

THE GOVERNMENT
AND MARITIME LABOR

1: *Up to the 1915 Seamen's Act*

IN SHARP contradistinction to the shipowners, who from the very beginning were favored and coddled by their government, maritime labor had to make its own way, first in the face of a government policy which locked it into a semi-serf strait-jacket of Admiralty Law and then indifferently left it to its fate, and later in the face of a constantly increasing governmental repression and regimentation. The position of seamen was one of involuntary servitude, not only in the early days of U.S. independence, but, by an extraordinary anachronism, right up to 1915. The civil code which freed men from chattel slavery was legally held not to apply to seamen. Because they were so completely stymied in their economic struggles by their uniquely unfavorable legal situation, the seamen in this early period had to wage their struggle first in the political field, even to gain the liberty to begin their economic struggles. (This situation has particular interest at the present moment because, by a special conjuncture of events, seamen today are again in the position, on a higher historical plane, of having to concentrate their principal struggle in the political field.) Finally, as we shall later show, the government had to revise its entire hands-off policy. As the executive committee of the ruling class, which, as we have already seen, is often more farsighted than the bosses of any particular industry, it had to intervene to free seamen from their special disadvantages (not unlike the way it had long before manumitted the Negroes), in order to create the neces-

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sary preconditions for the expansion of the U.S. merchant marine. Once it had been forced by its own imperialist needs to "free" the seamen, however, it found that it had sown dragon's teeth: it had, very shortly after, to intervene again on the opposite tack, to crush into control the powerful labor forces it had released.

DURING THE immediately post-colonial period, England was the dominant sea-power of the world. And the American shipowners prompted their government to attempt no legal or political innovations in the maritime field: the legal code for the shipping industry was patterned after British customs and practices and is known as the Admiralty Law. It treated all problems in the industry, including employer-employee relations.

The attitude prevalent in those earliest days was well summed up many years later by the Dean of American Admiralty Law, Robert Benedict, in 1889:

It was solemnly laid down as a principle in the old law books that those who have gone to sea "were reckoned neither among the living nor among the dead." The Admiralty looks after the interests of these poor souls. The Chief Justice of the United States described the Admiralty as follows: "The Admiralty may be styled not improperly the human Providence, which watches over the rights and interests of those 'who go down to the sea in ships, and do business in great waters'."

In recognition of the peculiar status of seamen, modern maritime nations have regarded them as "wards of Admiralty," incapable of making a freeman's contract, and deserving special care from their guardian, the state. This care comprises: government hospital service; care and return of seamen stranded abroad; supervision of terms of seamen's contract—of signing on or jumping off under it; regulations of most of the details of the seaman's relations with the master of the vessel.

In his richly documented book, *The Sailors Union of the Pacific*, Paul S. Taylor, writing of the period after 1830, notes:

In fact, with the exception of the rate of wages, the life of the sailor from the moment of signing articles to the time of paying off has always been regulated by law to the minutest detail. Only the power to self-help and self-protection has been denied. Workmen ashore have long been free to quit work, thereby incurring the liability of a civil suit for damages for breach of contract, but no criminal action, for that would smack of involuntary servitude. On the other hand, the very word "deserter" applied to the sailor who quits his ship implies a different status.

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Conditions of the period were especially barbarous. And just as American owners and shipbuilders in competition with the British often outdid them in construction and operation of fast ships, so the Americans were able to find ways to get more work out of their sailors. Not only were rations no better than the miserable standard of other nationalities, but American ships carried fewer men. Furthermore, American shipowners thought up special Yankee-shrewd quirks: U.S. vessels were often, for instance, "temperance ships." What this pious phrase in reality covered was that the shipowners simply took advantage of the American temperance movement of that time to cut out the grog ration and with it—what was much more important—the corresponding rest-period, with its chance to get warm. This meant far more than the grog itself to a sailor on six-hour watch in driving rain and snow.* It was a pretty hungry beach where a sailor would ship in a Yankee ship. Crews were usually shanghaied.

How backward maritime conditions remained can be gathered from the fact that only as late as 1872 was some slight beginning made in legislation protecting sailors from superexploitation, and even then on a very small scale. The Shipping Commissioner's Act of that year, which established shipping commission offices and codified existing laws, struck at shanghaiing by requiring that only sober men could sign articles before a U.S. Shipping Commissioner. Crimping was so rampant that even the shipowners protested. In 1879 they published in the *San Francisco Bulletin* a resolution against paying "blood money" to crimps, those blood-sucking boarding-house keepers who, by getting sailors in debt to them, were able in large measure to control the maritime labor supply, and who not only robbed sailors but collected tribute from the shipowners:

It is extremely difficult to procure convictions for the offenses committed by these runners as they do not only swear each other clear but oftentimes so manipulate the officers of ships, by the use of money or by threats, that they will not prosecute. . . . The commerce of the port is at their mercy. A crew cannot be shipped without their consent, and ships are frequently compelled to lay in the stream for days and weeks without crews on account of the captain's having in some manner incurred the displeasure of these pests.

*In this connection, see Dana: *Two Years before the Mast*. Dana got his experience in a tough school, the Yankee hide-carrying trade from California in the 1830's.

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Half-hearted attempts were made to control these evils: the Dingley Act of 1884, for example, abolished advance wages, prohibited allotments to anyone except wife, mother, or other relative. But the law was violated and ships held up. And in 1886 the shipowners and the crimps united to have an act passed authorizing payment of allotment not exceeding ten dollars for each month of the contemplated voyage to an "original creditor for any just debt for board or clothing."

The conditions of seamen are attested by the demands made by the early organizations which they attempted to set up. One of the sorest grievances was the conditions in the focsles of American ships. Often the shipowners were so hungry for profits that cargo was stowed into every available space, and such a thing as a bunk for a man to sleep in was unheard of. If he could find a space to put his sea-chest he might be able to sleep there too. It was only after a long and bitter struggle that the Coast Seamen's Union on the Pacific Coast forced the operators of coastal vessels to build mess rooms for sailors to eat in.

Though many short-lived attempts had been made earlier, the first maritime union that was able to last was the Coast Seamen's Union, founded in 1885 by a group of Utopian Socialists, principally Haskell and von Hoffmeyer. When Andrew Furuseth became secretary in 1887, the union launched a serious legislative struggle. He issued the first number of the *Coast Seamen's Journal*, and under his guidance the sailors began to learn how to take advantage of the laws of 1874. Furuseth, whose trade-union vision was as broad as his methods were practical, envisaged a world-wide seamen's union transcending national boundaries, and tried to implement his ideas when, with Waterhouse and Crayle, he was sent as a delegate to the Convention of the British Seamen's Union at Glasgow, and visited also Atlantic, Lake, and Gulf ports.

In 1891, under Furuseth's guidance, the Coast Seamen's Union was amalgamated with the recently formed Steamshipmen's Union to found the Sailors Union of the Pacific; and in 1892, the process was completed by the formation of the National Seamen's Union.

Though the unions were originally formed primarily to push for wage increases, they soon found that the special legislation discriminating against seamen blocked all successful action on the economic field, and had to turn their principal fire against the laws themselves. Thus, though a law of 1874 amended the Shipping Commissioner's Act to exempt coastwise and lake-going trade from its provisions—the net effect of which was to abolish the

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penalty for desertion in these maritime branches—new legislation of 1890 reversed this exemption. It provided that if a seaman in the coastwise trade shipped in the presence of a shipping commissioner, he was subject to the punitive clauses of the act of 1872, and yet was denied the privileges and advantages secured to him under that same act. Further penalties were slapped on: 1) one day's pay docked for each hour's tardiness; 2) arrest by master without warrant; 3) imprisonment for desertion; 4) \$10 a day fine for harboring a deserter. It was hard uphill work for the new unions fighting against the laws themselves. Momentary gains were constantly being offset by savage counter-attacks.

The Maguire Bill of 1895, called "the seamen's own bill," in effect repealed the Act of 1890, abolishing imprisonment for desertion in the coastwise trade and the allotment to relatives or an "original creditor"; and the Dingley Amendment exempted seamen's clothes from attachment under penalty of fine. But in a notoriously reactionary decision of 1897, the Supreme Court ransacked history to try to force seamen back into their condition of involuntary servitude: it dug into its dusty legal attic to cite the laws of the Rhodians, the *Consolato del Mare*, the Judgments of Oleron, and the Laws of Wisbury—all to prove that

from the oldest historical period, the contract of the sailor has been treated as an exceptional one, involving to a certain extent the surrender of his personal liberty during the life of the contract.

But the unions hammered on. In 1898, they obtained the passage of the White Act. Its principal features were: 1) the abolition of imprisonment for desertion in a U.S. port; 2) the reduction from three to one month imprisonment for desertion in foreign ports, and that not mandatory but at the discretion of the judge; 3) one month's pay allotment to "original creditor"; 4) abolition of corporal punishment; 5) provision whereby a majority of a crew, with the concurrence of an officer, might demand a survey of an unseaworthy vessel; 6) an improved scale of rations. Nothing could show so baldly how horribly backward were seamen's conditions than the fact that it was not until the threshold of the present century that flogging was abolished by law.

These were, however, usually only paper gains, since the government itself made no effort to enforce the law. It was only under the unremitting mass pressure of the unions themselves—while men continued to be jailed and flogged with impunity—that these theoretical gains gradually became fact, in a long series of bitter struggles.

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But even so, all these were only half-measures. The government's indifferent hands-off policy had produced an anachronism whereby the maritime industry was historically way out of line with all industry ashore. Pushed on the one hand by the increasingly powerful and militant unions, and on the other by the historic need of raising its merchant marine to the level demanded by its imperialist expansion, the government was finally faced with the inescapable necessity of undertaking a thorough overhauling of its entire policy toward maritime labor.

2: 1915-1921: *Paternalism (Fake)*

THE 1915 *Seamen's Act*, adopted only after 30 years' struggle by organized seamen to emerge from involuntary servitude into the status of free men, marked the culmination of a series of half-hearted liberative measures in a conscious turn of government policy toward a comprehensive program. This policy was based still on a false hope that its merchant marine could self-supportingly compete with foreign rivals. The government's main attention was elsewhere: on the inland home-front. European war had boomed U.S. industry; a growing labor movement was demanding concessions. Men preferred shore-side work to the much worse conditions aboard ships. Under labor pressure, it was possible to pass liberal legislation. Furuseth was pounding away in Washington. The whole conjuncture—a general labor upsurge, a maritime labor shortage, Furuseth's patient persistent persuasions—combined to convince the U.S. capitalist government that Furuseth's way was best—and cheapest. It hoped, through the *Seamen's Act*, both to create an international labor market and to satisfy the demands of Furuseth's sailors. Furuseth, dreaming of a genuinely international union of all seamen with equal conditions under all flags, thought that the seamen's ambitions and the government's imperialist aims could find a common ground. The succeeding 25 years have tragically proved that nothing could have been farther from the truth.

U.S. imperialism's policy had all the appearance of paternalism. Its desire to create a free maritime labor market was actually of great benefit to all seamen, in that it freed them to fight for greater gains. But the entry of the U.S. into the first imperialist war prevented realization of the union's program and exposed the falsity of the theory on which the Act was

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based. Furuseth, taken in by the government's "paternalism," supported the imperialist war (as did the labor leaders of every country except the Russian Bolsheviks and scattered little groups elsewhere). It was a high price the seamen paid for this show of government friendship. Because at the war's end, when the conditions which had necessitated the seamen's support no longer existed, the "paternalistic" U.S. government rewarded the unions for their war-time service by using its full power, through its agency, the U.S. Shipping Board, to smash them in the tragic 1921 strike.

