Reprint from:

URBAN LIFE

"The San Francisco Waterfront:
The Social Consequences of
Industrial Modernization,
Part One: 'The Good Old Days' "

by Herb Mills

SAGE PUBLICATIONS, INC.
275 South Beverly Drive
Beverly Hills, California 90212

SAGE PUBLICATIONS LTD
28 Banner Street
London EC1Y 8QE, England

HERB MILLS received his Ph.D. in Political Science from the University of California, Irvine. He has been a San Francisco longshoreman for 13 years and for the past 4 years has served as an elected official of his local—Local 10 of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union.

THE SAN FRANCISCO WATERFRONT

The Social Consequences of Industrial Modernization,

Part One: "The Good Old Days"

HERB MILLS

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

The economics of this industrial modernization have received a great deal of attention, although its social consequences have been very largely ignored. For example, the ways in which the new technology has changed the nature of the work performed

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AUTHOR'S NOTE: Thanks are due to a fellow longshoreman, Jake Arnautoff, for permission to reprint some of the sketches from his "Man on the Ladder" (copyright 1967 Jacob V. Arnautoff).

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first of a two part essay on social changes on the San Francisco Waterfront produced by modernization. The second part will appear in an issue in January or April, 1977.

URBAN LIFE, Vol. 5 No. 2, July 1976
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by longshoremen and seamen and the attitude of these workers toward their work have not been detailed. The same is true of the ways in which that technology, and the manner in which it has been utilized by contract, has affected the job-related social relations of the dock workers and those of the seamen. It is from such a perspective, however, that the present discussion will focus on one small sector of the industry's workforce, the San Francisco longshoremen.[1]

On the West Coast, the technology of modern longshoring has been introduced and utilized under a series of contracts negotiated by the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU) and the Pacific Maritime Association. The economic components of these contracts initially received close scrutiny from labor, industry, and commerce because they were advertised as providing a "model" for harmoniously introducing labor-saving devices and methods to the advantage of employer and employee alike. To most observers, these agreements were also of particular interest because the West Coast union of longshoremen had played an exceptionally important and progressive role within the labor movement since the early 1930s. For many years, those men had also been distinguished by an extraordinary on-the-job militancy and "toughness." While these circumstances have generated a lively and continuing interest in the industry, the ways in which the work and job-related social experience of the longshoremen have been effected by the utilization of new technology have received less attention. This essay will explore the changes which have occurred in the occupational experience of the San Francisco longshoremen. The baseline experience of what is often referred to as "the good old days" will first be delineated. Most longshoremen remember that period beginning in the late 1930s when the ILWU had very effectively asserted its presence on the waterfront for several years. The passing of what is remembered as a "golden age," dates to the mid-1960s. Certainly, however, there was a universal consciousness of "the good old days," as compared to the "mechanization and modernization" which was there for all to see and experience

by the late 1960s. During the golden era, despite the well-known militancy and progressive toughness of their local, most San Francisco longshoremen of that period liked their work and the terms of their employment. Most of them were proud to be longshoremen, and proud to be members of the ILWU.

The verbal expression of this occupational satisfaction took many forms, but could generally be reduced to the following: "I like the work" and "It's a damn good union."[2] Expressions of such satisfaction could be heard on the job, in the hiring hall during the morning and evening job dispatch, in the home and at parties, and at all sorts of community gatherings and events. Indeed, it is reported from all quarters that the enjoyment most San Francisco longshoremen took from talking about their work and their union bordered on the oppressive! As for the nonverbal expression of this satisfaction, that was reflected in the basic posture of the men: an innovative and fraternal behavior on the job and an obvious camaraderie both on the job and elsewhere.

The structural basis of this job satisfaction and the objective sources of this sense of self-esteem and fraternity are to be found in (1) the nature of the work which the men performed, (2) the structure and terms of their employment, and (3) the social relationships which were thereby produced amongst them. The first part of this essay will focus upon these three dimensions of "the good old days." The second and concluding parts will delineate the ways in which the utilization of new technology has directly and concretely effected these baseline dimensions of the San Francisco longshoreman's occupational experience. To that end, the discussion will focus primarily upon (1) the nature of *modern* longshore work, (2) the structure and terms of that work, and (3) the social relationships which these circumstances have in turn produced amongst the men.

This essay concerns itself with the manner in which the utilization of new technology has affected the work and job-related social experience of a particular group of workers. Granted this, the discussion ignores the second basic component of any wage earner's day-to-day occupational experience—the nature of his on-going, work-related contact with his employer and/or the supervising representative of his employer. The "labor-management" relations of the San Francisco longshore industry (both "on-the-job" and "across-the-table") have also been profoundly affected by the utilization of new technology. A subsequent essay will focus upon the ways in which the nature and structure of modern longshore work, together with the social relationships which the new technology has spawned amongst the men, has directly and continuously affected their relationships to their employer.[3]

THE GENERAL CONDITIONS OF WORK AND JOB SATISFACTION

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

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

Because of the varying cargoes and operational circumstances, there was a great fluctuation in the difficulty of the work performed, particularly in the hold of the vessel. This was another source of considerable satisfaction. Within the limits of the usual variety, pace, and cycle of longshore work, the dirtiest, hardest, and most demanding of such work was for the most part "gobbled up" by those who were not severely "taxed." The common posture was, "I don't give a damn what the cargo is." This reflected a general social definition of longshoring as "man's work."

