from May 1920 to April 1921. A motion by Madison that there be no reduction lost by a tie vote. A second motion passed that Madison and Middleton select a third person to arbitrate the issue.⁸³ At the next meeting of the Joint Executive Committee, employers proposed that a new committee be formed to adjudicate the wage dispute.⁸⁴ A Special Joint Wage Committee was unanimously approved. The committee recommended that on August 1 remuneration would decrease from 90 to 80 cents an hour for longshoremen and 80 to 70 cents for truckers. Overtime would be cut to \$1.20 an hour for longshoremen and \$1.05 for truckers.⁸⁵

On September 18, 1921, Foisie sent to the Joint Employment Committee a statement that a shortage of waterfront workers might be at hand on the Seattle waterfront. During

August, 379 longshoremen averaged \$146.61 and 207 truckers, \$135.34. In Foisie's opinion it was time for the Joint Employment Committee to weed out men "who either won't work or can't do good work."⁸⁶ Incompetents should be replaced by steady, capable, experienced men wanting work. "Here lies the opportunity to swap man for man – a new good man for an incompetent one – as fast as the Joint Employment Committee with the cooperation of men and management can start the process of weeding out."⁸⁷ Fred Carl immediately moved, and William Varlack seconded, that brass checks be issued to eight of the twelve old timers who had been proposed for registration during April 1921. The motion lost when the committee vote deadlocked, four to four. Nothing more was heard about discharging an "incompetent" and hiring a "good man."⁸⁸ The crowning blow came on December 13. With other employers watching, Keith Middleton asked a meeting of longshoremen and truckers to stand if they favored joint organization. All of the men rose, but there was not a sound.⁸⁹