BY 1915 the seamen's movement had grown so strong and so much attention had been centered on the intolerable conditions of seamen that some action was plainly on the order of the day. War in Europe having produced a general upswing in U.S. shoreside industry, a revived labor movement was driving for concessions. Thus with increased shoreside employment, it was hard to get native-born workers into coastal and inter-coastal ships under the much worse conditions there prevailing. Because of the restrictive laws up to that time, seamen were forced to direct their attention to Washington—the more hopefully inasmuch as, under pressure of the general labor upsurge, it was proving possible to pass liberal legislation: the anti-monopoly Clayton Act; an act exempting labor unions from all anti-trust laws; the eight-hour day for railwaymen. Andrew Furuseth kept hammering away in Washington on the specific idea that the U.S. maritime industry could afford higher wages than its foreign competitors.

The time was ripe, for at any given period, the government's attitude to maritime industry in general and maritime labor in particular is only a reflection of its general situation and perspective, a specific application of its general national and international aims to this specific key industry. In particular, the American employing class, though it had protected its coastal commerce from foreign competition, could no longer find adequate labor supply therefor.

And the man was there. Andrew Furuseth, pleading the case for seamen's rights in the corridors of Congress, became a popular figure. He was a man who impressed even the most cynical politicians with his sincerity. He drew inspiration from the cause of seamen's freedom and did not lose contact with the daily struggles that were being fought in the ships and courts and jails of every port in the world. He fired the cause of the seamen with an

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imagination that lifted it from the level of the picket lines and the law courts to the higher plane of an international movement for seamen's independence. A mind of such vision was rare in Washington. Furuseth's persistence and the force of his arguments for free and independent seamen, backed by the organized strength of the International Seamen's Union of America, were responsible for all the special beneficial features of the 1915 Seamen's Act. Because of the peculiar problems presented to American capitalism at that time by the need for a merchant marine and a free labor market to draw from for its personnel, Furuseth was able to suggest a plan which had some appeal to the more far-sighted representatives of the capitalist class.

American capital's real purpose behind the Seamen's Act is clear in the provisions relating to other governments and seamen under foreign flags. The Act abrogated all treaties with other countries. As we have seen (pp. 12-13), these provisions were designed to create the abundant labor supply and an open market which U.S. imperialism wanted for its merchant marine. Welfare provisions specified conditions that would make American vessels more attractive to seamen. Minimum foecle space was increased from 72 to 120 cubic feet for each man, with an additional proviso for hospital space and washrooms. Taylor, in his *History of the Sailors Union of the Pacific*, tells how Furuseth had to bring a model of the cramped quarters in which seamen lived before a Congressional committee in order to get just a little breathing space and somewhere for a sailor to hang his clothes and wash his face. The daily food ration was also increased. Instead of one ounce of butter a day, sailors were entitled to two under the new law. And they were allowed five quarts of water a day instead of the four previously due them. In port, work was limited to nine hours. At sea, sailors on deck had to be divided into two watches. The black-gang in the engine room was divided into three watches. The three watches at sea meant a big gain because it limited the day to eight hours in a spread of twenty-four. But this only legalized an established practice, and after the law was passed the firemen and coal-passers had to dump ashes on their watch below, the same as before. The other gains seem small today but they were important in the lives of seamen then. Allotments to an "original creditor" were abolished completely, thus dealing another blow to the crimps, who by this time, with the rise of the seamen's union, were losing their hold on the industry.

The greatest gain which the new law finally granted was aboli-

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tion of imprisonment for desertion. And teeth were put in the older law against corporal punishment. The vessel or owner, as well as the master, was made liable for failure to surrender an officer guilty of flogging members of the crew. If the guilty officer escaped, the ship and owners were similarly held liable.

In the form of safety regulations Furuseth managed to get a few measures into the Act which benefited seamen and facilitated the union organizing drive. The manning scale was fixed on passenger vessels: it was based upon the number of passengers and life-boats carried. Passenger ships in ocean routes more than twenty miles off-shore were prohibited from carrying more passengers than life-saving equipment was adequate for. Also under the new law seamen got the right to demand a survey in foreign ports to determine the unseaworthiness of a vessel, and to present their demand independent of the ship's officers. Such provisions of the law are a commentary on the state of the U.S. merchant service at that time. Officers afraid for their jobs could not be trusted even to complain about unseaworthiness of the ships on which they were sailing. (They still cannot be trusted. Their experiences with U.S. steamboat inspectors have had something to do with this. The local inspectors in most instances are simply creatures of the shipowners, hence do not enforce the law even when complaints are made.)

In order to increase safety at sea, 65% of the deck department had to be able seamen. This serves as an argument on the side of the unions when scabs are run on to the ships during strikes. But it has never been much real protection. The government has freely issued able seamen's papers to scabs who had never seen a ship before.

Seamen of course could not hope to get wage increases through legislation. But they did manage to get free from the last vestiges of serfdom. Legally the sailor became a free man. But he is still considered a special ward of the government even to this day. Under the U.S. Public Health Service, marine hospitals are provided for the care and treatment of sailors. But the seamen long ago began paying for this "service" out of the small wages they got. In 1870 a law regulating the amount sailors had to pay to help build these hospitals was passed:

The customs officers of the several ports of the United States shall assess and collect from the masters or owners of every vessel of the U.S. engaging in the foreign or coasting trade, the sum of 40c per month for each and every officer and seaman who has

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been employed on said vessel since last return of hospital dues, which sum the master or owner is authorized to collect or retain out of the wages of said officers and seamen.

This sum was later increased. Thus, in every instance the seaman has always had to pay for whatever "favors" he gets, and on top of this he is always being reminded of his obligations. Only after seamen had already begun to free themselves from the grip of crimping agencies, were laws passed against the loan-sharks and landlords. A sailor's clothes cannot be held for rent if he gets a job and is ready to sail.

For every "favor" seamen were granted under the government's 1915 policy, a penalty for misconduct was specified. It was made illegal to throw a sailor in jail for deserting his ship. But he was penalized "by forfeiture of all or any part of the clothes or effects he leaves on board and of all or any part of the wages or emoluments which he has then earned." This penalty is in effect to the present day. What other industrial worker has to forfeit the wages he has earned for leaving a job he doesn't like? For slight disobedience at sea—and the degree of "slightness" was left to the discretion of the master—a seaman could be placed in irons and four days' pay was taken from him. But for "continued wilful disobedience": bread and water with full rations every five days; logged twelve days' pay for every twelve hours of disobedience; imprisonment for not more than three months. And if a sailor actually had the audacity to defend himself against a provocative mate or skipper: two years' imprisonment. Anxious as the government was to enact legislation which would create a free labor market, it was also careful to take precautions against labor's independent strength.

But the Seamen's Act of 1915 was a far cry from the Supreme Court decision rendered in 1879 which declared that in U.S. law the "provision against involuntary servitude was never meant to apply to their [seamen's] contracts." By casting the seaman in the role of a helpless person, incapable of looking after his own welfare, the main provisions of the Act gave the government an aspect of paternalism. For a few years most seamen actually got the impression that they were special charges of the government and that the fatherly old man with the whiskers was standing just behind them to see that no harm befell them.

Andrew Furuseth described the passage of the Seamen's Act as the "Dawn of a New Day." But he well understood that the New Day itself would have to be made by the union. The legislative

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fight had succeeded in removing the most restrictive legal weapons that the shipowners had used for so many years against seamen. The Seamen's Act made conditions for further struggle on the economic field more favorable. That was all. Furuseth explained this very carefully and even appeared a little worried that seamen would place too much confidence in the legislation. The seamen's union had managed to crawl out from under the burden of the old laws. Having accomplished that, Furuseth urged the movement to begin its march forward into the New Day:

The seamen's law, Section 7, gives all seamen in American ports the right to quit work at will. You will lose what money you have coming to you, that is true. What are you willing to do to get rid of the shipowners' office here and elsewhere ["here and elsewhere" applies to America and all other maritime nations]? If you are not willing to do that much you will never get rid of those shipping offices.

Furuseth spoke to and for all the seamen of the world. He knew every angle of the Seamen's Act and how to use it for organizational purposes. He told the seamen that he had been careful to insert certain sections, so that—

You need not lose the money, however, because Section 2 of the Seamen's Act provides that you shall be divided into at least two watches, to be on deck alternately or successively. It further says that when this is not done (where men on day work are carried) the contract is broken, and you are entitled to your discharge and the money you have earned. . . . When they begin to keep the law about the watches and you cannot get your money in that way, we have another section in the Seamen's Act which gives you one half the wages due to you in any port (not oftener than after each 5th day). This section is section 4. Of course you will lose some of your wages now and then in this fight, but, if you are not willing to do this, then you prefer serfdom to freedom, then for you there is no help.*

All these plans for extending the organizational gains of the union were directed against the shipowners. Furuseth did not learn until much later that the government is "an instrument in the hands of predatory interests." His plans were interrupted by the entry of American imperialism into World War I. The problems presented by the war forced the government to improvise hastily a new policy for its merchant service. It had no time to work out a long-term program. It was forced to deal quickly with the problems of the maritime industry in all their aspects.

Only on the eve of American entry into World War I did the employing class in this country wake up to the realization of the

*Taylor: *History of the Sailors Union of the Pacific*.

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fact that its place in the world scheme of things could not be insured except through careful organization of its own merchant marine with a powerful navy to guard the sea routes over which its traffic with foreign markets flows. And even then it understood this only as an exceptional principle applicable to the special conditions of "war-time emergency." But it abandoned for all time any idea of building its own merchant service at the expense of its competitors by fostering favorable conditions for a free labor market in the international arena.

The war-time agency entrusted with the organization of a U.S. merchant service was the United States Shipping Board. The emergency fleet which the government constructed, it manned through its own hiring halls. By this method, after the war, when a large part of the fleet was tied up, the government was able to smash the seamen's union.

In July 1917 the Shipping Board established the Sea Service Bureau, which operated hiring halls in 21 American ports. While the war rush was on, with shipping booming and sailors at a premium, the International Seamen's Union operated in cooperation with the Shipping Board. But this "cooperation" was a one-sided affair. The Shipping Board made various rulings concerning wages, hours, and conditions of work, for men employed on Shipping Board vessels. While the war lasted, the effect of these rulings was to keep wages up, though they never reached a figure comparable to those of workers in other industries. The basic wage for able seamen was fixed at \$85 per month under the three-watch system. Marine firemen received \$90. In some instances the union was able to get a bit more.

In dealing with the question of personnel for its emergency fleet the government took what was ready at hand. The success Furuseth had had in the corridors of Congress impressed him with the kindly features of the government. The struggle for improvement of seamen's conditions seemed to him now primarily one for economic concessions to be wrested from the shipowners. He thought the government, by giving seamen a little freedom to conduct that struggle, had proved that it favored the sailor. At least the government had just given the sailor a break. Furuseth was completely taken in by the "paternalism" of the Seamen's Act. This had been his great contribution to the seamen's movement. And had it not been for the war, he believed, a great new day would be dawning for the sailor throughout the world. But the war presented problems Furuseth could not have foreseen and the consequences of

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which he could not anticipate. The government demanded the cooperation of the union. Although he had not favored American entry into the war, Furuseth thought these dark war days would pass, and for the period of crisis it was best to cooperate with the government in its war effort. Everything was sacrificed for the government's plans: the right to strike; even the right to collective bargaining. "During the entire period there was not a single strike on either vessel or harbor craft," gloats the Shipping Board's *Third Annual Report*. The only agreements the union asked for were "rulings" handed down by the U.S. Shipping Board. These were "various rulings concerning wages, hours, and conditions of labor for men employed on Shipping Board vessels."