Mobility. The variety of work options available to the men was also very greatly extended by quite exceptional opportunities for mobility within the industry and the final (if temporary) "safety valve" of not working as a longshoreman at all. Thus, to begin with, a hall man could at any time join one

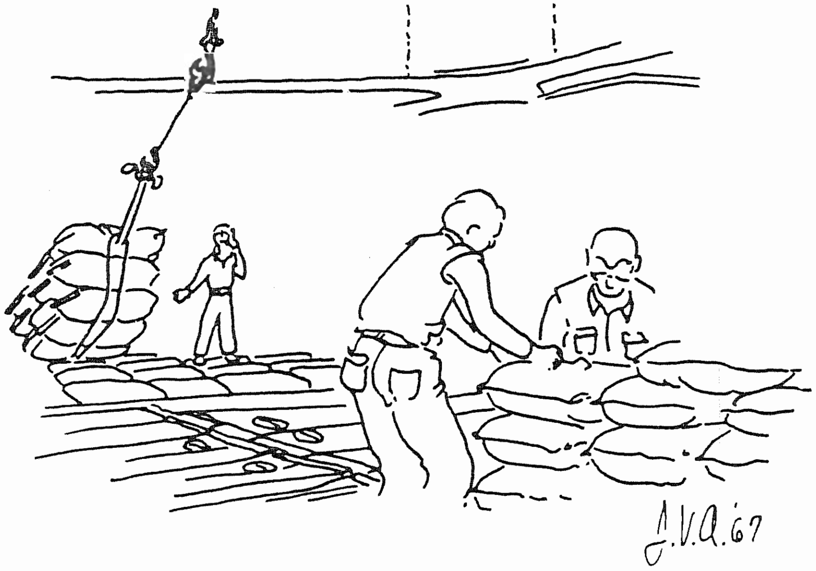

Figure 1: Coffee

of the "gangs" which had an opening in his job category or, if he were willing, in a job category requiring less seniority than he possessed. By contract, a longshore gang was a regularly constituted group of job categories, i.e., a "gang boss," two winch drivers, six hold men (later reduced to four), six dock men (later reduced to two), and a dock lift driver. The men of each gang were dispatched as a unit, but since this dispatch was made by telephone these men did not have to go to the hall for each succeeding job. As a rule, the gang men who went directly from their home to the job saved at least an hour a day and a lot of driving. Frequently, a man would also join a gang in order to drive to work with a neighbor and/or to regularly work with one or more friends or relatives. There were, then, certain basic reasons for "gang life" being popular. On the other hand, gang members did not have the opportunity of "shooting for" a particular job or pier, nor, as a rule, of working out-of-category. Having joined a gang, a man was required to stay in it for at least thirty days.

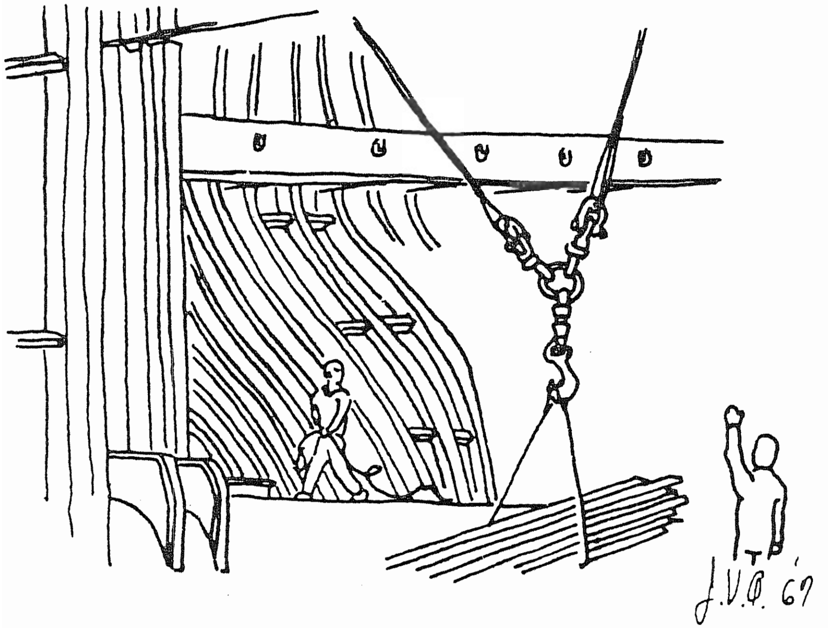

Figure 2: Long Steel

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

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

THE INSTITUTIONAL AND SOCIAL ROOTS OF COMMUNITY

A Pride of Union. The occupational satisfaction which these men enjoyed was also rooted in the pride and sense of camaraderie which they gained from their union with one another. By the late 1930s, the typical San Francisco longshoreman was fiercely proud of his membership in the ILWU. The men were routinely proud (if not always satisfied) of the wages, hours, and conditions which they had won. For many, there was also a pride in the union's lengthening history of progressive militancy on public issues and in community affairs. Such pride was more than justified, as it was rooted in a vivid remembrance of what had gone before, a deep appreciation of what was by then enjoyed, and a widely shared understanding of how things had been changed.

For nearly one hundred years, the life of a San Francisco longshoreman had been as difficult, as dangerous, as unrewarding, and as socially stigmatized as that of any waterfront worker in the world. The old Barbary Coast had truly earned its worldwide reputation as a degrading social maelstrom within which a brutal exploitation was enforced by violence and corruption. By the late 1930s, however, the waterfront had been transformed. It was now the domain of men who by long and bitter struggle had won a far better life than what they had previously known. In that struggle, those men had forged a clean and democratic union. It was through their union that they had also made important contributions to the struggles of untold numbers of other workers. This was a remarkable chapter in the history of American labor. By their union with one another, the men of the San Francisco waterfront had won a richly deserved, if long denied, dignity and standing.

Most American trade unions have at least upon occasion been distinguished by some sense of community, if only on an ideological level. However, the sense of community which first became visible amongst the San Francisco longshoremen during the early 1930s was destined for a unique longevity and elaboration. By the end of that decade, the sense of community had become extraordinarily rich in both form and content. Ideology had in part occasioned that elaboration. Ideology would also contribute to its subsequent elaboration and maintenance. But the persistence, form, and content of that communal spirit, together with the extraordinary loyalty which it elicited, also reflected a basic social reality—these men had effected a uniquely democratic and broad-based "working out" of their own experience as a community. The reality of their *communitas* was also understood as the social bedrock of their achievements as a union and as a veritable wellspring of their individual self-esteem and vitality.

The fashioning and maintenance of this community was underwritten in part by the concrete social relationships which were produced between the men by (1) the manner in which the work of the port was allocated amongst them and (2) the contact which they routinely had with one another simply as longshoremen. The discussion will now move to the third set of circumstances which underwrote the emergence and stability of this community—the nature and structure of the work which its members performed.

The Hiring Hall. The central demand of the long and bitter West Coast longshore strike of 1934 focused upon "the shape-up"—the practice of hiring men from amongst those who showed up each morning at one or another of the pierheads. The union sought—and won—"a hiring hall" jointly administered and operated by the employers and union through a "labor relations committee." As countless union publications subsequently put it, "The ILWU is the hiring hall."

The reasons for this demand were simple enough—the shape-up was riddled with favoritism, discrimination, corruption, and pay-offs in the hiring of men. On the job, it was distinguished by a relentless, exhausting, and hazardous speed-up which was in turn very effectively enforced by capricious and arbitrary firings. By contrast, the hiring hall meant the preferential dispatch of union men. While promoting union membership directly, this also reduced the number of firings simply because the man who was fired was almost always replaced by another union man. The second basic and fundamentally important feature of the hall was its "low-man-out" system of job dispatch. This meant that, in any given job category, the man who had worked the least number of hours during the current quarter had the *right* to be dispatched first.[4] The hiring hall also meant a centralized and scheduled dispatch, thus obviating the need to travel from pier to pier in an oftentimes endless search for work. In these ways, the degrading evils of the shape-up were to be precluded.

By equalizing their work opportunity, the low-man-out system also helped to equalize the income of the men in each job category. Another source of explosive competition was eliminated when the principle of seniority was firmly incorporated into the employer-union machinery for promoting men from one job category to another. Eventually, the dispatch of gangs was also based upon a "low-gang-out" system. While this, too, eliminated an historic source of favoritism, it also tended to equalize the income of the gang men. Constant attention was paid to the relative work opportunity of hall and gang men, but an equalization was in large measure maintained simply by the men exercising their option of working either in a gang or from the hall.

The hiring hall was indeed "the union." It was *the* institution whereby the reality of community could be fashioned and maintained by men who had agreed to structure and divide their work on a fair and equal basis and who, through great strife and conflict, had won the right to do so. As for the on-going fairness of the dispatch system, that was to be insured by the men annually electing their representatives to the joint Labor Relations and Promotions committees from their own ranks. An annual election of dispatchers by and from the ranks was also to assure the honesty and fairness of its day-to-day operation.

The Dialogue. A centralized "sign-in" and dispatch for work and the physical existence of a hiring hall meant that over a period of time the hall men became very well acquainted. Their acquaintance was also reinforced when they were dispatched to the same gang, ship, or dock. Since hall men were dispatched "to fill out the gangs" with needed men, acquaintances between the hall and gang men also developed over time. The men of different gangs were likewise destined to become acquainted by being dispatched to the same ship and, not infrequently, by having been assigned to opposite ends of the same hatch. With the passage of time, then, most of the San Francisco longshoremen had developed at least some acquaintanceship with all of their union brothers. The average longshoreman was also destined to become very well acquainted with a considerable number of those men.[5] For most men, such acquaintanceships frequently grew into a real and lasting friendship. Friendships were also spawned and strengthened over breakfast at the many waterfront cafes, at "the coffee break," with a deck of cards at lunch, and when the men were "sent to supper" prior to finishing a vessel (this continued until 1966). Then, too, some of the brothers were not adverse to getting together for a drink or two following the end of their shift.

Endless conversation thus ensued. As might be supposed, such conversation frequently drifted to the work and to union matters. But the men were also known to discuss such diverse topics as "women," baseball, gambling and horse racing, "capitalistic exploitation" and "the profit motive," fascism, and, of course, the great depression—that unforgettable fountain of experience from which they had all been obliged to drink. There emerged a quite extraordinary world of discussion, reflection, and debate.

The opportunity for conversation did in no way end when the men "turned-to" for work at the beginning of their shift or when they returned from lunch or supper. There was little machine noise (and no sustained machine noise) either on the dock or in the cargo sheds. This was also true aboard ship, except when older "Johnson-bar" steam winches were being used, but even then the cycle of the cargo hook meant that the clattering of the hoisting gear was at least intermittent. Then, too, the pace and cycle of the work between the "inshore" and "offshore" sides of the hold invariably allowed the holdmen to converse while "the hook kept moving" and the work proceeded.

There were two sets of circumstances, however, in which a longshoreman would invariably terminate an on-the-job conversation. First, when he felt that a man with whom he was working was intentionally failing to do his share; and second, the "silent treatment" was administered when a man refused to work in a safe and sensible manner. To put the matter simply, one did not converse with a man who failed to reflect a sense of pride and community in accomplishing the work at hand. At this point, then, the discussion comes full circle—the nature and structure of the work was such that it could give rise to a community and brotherhood of men who took pride in its performance.

PRIDE AND COMMUNITY AS THE SOCIAL PRODUCT OF WORK

Conventional longshore work is distinguished by widely varying and ever-changing operational circumstances. New and challenging operational problems and difficulties are constantly posed, especially for the holdmen who are "at the point of production." Consequently, such work cannot be subjected to direct and continuous supervision, and the efficiency with which such work is performed is essentially a function of the initiatives which the individual longshoreman is willing to assume and the willingness of the men to cooperatively innovate. Indeed, since it is in no way "routine," nor "rationalized," an efficient performance of such work requires a radical and broadly defined decentralization of initiative. The employers understood that the efficiency of their operation was in large measure dependent upon the voluntary and cooperative inputs of the men. They also understood that any particularly difficult or unique situation would most certainly require consultation and discussion. Since the men enjoyed an on-going opportunity to exercise and display their experience, skill, and ingenuity, they also enjoyed the opportunity of taking pride in their work. Given these circumstances and the fact that over time he would work with many of his fellow longshoremen, a man could become known as "a really good stevedore." Such a reputation signified more than the possession of a considerable skill and experience and an ability to innovate. It signified and constituted a public recognition of a man's unfailing willingness to exercise his skills on behalf of his fellow workers. While the employer naturally stood to benefit from such a contribution, "a good idea" or "move" was viewed as essentially intended to benefit one's fellow workers. The reason for this was that the men understood that the work at hand would, in any event, have to be accomplished.[6] Thus, a man most clearly expressed and displayed his sense of community and union with his fellow longshoremen by the pride which he took in performing the work. Indeed, the contributions which a "good" longshoreman routinely made were universally viewed as the most concrete and persuasive of all possible expressions of brotherhood.