Within the confines of its emergency program there were two basic considerations which the U.S. Shipping Board's personnel plan took into account. First was the need for new recruits, and these were supplied by its Sea Service Bureaus. Second, it had to get the close cooperation of the union to supply quickly the personnel already in the industry without danger of strikes. And this it got on the basis of the government's attitude of "paternalism" fostered in the period immediately preceding American entry into World War I.

Soon after the war was over, the Shipping Board showed the union-busting power of its war-time "rulings." Its Sea Service Bureaus had shipped approximately 50,000 new recruits into the industry. But as the shipping industry was among the first to suffer the general post-war depression, thousands of seamen were thrown on the beach. The government taught these seamen the real meaning of its "paternalism" by smashing the International Seamen's Union for the shipowners in the 1921 strike.

3: 1921-1934:

Union Defeat and Open Shop

THE U.S. merchant fleet, in wartime an absolute necessity to American capitalism, with peace began to appear an unnecessary adjunct, an uneconomical luxury. It being cheaper to accept the services of debtor nations. U.S. capitalism, which elsewhere was living off its World War I profits, saw in maritime the one field in which large-scale savings were possible. Its resultant policy can be summed up in one word: Retrenchment. As an inevitable corollary its labor policy became: the Open Shop. Andrew Furuseth's reformist dreams went glimmering.

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With mass unemployment rampant and growing, U.S. bosses' pre-war worries about labor shortages vanished: a vast labor market guaranteed the principal pre-condition for the government's open-shop drive. The other pre-condition had been created by the unions themselves: by having given full support to the war, and implemented it by relinquishing to government agencies their control over hiring, they had rendered themselves helpless to fight back.

In 1921, the government's U.S. Shipping Board, acting as the spearhead of the shipowners' attack, deliberately provoked and ruthlessly smashed a defensive strike called to hold the seamen's few previous gains.

After that, despite an occasional successful rear-guard action, the maritime labor movement on the whole broke into full retreat. With the ISU in decline, other new and more militant unions attempted to rise and revivify the seamen's militancy. But the seamen could not rebuild a powerful union movement by themselves. They had to await a new broad upsurge of the U.S. working class, which came in 1934.

THE SEVERE crisis precipitated in its maritime industry by the withdrawal of foreign shipping in World War I, U.S. capitalism surmounted by a colossal improvisation. But, as explained above,* it failed for some time to deduce the full logical conclusion: the historic necessity of a planned, deliberately uneconomic, frankly imperialist merchant marine. "Retrenchment" became the government's maritime watchword. Ships tied up. New vessels just off the ways went straight to the bone-yard without ever making a trip. Thousands of sailors who had been recruited through the U.S. Sea Service Bureaus were thrown on the beach with no ships to sail. Maritime unemployment started a dizzy upward spiral. Foreign seamen, encouraged to jump ship in America by conditions obtaining after passage of the Seamen's Act, found themselves stuck. Used to sailing under all flags, they suddenly found it hard to get a job on any but ships of their own nationality; they were marooned on U.S. beaches, without papers, with no ship to go to, and hounded by the immigration authorities.

Events outside maritime itself accentuated the trend. The First World War marked the final passing of the American frontier. Expansion of industry for war-time purposes had built great new

*See pp. 16-17.

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plants in every section of the country—plants for which, at the war's end, there was no use in the capitalist system of economy. As the plants closed down, the workers who had built and operated them were thrown off the job and into the ranks of the unemployed, further swelled by the demobilization of the American Expeditionary Force. Hastily the government raised immigration restrictions to prevent refugees, trying to escape Europe's post-war industrial paralysis, from adding their numbers to the American unemployed.

For Andrew Furuseth's dream of an international seamen's union that would link the sailors of all nations and fight for uniform working conditions under all flags, was only one casualty of a wave of nationalism that closed frontiers and threw up barriers. The reconstruction period in Europe brought with it new attempts to nationalize labor. Whereas earlier periods had seen the boss in every country try to restrict the emigration of labor so as to keep an adequate supply at home, his restrictions now were against the immigration of foreign workers. The post-war depression not only gave the capitalist class in every country a more than abundant labor market for its industries to draw from, but armies of unemployed to feed. America was less affected than other countries: mass unemployment was not accompanied by famine. But any worry that the American boss had had before the war about a shortage in the labor market was entirely dissipated. In 1921 the stage was set, the conditions were ripe, for the government to attack.

The first problem tackled by the boss and his government when they begin to cut corners to insure profits is always wage reductions. The post-war U.S. was no exception. The U.S. Shipping Board opened fire by decreeing, in conjunction with the private ship-owners, that the union must sign a new agreement. The proposed formula called first of all for a 15 percent wage cut. It furthermore abolished the three-watch system, thus increasing the work week from 56 hours to 84 hours. With this increase in hours, the wage cut actually amounted to over 40 percent. In addition, all overtime pay was abolished, and subsistence allowances were lowered. But this was not all. The Shipping Board denied seamen the right to have union representatives present when they signed articles for a trip or were paid off after a voyage was completed. And, with prospects of the depression deepening, the proposed contract was limited to six months, subject to termination on short notice.

Such an edict left no alternative to the International Seamen's Union except to call a strike. But what was the union's position? It had given full political support to the war. It had backed that sup-

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port up in practice by making concessions all along the line, as we have seen, to the government's demand for war-time "cooperation." It had relinquished all control over labor in the industry to government agencies such as the old U.S. Shipping Board's Sea Service Bureaus and Recruiting Service. It had relied on the paternalism of precisely the organization that was now spearheading the attack against it. And it had abandoned the only arms with which it could have waged a successful fight.

The Shipping Board, on the contrary, was prepared for the 1921 strike: as we have seen, it deliberately provoked it. Its Sea Service Bureaus shipped 15,029 officers and men to break it. "Temporary agencies were reopened on the Great Lakes on May 1 and continued to the middle of June in order to help supply engineers to the coast ports during the national marine strike," the U.S.S.B.'s *Fifth Annual Report* for the period ending June 30, 1921, frankly states. The *Seaman's Journal* of May 25, 1921, reports an incident that many men who were in that strike remember:

Admiral Benson, who will surrender the Chairmanship of the Shipping Board on July 1 to James H. Farrell, President of the **United States Steel Corporation**, has dropped his pretense of sympathy for the union. . . . He declares that he will take away from the operators all ships owned by the Board where the operators make terms with the union that do not provide for the 15 percent cut in wages which he has ordered.

As almost every steamship company in the United States is now operating one or more ships to which the Board holds title, this order by Benson is an ultimatum to shipping companies to join the fight to smash the unions or get out of the business.

Even those seamen with the blindest faith that the capitalist government was somehow being paternalistically "neutral" in the struggle between the capitalists and themselves could not fail now to see clearly the role of the government as the executive committee of the capitalist class. As if to underline the point, the Shipping Board in its *Sixth Annual Report* described itself with accuracy and frankness: "The division . . . corresponded to the industrial relations department of any of the larger private industries of the country." The report further opined that "due regard should be given to the principles adopted by the conservative employers." Andrew Furuseth was bitter. For a union policy of collaboration in support of the war, the government paid off by smashing the union. At the 1921 International Seamen's Union Convention, Furuseth charged: "The government, with its power and money, is to create, foster, and perpetuate the non-union ship, proscribing the union man." And at an-

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other time, with equal clarity: "The United States Shipping Board has become the most potent weapon in the hands of predatory interests."

In this bitter school, maritime labor learned—at least partially—two lessons of terrible importance. First, that a union in the ultimate analysis can rely only on its own strength. Whenever it gives up its independence, it becomes an easy target. It lost the 1921 strike, not because it struck, but because, before it struck, it had surrendered its arms to the enemy. Second, it learned the real nature of the capitalist state: that though that state may demagogically appear impartial, or even, in exceptional circumstances, friendly, it must and does, as the organizer of the interests of the employing class, reveal itself in moments of crisis as the spearhead of the anti-labor attack.

How these lessons are deliberately concealed by the Stalinist misleaders and applied only in a deformed, confused, and false way by the "anti-politicals," we shall examine at length in the section on the union leaderships and their policies (pp. 119ff.). But with the facts of labor's fatal policies in World War I here freshly before us, it must be insisted that these lessons are today more timely than ever before, because the union-smashing task which the U.S.S.B. began under the trying conditions of the last war, and succeeded in accomplishing only after the war was over, was precisely the same job handed the Maritime Commission 15 years later, and which it is carrying out as before—but at a much faster pace. The basic lesson has been forgotten: no sooner had the government made formal declaration of entry into World War II than the union leaderships rushed to the support of the war program. This was a political action which led very quickly to the next step. By renouncing in advance their political independence, the unions were in no position to retain their right to strike. They sacrificed their strongest weapon by pledging no strikes "for the duration." And, though the government is again intervening as the spearhead of private capital, the union misleaders are disregarding the second lesson by calling once more upon the ranks to trust the government and "cooperate with it." *These are precisely the policies that led to the disaster of 1921.* A defeat from which lessons are learned is only a temporary setback; but refusal to learn and reapply those lessons can lead only to disaster.

The 1921 strike, under this government attack, went down to bitter defeat. When the seamen returned to work it was through the open shop. For thirteen years following that strike, open-shop conditions were maintained in the maritime industry by the United

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States Shipping Board, governing as the super-personnel department of Big Business. But, having "solved" the personnel problem in the 1921 strike, the government left most remaining questions largely in the hands of the private operators. The government did not enter directly into the shipping industry during this whole period, except that it kept intact its machinery for shipping: the Sea Service Bureaus continued to operate. But even here the employers kept their own black-list, and began gradually to do their own shipping from their offices or from the docks.

The long years after the 1921 strikes were tough ones for seamen. The "paternalism" of the government wore pretty thin. Conditions on the ships steadily deteriorated. In many ships the two-watch system was the style. Often instead of having the watches stand six hours on and six off, the day was divided into three four-hour watches and two sixes, to get more work out of the crew. But however they arranged the watches, it meant that a man had to work about 90 hours a week. The quarters were cramped, often damp. It was hard to get a change of linen. And bed-bugs were common. Rations were short—eggs for breakfast once a week—and served off tin plates. For these hours of work and under these conditions the Shipping Board scale was \$62.50. But in those instances where the scale was not paid, the government did nothing to enforce it. U.S.S.B. ships became fewer and fewer as title to them was given over to the operators; companies that held title paid as low as \$50 a month. And after the 1929 depression set in, the basic wage was driven down to \$35 in some outfits.

Seamen learned in this bitter school that they would have to depend upon themselves to win any improvement in their conditions. They could expect nothing from the government. New attempts at organization were made.

The ISU, after the 1921 strike, managed to hang together, living on the funds and property and reputation it had built up before the war. Its once great leader Furuseth became a puzzled and defeated old man, spent most of his time in Washington as a lobbyist, fighting rear-guard actions against attacks by shipowners and insurance companies on certain provisions of the Jones Act which the union had succeeded in having passed by Congress in 1920. This had amended the Seamen's Act of 1915, granting seamen the right to sue at common law, with trial by jury, for injuries sustained in the course of employment. During the reaction of the post-war period the bosses were repeatedly endeavoring to take even this right away again. Furuseth, unable to understand and explain the government's

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new maritime policy, led a lone and losing fight. Because he no longer had behind his persuasions the suggestive power of a strong and rising union movement, he found sympathy, when he found it at all, only in the patronizing attitude of "practical" politicians for a kind but harmless visionary.