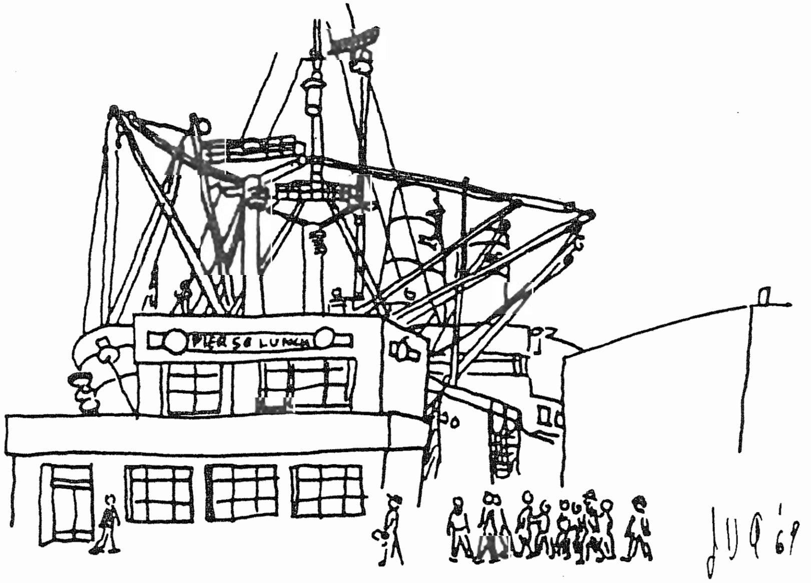

Figure 3: Lunch

But, what of the community/union status of the man who—in the judgment of yet another man—was possessed of average ability? There are several dimensions to this question. To begin with, the criterion of brotherhood and community was not the exercise of some considerable skill and ingenuity, but a willingness to contribute as one could to the performance of the work. This criterion might also be applied with some considerable compassion. For example, the alcoholic, the "character," the man who was "messed up" or "messed over," and "the fo-fo," i.e., the man who never really did "catch on," were nearly always "carried' or "covered" by their fellow workers. In fact, it was for most men a very important part of brotherhood and community "to carry" such a man so as to protect him from an employer-imposed discipline and penalty. Granted the presence of such compassion, the real "line" was drawn against the man who had *earned* the reputation of simply being "lazy." In other words, and to put the matter bluntly as did the men, a well perceived and important distinction was made between "the f--k-up" and "the f--k-off." It was one thing for a man to have a certain "failing." That could be the lot of anyone. But the man who would "lay back" avoiding whatever work he could was simply seen as deliberately "putting the hurt" on the other men. Indeed, since the feeling against being thus exploited by another "union brother" was extremely strong, the man who had a reputation for "laying back" might be "left on his own" even when that would interfere with the conduct of an operation.

Within these parameters, the "average" man was viewed by his fellow longshoremen as always being eager to contribute to getting the work accomplished. As a rule, the average man was also known to have occasionally "come up with a damn good idea." These circumstances were reflected in two of the sayings which were current on the waterfront: (1) "When it comes to longshoring, you can learn from any man." These egalitarian insights were common coin because they were deeply rooted in the concrete work experience of the men. Every man had occasionally been assisted by someone who in his judgment was an "average"—or less than average—longshoreman. By the same token, then, and through his demonstrated readiness "to lend a hand" on the job, the average man had made it clear that he was, indeed, "a pretty good union man and brother."

In sum, the work which was performed by the San Francisco longshoremen in the "good old days" required initiative, ingenuity, a willingness to cooperatively innovate, and a wide range of skills and experience. Given this and the social organization which had come to distinguish their occupation, the great majority of men routinely took pride in contributing as best they could to accomplishing the work. By the same token, the great majority routinely availed themselves of the opportunities which the work so frequently afforded them to express their feelings of community and union with their fellow workers. It happened, then, that the community and union of these men was made a concrete social reality as their work proceeded.

THE COMMUNITY IN BATTLE

By the late 1930s, the occupational circumstances which have here been described had existed for some time. As a result, the San Francisco longshoremen could by then walk the Embarcadero and work the docks and ships with a very considerable dignity. The most concrete expression of that dignity—and the most encompassing embodiment of the many circumstances which underwrote its fashioning and maintenance—was a quite extraordinary on-the-job militancy.

There were three distinct, yet frequently interrelated components to this militancy: (1) the enforcement of the contract, (2) an insistence upon safety, and (3) an insistence that the work proceed sensibly. Broadly speaking, an effective militancy could in these respects be exercised by the men simply because their employer was fundamentally dependent upon their initiative and good will. In other words, the decentralization which an efficient performance of the work required provided the men with a twofold opportunity: "producing" for their employer and effectively challenging his direction and control. While for these reasons some measure of job control (and, of course, the sense of dignity which that entailed) devolved to every man, a substantial measure of such control might, therefore, be exercised by the good longshoreman. Indeed, and because of the experience, skills, and innovative talents which he brought to the job, the good longshoreman could routinely exercise a very effective job control when in his judgment that seemed necessary. Given this and the visibility of such control as he routinely chose to exercise, the good longshoreman could also earn the reputation of being "a really good union man." In any event, however, "the good union man" was almost invariably considered a very good longshoreman. It should be noted that the men upon whom the employer could most readily rely for "a really first class stevedoring job" and a very conscientious performance of the work were men who were viewed by their fellow workers as the very best of union men and the most militant of their union brothers.

The opportunities which their work afforded these men for an effective militancy was frequently "raised to the second power" by collective and concerted "job action." Indeed, the ability and willingness to undertake disciplined and well-planned job action, i.e., work-stoppages or mini-strikes of limited scope and short duration, became the very hallmark of the San Francisco longshoremen. As a rule, job action was intended to enforce the union's understanding of a contract provision or to effect what was viewed as a sensible way of proceeding and/or a necessary safety measure. Occasionally, however, a work-stoppage clearly had "a negotiating thrust," i.e., it was undertaken in the hope that the contract might be in some manner changed. In either case, the effectiveness of such action was essentially rooted in the employers' inescapable and ongoing dependency upon the experience, initiative, innovative skills, and good will of the men.

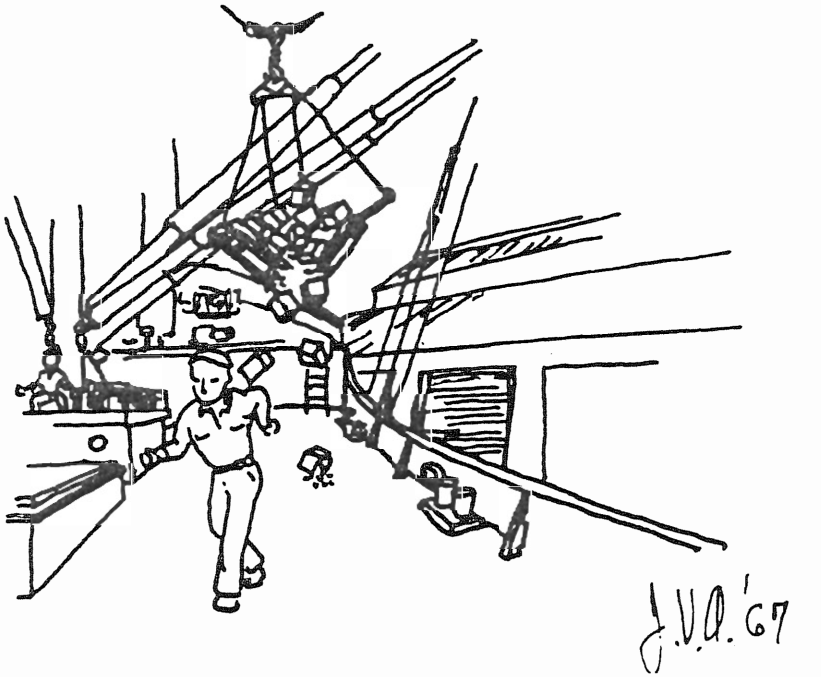

Figure 4: Accident

While the men were destined to evolve a great number of ways of collectively expressing and, therefore, experiencing their community with one another, job action was for years *the* mass, democratic form. It was also the most direct, immediate, and vibrant. As a collective expression and experience of community, job action was a veritable fountainhead of organizational élan and individual verve. By concretely reminding the men of the nature of their struggle and of the means whereby disputes and grievances might be resolved to their satisfaction, it was also destined to play a vital role in their evolution and self-education as a community. Hence, the militancy of these men was in certain fundamentally important respects the most complete expression and embodiment of their occupational satisfaction.

THE COMMUNITY AT WORK

In order to illustrate the ways in which the work performed by these men could generate such powerful "forces toward community" as have been delineated, that work may finally be depicted in some detail.

In this connection, then, it must first be noted that there was no "typical" workday. The diversity of cargo and operational circumstance was simply too great. Since, however, most jobs had a number of operational junctures, e.g., rigging the ship's gear, the discussion may focus upon those junctures in order to highlight what was most distinctive about the work.

Due to the nature of their work, all dock and hold men worked as a partner with one other man. Within the gangs, partnerships were typically maintained for years. Partnerships between hall men also had great stability. Such relationships greatly eased the work because they produced an almost instinctual familiarity with the work habits of one's partner. They also produced a certain temperamental compatibility. It followed, too, of course, that these relationships went a long way toward generating an unquestioned willingness to contribute to the performance of the work. Indeed, to concretely work *with* one's partner was an imperative embedded in the work and its social setting. It was simply axiomatic. By the same token, it was the partnership which constituted the basic sociopsychological unit through which the forces toward community were generated on the job.

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

The gang men would begin arriving at the pier sometime after 7:00 A.M.[7] They would go to a nearby cafe for coffee and often for breakfast. Meanwhile, the gang bosses would get their hatch assignments from their immediate superior, the ship "walking boss."[8] The walking boss or "walker" would also inform the gang bosses as to the nature of the cargoes, their place of stow, of any unusual circumstances, and the number of days that the job was expected to last. Each gang boss would in turn pass such information on to the men of his gang, again over morning coffee or breakfast. About that time, the hall men (who at 6:30 A.M. had begun to be dispatched to the gangs and to the ship or dock walkers) began to drift in. Greetings were widely exchanged. Conversations were begun. Others were resumed. There was a lot of catching up to do.

Towards 7:45 A.M., the men began to move toward the pier

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

As the shipboard men streamed onto the stringer of the dock, the dock men for the gangs were raising the doors of the cargo shed along the length of the vessel. They then proceeded to locate and ready the stevedore gear and dock equipment which would be required. Having cleared their immediate work area of any debris and having constructed a suitable seat (or "house") for themselves, they would presently stand ready to secure the "save-all" (i.e., a cargo net which is slung between the dock and a vessel so as to prevent a dock man or any spilled cargo from falling into the water). Meanwhile, and on the basis of the information given them by the clerk with whom they would be working, the other dock workers were "setting up" for the palletizing and de-palletizing of cargo.

Having ascended the gangway, the shipboard men moved to their respective hatches via the inshore fore-and-aft passageway on the weather deck. The members of each gang then proceeded to rig the ship's gear which they would be using. Essentially, this consisted of "spotting" or positioning the two cargo booms through the use of wire rope preventers and rope guys. With the assistance of the dock men—whose position allowed them a better sighting—the inshore or yard boom was spotted over the dock. As a rule, the offshore boom or midship boom was spotted just offshore the hatch. To facilitate the performance of this work, half of the holdmen took responsibility for rigging the yard boom, while the other half rigged the midship. Except when operational circumstances might dictate otherwise, this "inshore" and "offshore" division of the holdmen would continue throughout the job.

Each of the booms was serviced by an independently operated winch. By means of these winches, the wire ropes or "falls" which passed through the block at the top end of each boom might be independently lowered or hoisted. Given this arrangement and the spotting of the booms, the ship's cargo hook or "blacksmith" could be travelled between the dock and the hold and vice versa, once it had been shackled into the free end of both the yard and midship falls. With the blacksmith so shackled, the gear stood fully rigged, and with the gear rigged, and the save-all secured, the hatch tarp would be removed and stowed. The hatch boards and strongbacks (or "pontoons") would then be removed and safely stowed either on the offshore weather deck or on the dock, and having "uncovered" the hatch, the holdmen were ready to go below.