Yet the ISU, as an established organization, affiliated with the AFL, managed to hang on through the tough years, partly through the organizational loyalty many old-time seamen felt for it because of the early struggles. As bad as conditions were, they couldn't help comparing them with the infinitely worse conditions prior to the Seamen's Act, for which the ISU deserved full credit. Furthermore, solidarity helped: the longshoremen in Australia, for example, would not work ships coming into port with non-union crews; so the Matson Line ships running down there always called the ISU for crew replacements. But under these conditions, with a small membership and fewer jobs, the ISU gradually and inevitably fell into the hands of a bunch of conservative labor-skates, interested primarily in keeping their jobs and drawing their weekly union salary. They showed no imagination or understanding of the seamen's new problems. They lived on the pre-war speeches of Furuseth.

Among the more advanced seamen, new developments occurred. In 1923 the Industrial Workers of the World organized the Pacific Coast seamen and led a strike that tied up the coastal trade. But largely because of their principled opposition against signing contracts with the boss, and partly through an ill-advised political strike for the freedom of Tom Mooney, plus the arrest and imprisonment of many of the leaders under the California Criminal Syndicalism Law, the gains they made were lost and the organization declined.

About 1929 the Stalinists began to make their force felt in the industry. Seamen, by virtue of their intolerable working conditions, the nature of their calling (which isolates them from the "respectable" sections of society), and their knowledge of other peoples, plus their experience with the U.S. government as represented by the U.S. Shipping Board, were not unsympathetic to revolutionary philosophies. The Communist Party gave them a method of organization, pointed out the betrayals of the ISU labor-skates and the futility of the IWW methods, and appealed to all class-conscious militants to join the Marine Workers Industrial Union. This was the maritime section of the CP's Trade Union Unity League during the crazy "Third Period"* when they characterized the AFL as a

*For fuller explanation of this term, see p. 133.

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"fascist" union. They assured all their sympathizers that the revolution was just around the corner, and would be here now were it not for the "social-fascist" betrayers in the conservative and syndicalist and socialist sections of the labor movement. They kicked up quite a noise in the marine industry, managed to tie up a few ships for a few days in different ports. In Philadelphia they even succeeded in establishing a seamen's hiring hall for the port, which worked for a while until the shipowners cooked up a scheme to hire replacements at some other port whenever possible by firing any sailor they thought might be quitting in the port of Philadelphia.

These, then, were the organizations that sought the loyalty and support of all seamen: the International Seamen's Union (AFL), the Marine Transport Workers 510 (IWW), and the Marine Workers Industrial Union (TUUL). There was plenty of room for all of them in the field because the majority of seamen were, prior to the 1934 strike, not organized at all.

4: 1934-1937: Union Counter-Attack

THE CRISIS of American capitalism beginning in 1929 set off a great movement of mass revolt. By 1932 it was impossible for the government longer to ignore labor. The Roosevelt government attempted to head off a general labor revolt by such reformist measures as carefully fostering organized unions to aid in establishing wages at a slightly higher level. This broad governmental labor policy proposed simultaneously to check the mass discontent with concessions, and to restore capitalist profits by restoring consumer purchasing power. There was no specific program for maritime: the general over-all problem was more urgent. But the culmination of the maritime labor upsurge in the 1934 West Coast strikes dramatically brought the whole question of maritime policy to the attention of the nation. Even then the government could not spare the necessary full attention for the special complexities of the subject, but could only try palliatives and temporary expedients: labor mediators mixed with denunciations. But the strike broke through all mediatory bounds, scoffed at denunciations. Militant job action, federation of unions in allied trades, and organization of the nearby unorganized, plus a spread of the entire process from the Pacific to the Gulf and Atlantic ports, seriously alarmed the government. By 1935 it really tackled the maritime problem in its totality. American imperialism had

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finally had driven home to it the necessity of building its own merchant fleet on a deliberate, planned, imperialist basis. Starting from this broad perspective, with an eye on the inevitable coming imperialist war, it realized that its labor policy could necessarily be only a part of the over-all program. By 1936 that program had been formulated: in its labor aspect, it demanded a completely docile and "disciplined" personnel.

But the far-sighted government program stimulated the more immediate-minded shipowners to a counter-attack on the union which provoked the 1936-37 strike. The shipowners, however, were a bit previous: the unions were still driving ahead with such militancy, as part of the whole 1936-37 labor upsurge, that they could not be stopped by either the shipowners' frontal attack or the government's flanking movement. The Roosevelt administration's smoothly reformist labor policy had sown real dragon's teeth. It was necessary for it to retreat momentarily, and return later with a more devious and gradualistic policy.

THE CRISIS in U.S. capitalism provoked by the 1929 crash of fake prosperity had brought it to the brink of the abyss. All Hoover's prattle about "rugged individualism" was rendered not only meaningless but savagely ironic by the idle factories, overstocked granaries, and growing millions of hungry unemployed. The masses, spontaneous and leaderless, were instinctively moving and the ground trembled under the capitalists' feet. Working conditions in industry were no longer tolerable under the open-shop policy demanded by the employers and fostered by the Hoover government. Strikes against wage-cuts, increasing demands by labor for unemployment relief, farmers' rebellions against foreclosure sales by the banks, the overtly hostile Bonus Army march on Washington—all combined to strike terror into the hearts of America's rulers. And not only fear, but doubt. Though the Hoover administration clung to the old concept of a general hands-off policy in industrial management, intervening in strikes only to maintain the open shop, the capitalist class was shaken even in its own self-confidence by the continued economic decline, and by 1932 was beginning to doubt all the old concepts of free competition, individual initiative, and national self-sufficiency. Their profits were declining, and they saw no immediate answer to all the questions that overwhelmed them the morning after their post-war debauch. They began to look for someone to blame. And whom else but their own leading com-

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mittee, the Government? The capitalist class itself pleaded that the government "do something."

Roosevelt was elected in 1932 precisely on the vague but determined promise that "something" would be done. He introduced a nebulous program of "planned economy," and, turning for facts and advice to some reliable students of history and economics instead of to the know-nothing "practical" businessmen, most of whom were still trying to live on their pre-1929 boasts, he worked out the National Industrial Recovery Act, with its famous section 7A. Previous governments had chosen to ignore labor during the entire post-war period right up to the depression year 1932. Roosevelt, wiser than his predecessors, realized the gravity of the spirit of revolt that was bursting out sporadically in every section of the country in the form of strikes, farm-"holidays," and demonstrations by the unemployed, etc. He realized it was necessary to head off a general labor revolt by reformist concessions. Hence his broad labor policy was designed to lift the country out of the depression by increasing purchasing power, thus restoring the consumer market, and thus, as its end-product, restoring capitalist profits. In a sense, this is the essence of "pro-labor" reformism for the maintenance of capitalism.

Now these emergency measures were necessarily general in character. There was no time to work out a specific program for maritime. Maritime was only one part of U.S. industry, and the government hoped that its general measures would roughly apply. To a limited extent, they did. But there were also, as always, special circumstances.

Conditions, bad as they were, seemed certain to grow worse. As everywhere, there was widespread unemployment, deepened by the 1929 depression. But the seamen, having less to lose than other industrial workers, were all the more desperate. The U.S. Shipping Board, mainstay of the open shop, still existed, but its power had so gravitated into the hands of the private operators that even as a strike-breaking agency it had lost the punch it packed in 1921. The New Deal, more far-sighted, knew better than to employ such a discredited agency, and there had not been time to invent a palatable substitute. By a special combination of historic circumstances, and by the fact that the government was too preoccupied elsewhere, maritime labor got the green light. The volcanic pressure built up by the increasingly intolerable conditions after 1929 jibed with the favorable conjuncture of rising militancy in the U.S. labor movement, to permit maritime workers to carry their 1934 counter-

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attack against the 1921-created open shop to real heights, far beyond anything intended by the "New Deal." Yet it must not be forgotten that the 1934 strikes were not purely maritime, were not in any historical sense exceptional: they were essentially only part of the great wave of strikes that swept the U.S. that year, and they stemmed from the same historico-economic causes.

But seamen may be justifiably proud that, along with the strike of the Minneapolis truckers, their 1934 strike was the most militant in the country. Maritime labor today may look to the outside observer partly tricked, partly crushed, and incapable of resurgence; but the tens of thousands of seamen who went through that baptism of fire know better, know that those reserves of heroic militancy remain, ready for the new upsurge.

It started with the Pacific Coast longshoremen. Their original demands, of March 5, 1934, were: 1) coastwise agreement; 2) closed shop; 3) union hiring halls. On May 9, between ten and fifteen thousand of them went on strike, calling for: 1) \$1.00 an hour instead of \$.85; 2) 30-hour week instead of 48; 3) \$1.50 instead of \$1.25 overtime.

Now the maritime unions, by the nature of the seaman's occupation, are at a disadvantage in solidarity, atomized as the seamen are over the world's sea-lanes in small groups as ships' crews; during a long trip they tend to lose contact with what is going on ashore. But when the longshoremen started the ball rolling, the sailors, in solidarity, began walking off ships as fast as they hit port. Whole crews came off, organized and unorganized together: it didn't matter what union a man belonged to, or even whether he belonged to any union, so long as he left the job to help the stevedores win—and to win something for himself in the process. Differences, complications?—they could all be straightened out on the picket line. That was the spirit. It was unbeatable.

The MWIU was the first marine union formally to call a strike. Rank-and-file pressure on the ISU pie-card artists forced them to follow suit. The IWW, though reduced to a mere handful of members, had with characteristic militancy jumped in at the very beginning, and joined with the ISU in picketing.

The strike spread like wildfire to all Pacific Coast ports. It was a real rank-and-file strike, with the "leaders" swept along in the flood. It encountered every weapon then in the arsenal of the employers. The shipowners hired their own thugs who tried to work the docks and man the ships. The city police of every port on the Coast were mobilized on the waterfront to hunt down the strikers.

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The newspapers, launching a slander campaign against the strikers, called on the citizenry to form vigilante committees to raid the strike headquarters, the actual organization of this dirty work being entrusted to the American Legion and other "patriotic" societies.

Under this direct attack, the workers stood up unflinchingly. Nor were they to be fobbed off with fake settlements by labor-skates. On June 16, ILA President Joseph P. Ryan, rushed from the East Coast, presented a compromise agreement, involving: 1) recognition of the union; 2) provisions for collective bargaining; 3) arbitration of wage-scales; 4) joint operation of the hiring halls (but with no provision for rotary shipping). Shipowners' spokesman Thomas G. Plant explained:

Messrs. Casey, McLaughlin, and Beck volunteered to underwrite and guarantee the performance by the longshoremen of any agreement so reached. Their specific promise as to the means they would use to guarantee observance was that trucking operations would be resumed if the longshoremen refused to return to work should an agreement be reached. The International President of the Waterfront Employers' Union of San Francisco secured the necessary authority, and these two representatives then proceeded to negotiate and on June 16th, reached an agreement which was reduced to writing.

It was signed in the office of Angelo Rossi, Mayor of San Francisco.

With the exception of San Pedro, the ILA locals of the whole Pacific Coast contemptuously rejected the compromise. Mr. Plant was indignant. He alleged that the vote on the Ryan agreement was not sufficiently "secret," that workers tending to accept it were "intimidated" by the fact that voting was public and their mates could see what they were up to. And Mr. Plant was also scared. Later, on July 11, in a statement to the National Longshoremen's (arbitration) Board, he complained:

Commencing with the calling of the strike on May 9, and continuously thereafter, the waterfronts of all the Pacific Coast ports have been continuously picketed by longshoremen, sailors and communists.

There have been hundreds and at times more than a thousand pickets at the waterfront.

Sure enough. The workers were at last taking independent, militant, direct action. And that was the only language that Plant & Co. really understood and feared.

The situation had got beyond the control of the shipowners, of the municipal police. On July 5, in the "Battle of Rincon Hill," they fired on the strikers, killing Howard Sperry and Nick Bordoise, and wounding 109 other workers. The same day Governor Merriam ordered the National Guard to San Francisco to break the strike.

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Uncowed, the strikers stood firm, and the working class of San Francisco showed its solidarity by calling a general strike in support of the maritime workers and in protest against the use of troops. The federal government also entered the picture—on the side of the shipowners, naturally—in the person of General Hugh S. Johnson of NRA fame. Coming to San Francisco, he characterized the strike as a "civil war," thus giving official endorsement to the newspaper campaign for vigilantism. Federal mediators and conciliators went scurrying between the strike committee and the shipowners' association. Nor were the labor fakers idle, denouncing the strike and piously averring that surely some "peaceful settlement" could be found.

Finally, after eleven weeks, under the weight of pressure from the shipowners, the government (city, state and federal), and the "public," the maritime strike was called off in San Francisco. The longshoremen went back on July 31, and the maritime workers up and down the Coast returned to work pending settlement of their demands by an arbitration committee. But they went back to work as an organized body of men.

The strike had succeeded in two very important respects: it had built a spirit of solidarity and it had discredited the old-line officials who were constantly trying to direct the strike into "safe" channels. The seamen went back to the ships with their demands for wages and conditions still in the hands of an arbitration committee which they did not trust. But they were in a position to finish a job they had waited a long time for. They soon drove the finks off the ships, and the labor fakers out of the leadership of the ISU. But the greatest gain of all, the real key to future improvements in wages and conditions: they went back to work determined to establish the union hiring hall. All this was accomplished in a short time.

Against the finks who had tried to run the ships during the strike, the fight went on in every port of the world, and on every ship that left the Pacific Coast with strike-breakers foolish enough to stay aboard after the strike's end.

The government unwittingly helped by eliminating all the pre-strike organizational rivalries. When the NLRB elections went overwhelmingly in favor of the ISU, the Stalinists were forced to disband their MWIU, abandoning the bankrupt policy of isolating militants in "revolutionary unions"; the MTW also dissolved into the ISU. With this infusion of extremely militant elements, the rank and file began to drive against the reactionary ISU leadership. By 1935 they were able to rid themselves of the notorious Scharren-

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berg. The rank-and-file control that brushed aside the old officialdom in the Sailors', the Firemen's, and the Cooks' West Coast ISU unions is an outstanding example of how a union can be transformed from a slow hide-bound outfit dominated by a bunch of fakers into a strong militant organization run by its members.

By 1935 the union hiring hall was operating up and down the Pacific Coast from Seattle to San Pedro. This was the result of direct action. Seamen refused to ship except through the union hall. If a man came aboard ship from any other source, the rest of the crew formed a welcoming committee for him. Every man who quit a ship went to the union hall and registered. He received a card with the date of his registration. When he was ready to go to work again, he went to the union hall and saw on the blackboard what jobs were needing his skill and experience. If he saw a job he liked he bid for it. If other members of the union were bidding for the same job, the one with the oldest shipping date to prove that he had been out of work longest was given the job. Thus was established the union system of rotary shipping.

Following the 1934 strike, seamen initiated a program of job action to improve conditions on the ships and strengthen their organizational structure. "Job action" during this period was largely led by the "anti-politicals" of the Sailors Union of the Pacific. In essence it meant that every ship's crew selected its own delegate and decided what changes in conditions were necessary on that particular ship. When the ship came to port, if the demands of the crew were not granted, all hands quit; and the union was somehow never able to find replacements until some adjustment of the grievances was made. In this way, for example, overtime pay was won for all work after 5:00 p.m. and before 8:00 a.m., various types of work were classified as overtime, better food came aboard, crew quarters were altered and improved. Job action is a valuable tactical device, but it is no substitute for trade-union strategy, as will be seen in later examination of this question in the following section, "The Development of Leadership."

The longshoremen also launched a campaign to consolidate their position and extend the gains of the 1934 strike to other workers. Intensive organization work was begun among the warehousemen in all coastal industry to bring them into the ILA. Especially active in this campaign to organize all Bay Area warehousemen around San Francisco were the Stalinists. They had won a place in the leadership of the ILA during the 1934 strike, which they gradually consolidated by operating as an organized fraction against a disorganized oppo-

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sition. Conditions prior to that time had precluded them from attempting a dual "red" union for longshoremen. Of necessity, they operated primarily within the Pacific Coast ILA. During the strike, Harry Bridges rose to power on sheer activism and a program which was coincidentally what the longshoremen were fighting for. But with the full flowering of "Popular Frontism," with its concomitant class collaboration, the Stalinists fought against job action and what they called the "super-militants," allying themselves for the purpose with the ISU bureaucrats who were still entrenched on the East Coast, and who in January 1936 expelled the Sailors Union of the Pacific from the International.

On the Atlantic Coast, in an apparent paradox, the CP seamen's fraction organized the rank-and-file seamen against the ISU bureaucracy, battenning on the militancy of the West Coast seamen and Bridges' earlier reputation. In less than two years the impetus of the seamen's struggle on the Pacific Coast would begin to find organized expression on the Gulf and Atlantic Coasts. Maritime labor was on the march.

But the organizational gains of the strike found their highest expression in the Maritime Federation of the Pacific. With but two exceptions, all the original unions that banded together to form it were affiliated to the American Federation of Labor. They all breathed the new spirit of industrial unionism that was sweeping nationally through the ranks of the AFL. The Maritime Federation was originally confined to waterfront unions: 1) The International Longshoremen's Association; 2) The Sailors Union of the Pacific; 3) The Marine Firemen, Oilers, Watertenders & Wipers Association; 4) The Marine Cooks & Stewards Association; 5) The Masters, Mates & Pilots Association; 6) The Marine Engineers Beneficial Association; 7) The American Radio Telegraphists Association (these latter two being independent organizations unable to get a charter from the AFL). A bid was made to bring the International Brotherhood of Teamsters' waterfront locals into the Federation, but they were kept out by their old-line officials who looked upon the new Federation as a bunch of waterfront outlaws dual to the AFL Central Labor Councils. The Maritime Federation of the Pacific took as its slogan "An injury to One Is an Injury to All." It was a long step forward on the road to genuine industrial unionism.

The government was really alarmed by the 1934 strike: by its militancy, by its solidarity, and above all by its tendency to spread. At first, the government was in no position to pay close attention to the special complexities of maritime. But to the impulsion given

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by the strike there was added the growing and tardy realization that it had to recast its whole policy toward the maritime industry in the light of its imperialist needs, especially since it had a weather-eye to the gathering war clouds. It settled down to restudy the whole maritime problem thoroughly. While the post-1934 seamen's upsurge ran its course, the government was preparing its long-term answer. By 1936 it was ready: the Merchant Marine Act, H-R 8555, commonly known as the Copeland Bill.

The ultimate long-range purposes of that Act, what it meant for U.S. imperialism in general and for the increasingly parasitical shipowners in particular, we have already examined.* Let us now examine what it meant for seamen.

The key and kernel was the "Continuous Discharge Book," more commonly—and more accurately—known as the Fink Book. This little device the international-minded Roosevelt advisers had quietly lifted from the experience of British imperialism. The British government had successfully regimented all seamen during World War I by means of the Continuous Discharge Book, issued to all seamen by the British Board of Trade. It contained a description of the man, his rating, and space for a continuous record of his sea service. According to U.S. law a seaman is given a discharge at the end of each voyage. Under open-shop conditions if he applies for a job he can produce these discharges to prove that he is an experienced man. However, since they are individual discharges and all separate, he can produce only a few of those he actually has. Thus, if he has made a number of short trips or has quit his ship before completion of a voyage, which is always true of a man who is marked in the industry for union activities, these facts are not readily apparent to the company shipping master. But with the Continuous Discharge Book, the entire sea record of a man is there. Anyone looking at the Book can tell at a glance whether it belongs to a "loyal employee" or an "agitator." The Book thus serves as a blacklist.

The Book was agreed to in England by the conservative union representatives. In exchange for this, the trade-union officials received joint control of the hiring halls. That is to say, a government board comprised of shipowners, union representatives, and government agents operates the hiring halls in England. Seamen are not shipped unless they are satisfactory to both the union and the operator. This arrangement has resulted in the shipowners collecting

*See pp. 30 ff.

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union dues from 90 percent of the seamen by means of the check-off system. Ships carry no union representatives, have no "shop committees"; in fact, the British union officials confessed that, to maintain discipline, they "would not allow such a thing."

In the light of these facts it is not surprising that the president of the Sailors' and Firemen's Union of Great Britain and Ireland could write to Andrew Furuseth during the 1921 strikes:

It seems strange to me that the owners in America are so strong on the "open shop," whereas the owners on this side are doing everything they can to make it the "closed shop." . . . As a matter of fact, the great majority of the owners have turned the entire shipping of men over to us and many of them have expressed the view that they do not know how they could do without us.

At first Roosevelt's maritime experts did not reveal that it was on the British model that they had prepared the Fink Book, but later, in 1938, when the maritime workers had defeated the attempt to force it on them, President Roosevelt sent a commission of inquiry to England to find out how the British bosses had got away with it where the American bosses couldn't. The commission verified the success of the so-called "closed shop" system, with every British seaman carrying his blacklist in his hip-pocket in the form of the Book. Says the report:

That this machinery works well is attested by the fact that in nearly 20 years of its existence there have been no official strikes, and only two unofficial stoppages, one, an unsuccessful strike among the caterers (who at that time had a separate organization) and the other a localized rank and file stoppage of seamen growing out of wage reductions which the Seamen's Union had agreed to. In the latter instance, the union supplied men to man the ships. But the report did not say how such a happy state of affairs could be achieved. Indeed, the bosses and their government are still trying to find out how to do it.

In order immediately to effect this plan the government needed a docile union leadership that would cooperate in the same manner that the ISU leadership had cooperated in the last war. But the 1934 strike on the Pacific had not given rise to that kind of a leadership. The International officials of the ISU, who were pledged in advance to support of the government's program, were held in contempt by the militants on the West Coast, and they were hardly more respected by seamen on the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts. The resurgent union movement on the Pacific Coast had to be smashed. The government could then effect its plan in the absence of any union, or it could, to save the face of democracy, use the decrepit ISU officials for a "union" front. The task of making the frontal attack on Coast

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unions was left largely to the shipowners, while the government brought flanking pressure with the Fink Book.

While the Copeland Bill was being debated in Congressional committee (Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries), the shipowners prepared for an all-out fight against the unions. Their aim was to smash the union hiring hall so as to clear the way for government introduction of the Continuous Discharge Book. The seamen were ready for strike action. A wage increase was due them. For two years following the 1934 strike, they had been working for the old Shipping Board scale of \$62.50 a month. And these two years marked a period of sharp rise in the cost of living. But the shipowners sat tight, refusing even to discuss the question of wages until first the seamen's unions agreed to give up the union hiring hall and the system of rotary shipping which the operators called "illegal." Every time the union negotiating committee met with the shipowners, they ran into this obstacle. Contracts expired September 30, 1936. But right up to that date employers stuck by their "preference of employment" formula, always with the reservation that "nothing herein shall prevent the employers from discharging or refusing to employ anyone who is not satisfactory to them." If seamen called a strike it would affect all maritime workers. And no seaman doubted that a strike would be called. The only question was *when*? But the problem of organizing support for the strike was not so simple as it might have appeared on the face of things.

Attempts were made to get endorsement of the strike by the Maritime Federation. Without such endorsement the strike would have been impossible. But the Maritime Federation was torn with factional warfare. Some political differences existed between the pro-Roosevelt Stalinists and the "anti-politicals" who wanted to be pure and simple trade unionists. These political differences were a distorted reflection of the relative economic conditions enjoyed by the longshoremen as contrasted with what the sailors had won in the '34 strike. Longshoremen stood to gain very little from a strike in 1936. But the rank and file understood that in order to insure their conditions they had to help defend the sailors' hiring hall.