As might be supposed, the task of rigging the gear and uncovering was frequently made difficult by the presence of large deck loads. Strong winds and heavy rain, especially when combined with poor lighting at night, would also add to the difficulties. Such circumstances could also make the rigging of a rain tent over the hatch both difficult and dangerous. In any event, however, the men took pride in being prepared to go below in short order.

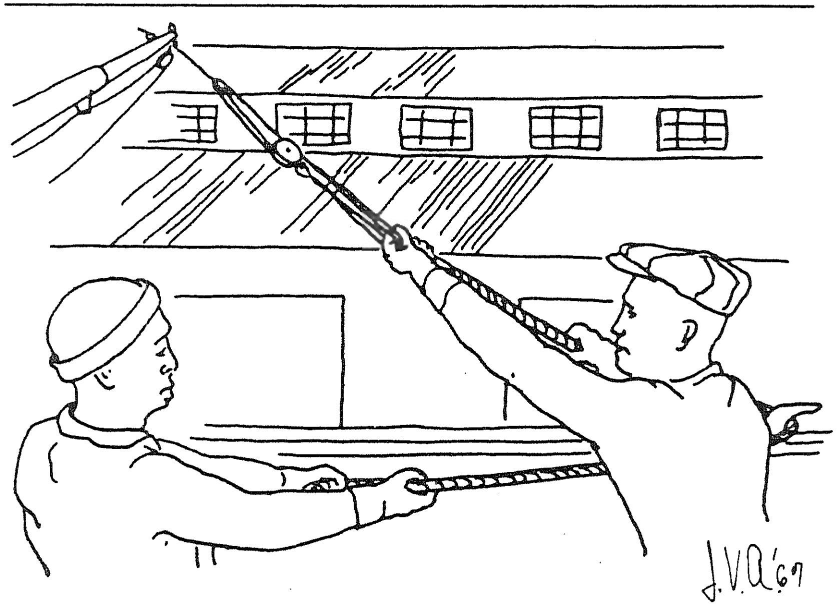

Figure 5: Rigging Gear

With the hatch uncovered and the hold men ready to go below, the dock men would secure the appropriate stevedore gear (e.g., a bar-bridle, chine hooks, a cargo net or sling) to the blacksmith. They would also ready such other stevedore equipment as the hold men would require (e.g., pallet boards or scows). Frequently, the cargo which was to be discharged from the shelter deck (or upper 'tween) had been loaded right up to the hatch covers. In that event, the hold men—having clambered over the hatch coaming (edge) from the weather deck so as to stand atop the cargo—began the discharge by building that cargo into loads (pallet, sling, or net) and sending those loads ashore. They continued to "dig down" until they reached the shelter deck itself. If the size of the square and the nature and stow of the cargo would permit, both the inshore and the offshore men would build such loads. Otherwise, they built one load at a time. With all other things being equal, the men would first dig around the hatch ladder leading from the weather deck to the shelter deck. This was done because walking around on top of cargo and climbing over hatch coamings is hazardous. Having cleared out the area near the ladder and having freed the ladder for use, the discharge of the remaining cargo in the "square" of the hatch, i.e., the area directly beneath the hatch covers, could go on apace.

With the square cleared of cargo, both the offshore and the inshore men began to discharge the cargo which was stowed in the "wings" of the hatch, i.e., the port and starboard portions of the hatch which are located beneath the deck above. Essentially, the task was that of moving the cargo from stow to the square so that it might be hoisted and sent ashore. The same task was posed when, as was generally the case, the forward and after end of the hatch was also located beneath the deck above.

As the men moved into the wings, an important skill almost always came into play. This was the construction of a safe and suitable flooring over which the cargo might thus be moved. Decisions as to which available cargo-moving devices could best be used would also be made. These decisions would in large measure depend upon the nature of the cargo and its stow.

Once finished with the cargo to be discharged from the shelter deck, a loading operation might commence. As a rule, however, the men would again uncover to begin the discharge of cargoes from the lower 'tween deck. On occasion, this would require a rerigging of the gear. If, as was usually the case, there was cargo for other ports remaining on the shelter deck and if that cargo was at some point stowed close to the square, the uncovering could at that point be especially dangerous simply because the men would have to work in tight quarters. Since many a man had fallen from one deck to another while

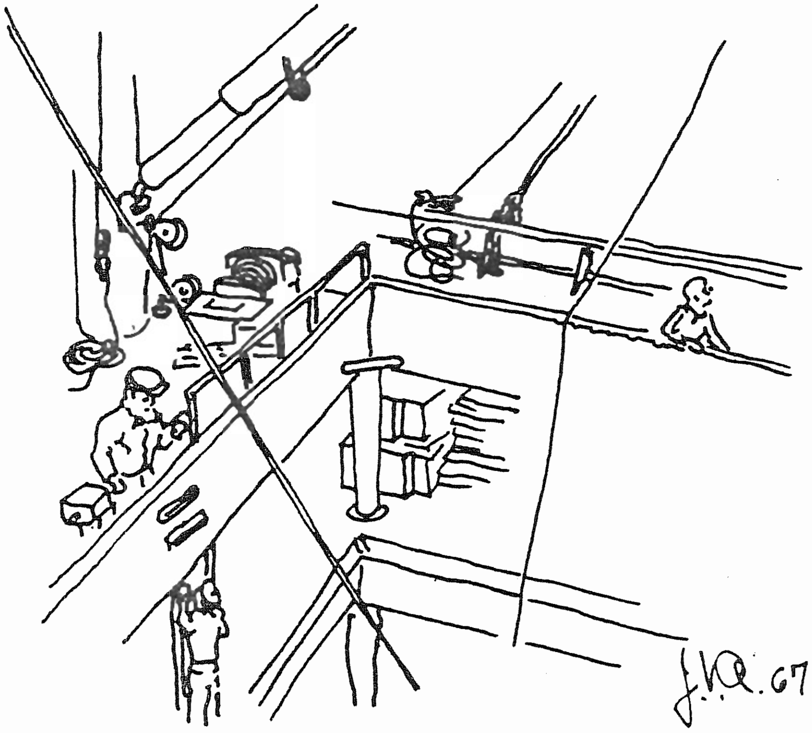

Figure 6: Man on the Ladder

uncovering, there was strong insistence upon a "three-foot hatch space" rule, i.e., the men insisted upon having three feet of clear space between the cargo remaining on the deck and the hatch boards which were being removed. An insistence upon hatch space also reduced the chances of cargo falling upon the men from a deck above where they were working.