The Stalinists at that time were trying to extend their influence inside the AFL. They found general political agreement with the labor bureaucracy on their "Popular Front" line which on the American electoral scene then meant support of Roosevelt. Whatever fights they had in various sections of the AFL with the old-line labor-skates were purely bureaucratic struggles for posts—policy was not involved. Bridges was trying to make peace with Ryan

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within the International Longshoremen's Association on the basis of territorial division and an understanding whereby Ryan would recognize the rank-and-file seamen's movement on the East Coast which was in the hands of a Stalinist leadership, and Bridges would prevent a strike in the industry, which neither of them wanted. A meeting took place in New York on September 16 and 17, 1936, between these two longshore leaders to iron out their difference. After the meeting Bridges told the press, "There is no commitments, but everything is going along satisfactorily. Nothing has been said about any strike anywhere."

The Pacific Coast shipowners, hoping to take advantage of the difference in conditions enjoyed by longshoremen as contrasted with what the seamen had won, offered to submit all questions in dispute to arbitration. At the same time they pressed their demand upon the seamen to give up the hiring hall. But the union hiring hall was not a question that could be arbitrated. This became the central issue for the 1936-37 strike.

Bridges had been angling for a separate agreement for the longshoremen. And when the shipowners refused to make any concessions he threatened them with a nation-wide strike. The Associated Press on September 20 quoted Bridges as saying that the longshoremen of the Atlantic Coast and Gulf of Mexico and Great Lakes would "support the West Coast in the event of a break with the employers." He said that he had received assurance from representatives of the three districts, indicating how far his understanding with Ryan had gone. Whatever the deal was, Ryan got out of it very nicely by signing a new agreement with East Coast operators and having them urge the West Coast operators to sign a contract so as to avert a strike. And Bridges would have snatched it up, but the West Coast operators wouldn't. That was the extent of Ryan's "support." It came just ahead of the West Coast strike, and during the strike Ryan ordered ships loaded on the Atlantic Coast when rank-and-file seamen walked off the ships in sympathy with the West Coast.

In spite of the growing factional issues inside the Maritime Federation the solidarity of maritime workers on the Pacific was so strong that every affiliated union voted to strike for the hiring hall demand. As the September 30 deadline approached, last-minute efforts were made by interested and disinterested parties to avert the strike. The longshoremen's negotiating committee, headed by Bridges, notified the shipowners that the ILA would continue negotiations. Joseph B. Weaver, director of the Commerce Department's

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Bureau of Navigation and Steamboat Inspection Service

stressed need for immediate appointment of the Maritime Commission created by legislation passed at the last Congress, pointing out that there was now nobody with authority to do more than attempt to arbitrate and conciliate disputes between seamen and shipowners,

according to the San Francisco press. Being high in government maritime circles, Weaver was familiar with the government's plan and wanted to see it begin operating immediately. The San Francisco Chamber of Commerce worked out its own peace plan and wired Roosevelt to intervene. Roosevelt intervened by naming a temporary maritime board, comprised of two brass-hats, Admirals Wiley and Hamlet, and an accountant, George Landick, Jr. Great hopes were placed on these three. Colonel J. Monroe Johnson, Assistant Secretary of Commerce, announced that "the Maritime Commission has full power and authority to cope with the situation and it probably will direct its earliest efforts toward that very difficult problem." But this committee, hastily set up to take over the first duty handed the Maritime Commission, needed a little time to get organized. Edward F. McGrady, crack federal mediator, flew to San Francisco with an offer of a fifteen-day truce. The waterfront employers carried off their part in the game quite well. They were adamant. They would consider an extension of the truce only if all questions in dispute were submitted to arbitration. They had previously announced that, after October 1, "All hiring will be direct at the piers, until such time as hiring halls can be re-established by agreement." In his formal reply to the demands for "peace," T. G. Plant whined that the employers were exhausted and could go no further:

While having the greatest deference to your request, employers are loath to grant any further delay in arriving at a definite and permanent settlement. For two years, they have been subjected to violations of awards, harassment, strikes, stoppages of work, strikes on the job, etc. . . . Three major companies on this coast are operating under section 77B of the Bankruptcy Act. One of these companies has just obtained permission from the courts to cease all operations. Two other substantial companies have retired from business and laid up their fleet.

Poor ship operators. That year they had received cash aid through the old ocean mail contracts in the amount of only \$20,000,000.

The maritime unions readily accepted the 15-day "truce" and federal mediators convinced the employers that they could hold out a little longer—Uncle Sam was on his way with more money bags, in the person of Admiral Hamlet. He also carried a club.

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As the 15-day truce period began to draw to a close, another extension was proposed. Admiral Hamlet was a little late. Another extension. Hamlet finally arrived on October 19. He looked around for three days, intimated to the press that he was anxious to lay the basis for an extensive "truce," and finally called a meeting. The unions demanded guarantees that the 1934 Award benefits would be maintained, notably union control of the hiring hall and the six-hour day for longshoremen. Hamlet's reply was flat: "I am in no position to give such guarantee."

Out of the councils of the Maritime Federation next day came a list of those demands that could not be submitted to arbitration:

- 1) Preference of employment for union skippers, mates and engineers.
- 2) All unlicensed personnel to be employed through the union hiring hall.
- 3) Seamen to be paid for overtime worked in cash, not in time off.
- 4) An eight-hour day in a spread of twelve hours for cooks and stewards.
- 5) The six-hour day and the hiring hall for the longshoremen.

The memo accompanying these demands specified that if points 1, 2 and 5 were agreed to by October 28, the expired agreements would be extended to September 30, 1937. This proposal amounted to an offer to continue for another year under the same conditions that prevailed during the two previous years. This was the proposal of the Stalinist faction inside the Maritime Federation who argued that it was best to postpone the strike for another month and avert it if possible "so as to insure the re-election of President Roosevelt." They had a big legislative scheme afoot at the time and hoped to be rewarded for their political support to the Roosevelt administration. Joseph Curran came to San Francisco to explain what was up. He denounced the Copeland Bill: "It is a deadly, anti-labor piece of legislation. There is no question it is aimed at regimentation of seamen, and the beginning of a movement to regiment all organized labor." (And these were the people who were supporting precisely that Roosevelt administration which had just pushed through this very Copeland Act.) But Curran had an answer. He explained that Copeland had suggested seamen themselves draft a bill. And the Stalinists thought this a good idea. Said Curran:

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The rank and file on all coasts should comply with the suggestion. We have a legislative committee working now. We intend to put the matter before West Coast seamen and create a National legislative committee to see it through.

But West Coast seamen did not take very kindly to the idea. They did not favor postponement of the strike "to insure the re-election of Roosevelt." And they did not propose to work for another year at \$62.50 a month and take their overtime in time off.

All efforts to avert the strike failed. The Merchant Marine Act, creating the Maritime Commission, did not become legally effective until October 26, 1936. Roosevelt jumped the gun a little to get the machinery moving before the 1936-37 strike overtook him. On the day the law became effective the Maritime Commission asserted its authority in a letter to both the unions and shipowners. The letter demanded:

Answer unequivocally and without qualification the question, are you going to respect the public and government interests to the extent that you will carry on under the latest agreements without stoppage of work by lockout or strike until the commission is completed [with its work] and facts announced.

The shipowners took the cue nicely, answering:

If your commission is unable or unwilling to cause the unions to comply with your demands that the agreement be observed and that strikes do not occur, we must be free to proceed as we see fit to protect our interests.

The unions were left very little choice. Inside the councils of the Maritime Federation rank-and-file pressure from the seamen was too great to permit further delay. The Maritime Commission received an answer from the unions which correctly characterized all the Commission's actions then and since: "The action of the commission appears to us to coincide with wishes of the shipowners, who apparently desire a tie-up regardless of ultimate results."

On October 30, 1936, the strike was called. Roosevelt went on a fishing trip, apparently confident that the Maritime Commission was well equipped to deal with the situation.

The strike faced many dangers. The shipowners were well prepared. They had a strong Employers' Association with a big slush-fund to tide them over a long drawn-out strike. The labor bureaucracy denounced the strike from the beginning. When rank-and-file seamen on the East Coast walked off in sympathy with the striking West Coast maritime workers, the old ISU fakers kept the ships running. And in addition to all this, the threat of the government Fink Book overshadowed everything else. It was a source of confidence for the shipowners. It became a controversial issue between

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contending factions inside the Maritime Federation of the Pacific. At the end of three months of strike, on the eve of the settlement, the Stalinists came out openly for acceptance of the Book.

While the ISU fakers were feebly agitating for acceptance of the Fink Book, the shrewder Stalinists had been distributing pledge cards against it. But they were simultaneously preparing to support the re-election of the Roosevelt administration that was behind the Copeland Bill. Once Roosevelt was safely in, the mask was dropped and the Stalinists urged the Book on seamen. Before the strike was over, faced with recalcitrant rank-and-file refusal to swallow the Book, the Stalinists attempted to divert the whole struggle. Their slogan was a lulu: "Take the Fink Book—and burn it on the Capitol steps May Day." How impractical and dishonest this tactic was is demonstrated at greater length later (p. 138).

As the strike stretched from weeks to months and it began to look as if the shipowners were going to be the first to crack, the government began injecting its influence more and more into the struggle. Mediators from Washington had been on the scene weeks before the strike was called. Their futile efforts to "mediate" served primarily to keep Washington informed as to the actual progress of the strike. With union control of hiring the central issue of the strike, J. B. Weaver, of the Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation, chose just this time to propose the government hiring hall.

The Maritime Federation of the Pacific showed signs of weakening before the strike ended. Bitter factional struggles were waged over every issue that arose during the strike. The Stalinists opened a fight for the control of the *Voice*, official organ of the Federation. One of their main charges was that a series of articles in the paper explaining the Continuous Discharge Book had been "incorrect." They succeeded in capturing the paper and using it for their own factional purpose. The councils of the Federation rocked with arguments over the question of "perishable cargo." The shipowners were demanding that the strikers discharge from strike-bound ships what was called "perishable cargo" before any settlement of the strike could be reached. The Stalinists were anxious to comply "to gain favorable publicity." But the seamen who had everything to lose in the strike wanted to hold a solid front against the operators until all demands were won. Such differences over policy where each organization was an autonomous unit in the Maritime Federation was too much of a strain for a loose body whose executive organs had no organizational authority or power to en-

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force its decision on any of the unions comprising it. The Federation was not recognized by the AFL. It was impossible for the Federation to appeal to an International to discipline one of its local affiliates in the same manner that the AFL Central Labor Councils do. The president of the Maritime Federation sat on the strike committee only as a figure-head. He represented no one. Yet the solidarity that still existed in the ranks of the West Coast maritime workers gave such moral authority to the Federation that it survived the strike and dragged out another two years' existence marked by bitter feuds.

When the shipowners finally were brought to their knees and signed agreements with all the West Coast maritime unions at the end of 99 days of strike, seamen had won a greater victory than they knew. Not only did they win a ten-dollar monthly wage increase; more important, the 1936-37 strike was especially successful because it forced the shipowners to recognize for the first time in signed agreements with the unions the principle of the union hiring halls. The Steamship Owners' Association of the Pacific Coast had to incorporate this provision in its agreements with all the West Coast unions: The Sailors Union of the Pacific, The Marine Firemen's Association, and The Marine Cooks & Stewards Association. Since that time every union contract on both coasts has embodied this provision, the cornerstone of union independence.