The operational circumstances encountered in the lower 'tween deck would be a variation of those which have been pictured for the shelter deck. So, also, would the subsequent uncovering and discharge of the "lower hold" be much like that just described. On the other hand, the work of the winch drivers, who, from the weather deck (or above it) controlled the movement of the cargo hook and loads between the hold and the dock, became increasingly demanding as the holdmen descended into the vessel.

On most vessels, the descent of the holdmen into the hatches aft of the midship house (superstructure) continued beyond the

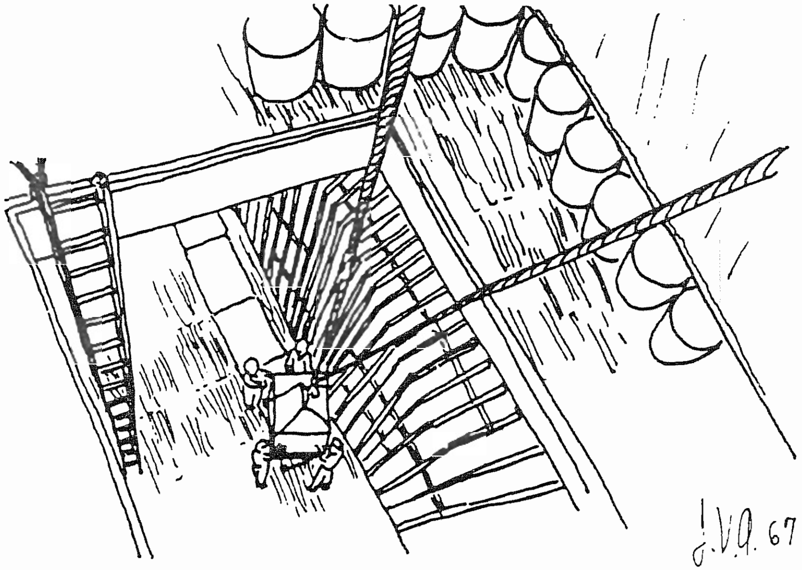

Figure 7: Teamwork

lower hold into an offshore and inshore "deep tank." Since access to these tanks, which were separated from one another by the "alley" of the propeller shaft ("shaft alley"), was quite restricted, the winch driver's skill became extremely important as loads were hoisted and lowered through the tank tops.

Great responsibility always rested with the winch drivers simply because each move of the cargo hook might endanger one or more other men. This was especially true of its movement in the hold. Considerable experience and skill was also required because there were different types of winches and a great number of differing designs. To a lesser degree, this was also true of the standing gear of the vessels. Then, too, the state of repair and general condition of the winches and gear varied tremendously. Given such varying circumstances, the most demanding of situations occurred when the winch driver, because of the configuration of the hold and the location of the winch controls, could not see the holdmen or the area in which they were working. When the winch driver was for these reasons driving "blind," he relied upon the signals and instructions of a "hatch tender" who had positioned himself so that he could see the operation and the signals of the holdmen. With these conditions set out, some detail as to the variety of cargo which might be encountered should next be offered.

To begin with, there was usually a considerable amount of "general freight," i.e., all sorts of differing sized crates and packages of varying weights shipped by small manufacturers, firms, or individuals. Larger crated shipments of such variously sized and weighted items as machines and machine parts, furniture, glassware, dishes and ceramics, sports equipment, clothing, and relatively exotic or "speciality" food products were frequently encountered. Still larger and variously packaged shipments of all sorts of food–from 25 pound boxes of Norwegian sardines through 100 pound cartons of New Zealand frozen meat to 750 pound barrels of Greek olives–were common. So, too, were shipments of wines, beer, liquor, cheeses, teas, cocoanut and tapioca, tropical fruits, candy, cookies, and speciality desserts. Very large shipments of a wide variety of canned goods were almost inevitable. A host of industrial products–from ingots of copper, through sheet and bar steel, pipe and rails, to steel pellets, corrugated metals, and fencing–were standard. The number of sacked or bagged goods was legend: cement, flour, wheat, barley, coffee, and all sorts of nuts and dried fruit. Then, too, there were the offensive sacked cargoes which were worked at a penalty rate of pay, e.g., animal bones and meat scraps, blood and bone meal, fish meal, coal, lime, phosphates and nitrates, lamp black and soda ash. Baled goods were also common–cotton, rubber, rags, gunnies, jute, pulp and paper. Deck loads of lumber and/or logs, of creosoted pilings, utility poles, or railway ties, of farm and construction equipment and all sorts of commercial vehicles were almost always worked.

While this listing might be multiplied many times, the task was always the same: To move the cargo to or from the dock and to or from its place of stow. To effect the first of these movements, a wide variety of pallet boards, scows, nets, slings, bridles, and hooks were used (see Figures 1, 2, 4, and 8). For