The resurgence of the maritime unions in 1934, establishing the union hiring hall and forcing formal recognition of it in the 1936-1937 strike settlement, brought direct pressure from the government. The entire pre-war period following the 1936-37 strike saw further consolidation of union gains—with increased government sniping at the basic foundations of the new union movement.

5: 1937 to Pearl Harbor: Government Intimidation

THE LABOR program which the government finally worked out was precisely stated in legal terminology in the 1936 Merchant Marine Act. All grievances by the unlicensed personnel were to be settled by the government, through the seaman's immediate superior. This is the Navy way of dealing with personnel problems, applied to the merchant marine. But Congress, when it passed this Act, underestimated the power of the still developing maritime unions. Thus, to effect its policy, the government had to adopt a dual tactic: smash the unions as in 1921,

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and/or absorb the union leadership into the government apparatus as the British ruling class has done. But 1937 was hardly the moment and the leaderships were hardly the people. The government could have made a deal with the Stalinists but would not; would have dealt with the "anti-politicals" but could not. It kept the unions busy in a windmill fight that had them striking out in all directions at once against the three main weapons on which the government staked the final success of its skillful anti-labor policy: government hiring hall, government discharge book, and government training schools. No hastily pieced-out plan, this was a comprehensive policy with all the instruments for effecting it. Government pressure sharpened the division in union policies and leaderships. These divisions, though weakening the unions, complicated the government's problem. It needed above all a united union movement dominated by a loyal and docile leadership. That was precisely what it could not find. Unity was impossible. The Stalinists were docile but untrustworthy. The "anti-politicals" were loyal but not very docile—their first duty being to the union as such. The government program was essentially a war-preparedness measure, with the long-term perspective of badgering the seamen till it wore them out. But there was not time for the process to work itself out: World War II cut across American imperialism's path before it could complete its maritime program. The U.S. declaration of war found the marine unions fighting a slow retreat, but still essentially intact.

THE GOVERNMENT'S new labor policy was summarized in the 1936 Merchant Marine Act in unmistakable terms:

Licensed officers and unlicensed members of the crew are entitled to make complaint or recommendations to the Commission, Coast Guard, Department of Labor, providing they file such complaint or recommendation with their immediate superior. He shall then forward such complaint or recommendation, with his remarks, to the Commission, Coast Guard, or Department of Labor.

Could such a policy have been effective, it would have replaced all collective union procedure in bargaining and grievances by the equivalent of Navy discipline. But Congress failed to realize that the unions were still driving forward. Following the 1936-37 strike, the organizational gains of seamen were extended to all coasts.

This period saw the complete breakdown of the old AFL international, the International Seamen's Union, which began when the reactionary officials of the ISU on January 16, 1936, expelled the

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Sailors Union of the Pacific for refusing to reinstate the notorious Scharrenberg. From that date on, the crafts on the Pacific Coast—sailors, firemen, and cooks—began their separate, independent existences. The Sailors Union of the Pacific was finally reinstated in the AFL in 1938 and given a charter to organize all American seamen. The Marine Firemen to this day are attempting to steer an independent course, not being affiliated to either the AFL or CIO. The Marine Cooks & Stewards are now formally affiliated to the CIO. This development on the Pacific had its counterpart on the Atlantic.

Real organization of East Coast seamen began to take form following the 1936-37 national maritime strike. Although the strike on the East Coast was called in "sympathy" with the striking West Coast seamen and longshoremen, it was really an organizational measure taken by the Stalinists, who set up the National Maritime Union (CIO). But on the East Coast there were still seamen who remained with the AFL. This body of seamen was brought under the wing of the Sailors Union of the Pacific in 1938 when the West Coast sailors got an AFL charter—the Seafarers International Union of North America, AFL—which today is in the field and competing with the National Maritime Union (CIO), for the sympathy and support and allegiance of all seamen on all coasts.

The conflict between AFL and CIO unions in the maritime industry did not occur over the issue of craft vs. industrial unionism as it did in the labor movement in the rest of the country. Nor has the CIO been distinguished from the AFL in maritime by more militant policies; just the contrary has been true. The Stalinists utilized the affiliation of the NMU to the CIO—by exploiting the latter's progressive reputation among the workers—in order to attempt to crush the SUP and the militant struggles the SUP was waging to preserve the seamen's unions. The SUP re-affiliated to the AFL when it appeared that without outside labor support they would be crushed by Stalinist attacks. It is to be noted that the SUP organized the SIU-AFL on the East and Gulf Coasts along industrial lines of the same order as in the NMU-CIO.

While these divisions among seamen weakened them and often prevented the leaderships from seeing the main enemy clearly, they also caused many a headache for the Maritime Commission. The government had a dual tactic, flexibly combining a 1921-style crack-down on rank-and-file militancy and a cajolment of the leadership into cooperation with and even integration into the government apparatus. This needed a single union under docile leadership.

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But both the time and the people were ill-suited for such a tactic. As a result of winning a three-month strike which forced recognition of the union hiring hall, mobilized seamen on the Atlantic and Gulf Coasts, and discredited forever the old-line labor-skates in the corrupt and impotent ISU, the seamen were at a high point of rank-and-file militancy. And the government could fully count on neither leadership. The Stalinists were willing enough, but, in view of the past zigzags in the party line, the government did not trust them to stay put. The "anti-politicals," on the other hand, who had developed during the 1934 strike struggle and had led the union counter-attack against the shipowners right through the successful 1936-37 strike, were perhaps loyal but not very docile—and their loyalty had limits because their first allegiance was to the union. So, though the government made alternate attempts to put over its labor policy behind the back of the new virile unions, and to cajole and intimidate the leadership into acceptance of its policy, neither method worked. Had the Commission had a docile union leadership of a single seamen's union, it might by this time have put over some sort of scheme which today would operate very like the shipping pool in England. But that wasn't in the cards.

Not that the government didn't try. The Maritime Commission swung into action under the direction of its first chairman, Joseph P. Kennedy, with vigor and determination. A vast training program was soon under way to supply a "disciplined" personnel for the new ships, long before a single keel was laid. How far this training program had gone was clearly stated in the Report of the Maritime Commission to Congress on "Training Merchant Personnel," published on January 1, 1939. Before its publication the Maritime Commission had established three "training ships" and was already looking around for a fourth. Two were on the East Coast. One of them had 15 buildings on Hoffman Island in lower New York harbor "to train approximately 2,500 of the present personnel of the merchant marine at this station annually." The other was in New London, Connecticut, and "planned to train annually at this station approximately 200 of the present licensed personnel of the merchant marine." The third training station was on the Pacific, at the U.S. Coast Guard base, Government Island, Oakland, California, "to train annually approximately 650 present unlicensed and 100 present licensed personnel of the merchant marine." Thus by the end of 1938 machinery was already moving to turn out more than 3,000 unlicensed seamen from government training schools. Union pressure

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forced the Maritime Commission to announce formally that it would restrict the schools to

unemployed licensed and unlicensed men of the merchant service. They must be citizens with at least two years' sea service in the American merchant marine, of which seven months must have been served within two years prior to application for enrolment.

But in this same report the Commission was quick to reassure Congress:

Regulations restricting enrolment are subject to change. The number of persons enrolled in said Service . . . shall be determined, fixed and prescribed by the Commission in such manner and form as may appear to be necessary to maintain a trained and efficient merchant marine personnel. . . . The Commission believes it most important to have at the disposal of the merchant marine a thorough system of training . . . licensed and unlicensed personnel and, in addition, *competent young Americans who have had no previous experience.* [Our italics.]

The Maritime Commission had three big guns which were brought into play in its drive for regimentation of seamen. One of them was the training ship. Another was the government hiring hall. Both of these had been used before. The third was the Continuous Discharge Book. This weapon had been used by private operators in America, on the Lakes and the Pacific Coast. But it was new in the government's arsenal. It was thought to be so valuable that it was incorporated in the body of the Merchant Marine Act of 1936, not even left to the discretion of an agency to use at the proper time. When the Act became effective in 1937 the Fink Book was supposed to be automatically compulsory upon all seamen.

Such was the government's union-smashing program. But to write and enact such a program into law is one thing. It is something else to enforce it. Nobody can say the government didn't try. But it ran into a stone wall—the stubborn resistance of the seamen.

The cornerstone of the government program was the abolition of the union hiring halls, replacing them with government hiring halls like the Sea Service Bureaus of the last war. But just as the hiring hall was the fundamental issue to the government, so was it to the seamen.

The first government assault on the union hiring hall was a flank attack: the attempt to enforce acceptance of the Continuous Discharge Book. As in England, it would have enabled the owners to weed out the militants from the industry and thus pave the way for smashing the union hiring hall altogether. The government was attempting to do by law for the shipowners what they failed to do for themselves in the 1936-37 strike.

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The government's scheme collapsed when the Pacific Coast seamen simply refused to take the Continuous Discharge Book. Who would enforce the law? The shipowners, just defeated in the three-month strike and with no stomach for another one, were scarcely ready to enforce it. Any attempt by the government itself to do so meant tying up the ships at a time when the employers wanted them running. The government retreated. A compromise was reached whereby the union agreed to a Government Certificate of Identification. It eliminated the worst feature of the Book—the space for the continuous record of a man's sea service. As amended in 1938, the Merchant Marine Act makes the Continuous Discharge Book optional. No union seaman carries the Continuous Discharge Book today. That does not mean that tomorrow the government will not again attempt to establish it.

The next government assault on the union hiring hall was to open a government hiring hall in New York on April 1, 1938, another one in Baltimore a little later, and to prepare for still others elsewhere. Captain Conway, the government spokesman, announced what the halls were for: "We are not concerned with the union views or affiliation of the men. We accept all applications whether or not they are union men. . . ."

The showdown on this issue did not come on the East Coast, where the principal union, the Stalinist-controlled NMU, refused to make a fight. It was left to the West Coast unions, led by the Sailors Union of the Pacific, to halt the government program, when the Maritime Commission attempted to extend government hiring halls to the Pacific.

In Seattle in March 1939, the Maritime Commission announced that it would operate ships out of that port under the following policy:

Unlicensed personnel of vessels operated for the account of the U.S. Maritime Commission are employees of the Commission. Masters of all U.S. Maritime Commission vessels have the responsibility and the duty of selecting the crews of such vessels. . . . Crews shall be supplied through the office of the U.S. Shipping Commissioner and subject to final acceptancy by the master. No discrimination shall be made because of membership or non-membership in any organization.

The answer of the West Coast seamen was to throw picket lines around the ships involved. The whole Northwest labor movement stood back of the sailors. The government dared not go through with its scheme. It found a face-saving device to retreat, setting up a group of Seattle businessmen as "private operators" who

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signed a contract with the union recognizing the union hiring hall. Meanwhile pickets kept a watch in New York at the government hiring hall, 45 Broadway. These pickets were representative seamen from every maritime union, even though the Stalinist leadership of the National Maritime Union did not support the picket line. Soon after the Maritime Commission's Seattle failure, all government hiring halls were closed.

As has been seen, the brunt of these successful struggles was borne by the West Coast unions. It must be emphasized, however, that they could never have been successful without the aid given by the rank and file of the NMU despite the policy of the Stalinist leadership of that union. All seamen, whatever their union, were against government intervention.

In some instances attempts were made to unite all seamen on this issue. The most notable example of this occurred in Mobile, Alabama, on December 14, 1938. There a joint committee of NMU and SIU seamen called a mass meeting to discuss the following questions:

- 1) The betterment of conditions of the seamen as a whole.
- 2) Unity in combatting the opposition of the Maritime Commission, such as Fink Halls, etc.
- 3) For greater unity and harmony among all seamen.