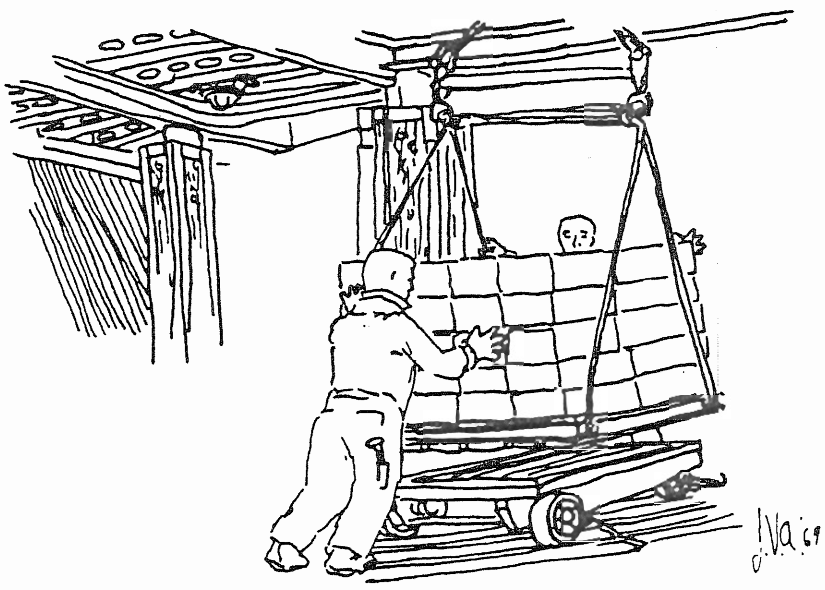

Figure 8: Landing a Load

the movement of cargo to and from stow, flooring of some sort was frequently necessary. To that end, the holdmen might order a variety of heavily constructed skids, ramps, or "runways" from the dock. It was often necessary, however, to construct a floor from dunnage and plyboard. Once there was flooring, a four-wheeled hand truck, upon which pallet loads could be landed or built, was often used to traverse the distance between the square and the place of stow. On occasion, a device called a gravity roller might instead be used. This device—which may be described as a rectangular steel frame (of approximately 1′ x 12′ dimensions) between whose longer sides has been fixed a number of parallel steel rollers—could be rolled across the flooring with a pallet of cargo having been placed on top of it. On the other hand, in an area where the construction of flooring would be difficult or impossible, a gravity roller might be turned "face-up" and elevated so as to span that area, secured in place, and the cargo thereafter rolled across its face piece-by-piece.

For many years, sacked goods were simply "belly-packed" between the square and the place of stow. When discharging, this meant that each holdman would in turn remove a sack from stow and carry it to the square where a load would be built and then sent ashore. This circle was reversed when loading.

When it came to moving heavy cargo, the use of a number of wooden rollers (some 6″ in diameter and 3′ long) which could be placed beneath the cargo was quite general. With the rollers in place, the cargo might be "man-handled" to or from the square. For still heavier cargo, slings and such block and tackle set-ups as might be required, together with the motive power of the ship's gear itself, were routinely employed. When baled cargo such as hemp or sisal could be directly discharged from stow by the use of hooks, the ship's gear was again used for motive power. This was also true of the discharge of such sacked goods as might be built into sling loads near their place of stow, dragged to the square, and thereafter hoisted to the dock, e.g., coffee (see Figure 1).

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

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

To effect a tight and economic stow, the holdmen frequently had to work within the constraints of the sheer and declivity of the deck. When odd-sized and variously weighted cargo was being handled, "an eye for the work," i.e., the ability to visually judge where a particular piece of cargo might best be fitted into the stow so as to safely and properly maintain its "face" while following the stowage plan, became particularly important. The use of dunnage as a means of preventing shifting was always important, too, but that was especially so as the men proceeded "to go up with the cargo," i.e., to stack cargo atop cargo. As the final step in securing an economic stow, the men would request the lightest of the available cargoes for "topping off," the piece-by-piece, hand-handled stowing of cargo just beneath the decking above. The final end: "A proper stow you could take a picture of."

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

Once the shelter deck had been loaded and covered up, the men went on to load and secure the deck cargoes. As a rule, these were the largest, if not the heaviest of cargoes simply because the weather deck and/or its hatch covers offered the largest area of open deck and because the cargo could be directly landed in stow.

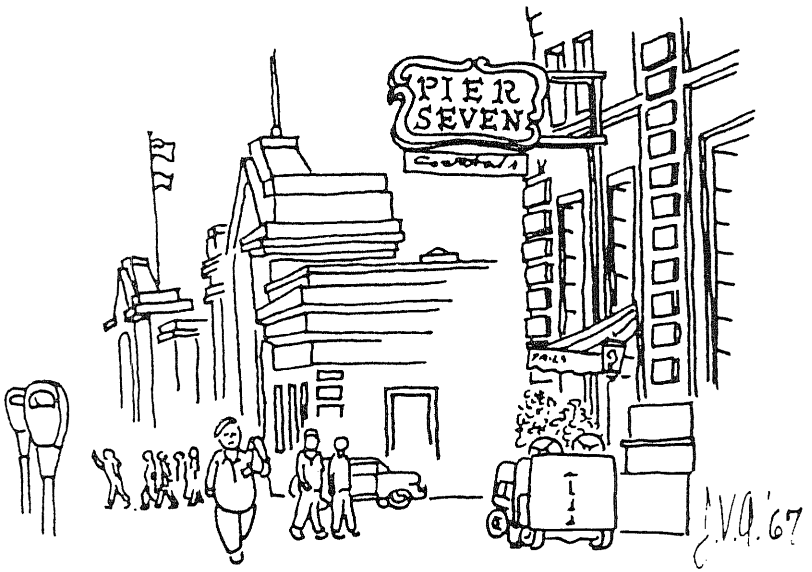

Figure 9: Five O'Clock

Having finished with the deck cargoes, the men would send the water can ashore, together with such tools as they had been using. The dock men having removed the stevedore gear from the cargo hook, the save-all would be let go and sent ashore. The men would then "wing in the gear," i.e., let go the preventers and guys and haul in the boom until they were both standing above the hatch. With that, they headed for the gangway.

Frequently, as many as ten gangs (of some sixteen to twenty men each), plus the necessary dock workers, would work a general cargo vessel. With a proper allocation of the shipboard men, all of the hatches would as a rule be finished about the same time. As the last of the gangs finished up, tugs would be positioned against the vessel. The pilot who would take the vessel through the Golden Gate and into the open sea would appear on the bridge. By then, linesmen, too, would have stationed themselves abreast the bits to which the mooring lines had been made fast.

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

NOTES

1. These men are members of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, Local 10. Because the offices and the hiring hall of the local are located at Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco, they will be referred to as "San Francisco" longshoremen. However, the geographic jurisdiction of the local extends throughout the San Francisco Bay region, i.e., from the Port of Redwood City in the south to the Port of Benecia in the north, and therefore includes the ports of Alameda, Oakland, and Richmond. At the present time, approximately 50% of the men live in San Francisco or on the San Francisco Peninsula. The remainder live in the "East Bay"