Three hundred and fifty seamen from all unions were present. The chairman opened the meeting with these words:

There will be no need for a brother to give his name, book number or organization. We are not gathered here as members of different unions—but as brother seamen for an open discussion of our problems.

He reviewed briefly the history of the seamen's struggle against the Fink Halls, recalling that they were used as far back as 1909 on the Great Lakes.

The same tactics that the Lake Carriers used were inaugurated on the Pacific Coast—there it was called the fink halls, headed by a former Police Captain from Portland, namely Captain Peterson. The Steamship Owners' Association, under Peterson, regimented all the maritime workers under this nefarious scheme of the owners. The maritime workers threw this yoke off their necks in 1934 and since 1934 have made wonderful gains for the organized workers. The shipowners have now formulated another scheme through their conniving lobbyists in Washington and have come out with another hellfire plan, namely the Maritime Commission Fink Hall and the Training Ship Schemes." [Quotations from official minutes.]

These remarks undoubtedly expressed the sentiment of all seamen. They never achieved organizational unity; jurisdictional con-

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flicts and prejudices among the competing unions remained; but the basic unity of sentiment of the seamen was an important factor in defeating the Maritime Commission.

After its defeats on the hiring hall and Continuous Discharge Book issues, the Maritime Commission's most powerful remaining weapon was the oblique one of the training ships. These were the factories where a shoddy substitute for the skill and experience of union men would be turned out on a mass production basis. Thereby the government hoped to get enough seamen independently of the unions and their halls.

The union seamen were just as conscious of the anti-labor role of the training ship as they had been on the other issues. In September 1938, when recruiting began for the training ships, the ports were crowded with unemployed seamen. The Maritime Commission wanted some of them on the training ships, to cover up its recruiting of new men outside the industry, but few bona-fide union men would accept the bait. Even after December 1938, when the Stalinist leadership of the NMU, as reported in the *Pilot* for December 23, endorsed the training-ship program, few seamen joined. With most of the maritime unions opposing the training ships, the government was faced with the fact that those completing the training course would not be able to ship except through the union hall. Moreover, it was unable to get sufficient trainees: the universal hostility of the seamen discouraged many a candidate. The resistance of the NMU rank and file to the pro-training ship policy of its Stalinist leadership was so great that Tommy Ray was driven to writing in the rank-and-file column of the *Pilot* for Jan. 13, 1939:

The first point that should be clear to the membership is that the N.M.U. NEVER disagreed in principle with the idea of Training Schools. As a matter of fact, the N.M.U. and other East Coast Unions submitted a comprehensive program in Washington for the establishment of Training Schools on the East, West and Gulf Coasts and the Great Lakes some months before Congress passed the Maritime Training Bill.

These Unions recognized that the training service was considered an integral part of the program of the U.S. Government for building up the American Merchant Marine and that a fight against it in principle was not only an unwise policy, but also an un-American policy.

Then, in August 1939, came the Stalin-Hitler pact, and the NMU leadership adopted the pseudo-revolutionary anti-war program of the Communist Party. But it is interesting to note that, despite the new line, the tradition of class collaboration set up by the NMU's Stalinist leadership during the previous period could not be changed

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at will. Typical were the statements Curran made in his column, "Passing the Word," in the *Pilot* of September 22, 1939:

I have recommended to the membership that they accept the operators' proposals on the war work compensation question as a basis for continued negotiations.

The offer is ridiculous, but I believe that I have a duty and responsibility to the membership . . . [to] recommend that this offer be accepted.

. . . Two years ago we had nothing to lose by striking and everything to gain. Now we've got a lot to lose if we strike and get licked. . . . My honest opinion is that it is 100% wrong to strike at this time.

"The offer is ridiculous . . . recommend [it] be accepted." Class collaboration has a logic all its own.

But as a result of the pseudo-revolutionary Stalinist program resulting from the Hitler-Stalin pact, the NMU leadership reversed its endorsement of training ships. One of the clearest formulations appeared in the *Pilot* for Feb. 7, 1941, a front-page article headlined "NMU Exposes Commission Job Attack":

Investigation and evidence from first hand sources reveal that full three year A.B. tickets are being issued to youths who have only six months training in the American Seamen Government School and one trip in the *Republic* [a transport]. . . .

The M.C. training programme, as predicted by marine unions when inaugurated, is thus clearly proving to be nothing less than a government sponsored assault on the conditions built up by the marine unions and on the unions themselves.

All these factors combined to prevent the training-ship program from developing at more than a snail's pace. Nevertheless, if the government had had time enough, the training ship might have solved its problem. Direct action by the seamen could block government hiring halls and the Continuous Discharge Book, but could not stop the training ships. In time there might have been thousands of such government-produced non-union seamen.

But time was precisely what the Maritime Commission did not have. Long before the training-ship program had served its purpose, the war caught up with U.S. imperialism. Since 1936 the government had tried to work against time to be ready for the imperialist war. But the government's union-wrecking program had encountered greater resistance than was anticipated. It became necessary to revise the timetable.

Thus we see that the American employing class learned from its experiences during the First World War, and when the war clouds became again unmistakably visible, it began preparing for the second by carefully laying out a maritime program in advance. In

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broad outline this copied the emergency program of the First World War. The bosses and their government brought out all the old weapons that had been used before: a training program to bring new recruits into the industry independent of union control; government hiring halls to place non-union men on the ships under open-shop conditions; and added to these one borrowed from the British, the seamen's Continuous Discharge Book to regiment union men already in the industry. This time they hoped to crush the independence of the unions before war came. But they were reckoning without the unions.

Yet the difference was not one of kind, but only of degree. It was precisely because the labor movement had supported the First World War—consequently relinquishing its main weapons of defense, the closed shop and the right to adjust wages and conditions; allowing control of seamen to pass into government hands; lending itself to political support of the whole imperialist adventure—that the government had then been able to hold all the trumps and cash the union in. In the period between the wars, the unions had regained strength, and prevailing conditions were different: not holding the whip hand, the government could not so easily ride the unions out of the industry. The most important factor was that the unions had a kind of opposition program.

But before the war that nebulous program was confined mainly to the economic field; and under war conditions the program must necessarily be a political one. Whenever the union gives up its own program and adopts that of the employing class, it sacrifices its strongest weapon. Support of the war is a political action. And, refusing to learn from the last war's experience, that is exactly what, as we shall see, the maritime union leaderships did. By so doing they let down the defenses guarding unionism's own independent existence. With government machinery already set up for absorbing the union movement and regimenting the industry from top to bottom, it is not necessary for the government this time to wait until after the war to wipe out union conditions.

6: Pearl Harbor to Date: Government Regimentation

THOUGH OPEN war did not change the government's general policy toward maritime labor, it forced a sharp increase in the rhythm of its application. The government gained a new ally when on June 22, 1941 Hitler invaded the Soviet Union: the

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CP flopped back to support of U.S. imperialism, and the NMU's Stalinist leadership rushed to help apply the government's policy to maritime. The "anti-politicals" and "independents" resisted the government's anti-union drive but had no thought-out program for the problems inevitably raised by formal U.S. war entry. Their instinctively sound resistance, though it slowed down the government's program somewhat, was powerless to stop it.

From the first step, political support of the war, given by both leadership tendencies for different reasons, all subsequent union concessions have automatically and inevitably derived. Having renounced their political independence in advance, the unions had consequently to sacrifice their strike weapon and every other arm. The government relentlessly pushed its advantage. First Captain Macauley complained of "uncontrollables." Then Knox began to "study" a plan for the Navy to take over the merchant service. Government intimidation, here checked, there successful, pressed on. The WSA requisitioned the fleet—and the seamen. The pool plan defeated on a national scale, the government skillfully tried to reapply it through an international wangle. The Navy's M-1 plan was introduced.

Thus, flexibly but tirelessly, the government drove on: checked in one quarter, it renewed its attack in another. The unions were on the defensive. Though the Stalinist NMU leadership gave away everything with both hands, the "anti-politicals" fought defensive skirmishes—but always retreating. The process, under war pressure, was getting ahead of itself: the labor bureaucracy could not keep up. The Stalinists fought for recognition of their services in the form of government apparatus posts. The "anti-politicals," though afraid of being out-manuevered by the Stalinists and of being stigmatized as "unpatriotic," were nevertheless not yet ready to give up the last vestiges of union independence.

The government could afford to wait. It had union cooperation in manning its fleet; meanwhile it was pressing its training ships, its hiring halls, its fink book. Steady, relentless, but flexible pressure, it was sure, would tell in the end. And under that unrelenting weight, between the political sell-out of the Stalinists and the lack of political understanding of the "anti-politicals," U.S. maritime labor was gradually cajoled, intimidated, herded, beaten, tricked, smashed, bamboozled, and betrayed into that final impasse in which it finds itself today.

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WAR DID not essentially change the general policy that the government had worked out for maritime labor, but speeded it up. The moment Congress declared war on December 8, 1941, the problems of all parties concerned in the maritime industry were increased a hundredfold. Everyone had to take a stand in accordance with the preparations he had made for the catastrophe. The Maritime Commission had not finished its job: it was still confronted with essentially the same problems it had faced five years earlier. It still had (and has) to build a merchant fleet. It still had (and has) to complete its regimentation of merchant seamen.

Meanwhile, however, it had picked up a new ally. Since the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, the Stalinists in the NMU leadership had been among the most solid supporters of the war program of U.S. imperialism and had become the most blatant advocates of war. They had been trying to work out a formula, therefore, for application of the government's maritime labor policy, though sometimes rank-and-file resistance forced them momentarily to backwater and pretend a demagogic union-defense position. But they had not succeeded in ingratiating themselves with the government. They still have not received official recognition as qualified spokesmen for all U.S. seamen.

The "anti-politicals" in the Sailors Union of the Pacific and Seafarers International, on the other hand, had been protesting their loyalty to the government. They had seized on the unpopularity of the Stalinists during the preceding Hitler-Stalin pact period, with the "clever" aim of getting the inside track and, by being the government's friends, protecting the union from its blows. They hoped thus to preserve the union's independence somehow and ride out the war. They did not choose to become involved in politics, preferring to rely upon the collective bargaining contracts they had negotiated with various shipping companies. But they had no program for meeting the problems that would be raised by the war. With the actual declaration of war, they rushed to endorse it. But the declaration of war only intensified the government's drive to regiment the seamen and control the unions.

Nothing in subsequent union behavior can be understood unless it is first understood that it was the first, the political, step, which counted. Once the maritime union leaderships took that fatal first step of full and unconditional political support of the imperialist war, then every other step deriving from it followed automatically. If anyone is for the war, and strikes impede the war, then naturally he must give up the right to strike. And so on. And so on. In this

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the Stalinists, though traitors to the working class, are perfectly logical; the "anti-politicals," though instinctively sound in their resistance, are inconsistent.

Once it had political support for the war, the Maritime Commission moved quickly. In spite of the government's comparative failure to put over its full war program for the maritime industry in the war-preparedness period, it was much better prepared than the seamen, who had practically no program at all. Formal war entry necessitated, on the part of the Commission, only a change of tactic.

The war, creating an extreme shortage of seamen, altered the previous significance of the training-ship issue. While this shortage enabled the Commission to put over its training-ship program, the shortage also further aggravated the problems of the Commission. Men who now come off the training ships into union crews are still generally absorbed as union men. This process will be reversed as the war progresses and the unions more and more relinquish their weapons for keeping conditions up to union standard. But in the initial period of the war, the most the training ships could do was to provide *supplementary* personnel, instead of a body of men *separate from and opposed to* the unions. Thus for this period the training ship lost much of its significance.

Faced with the failure of its original plan, because the time element did not permit its completion, both as to the number of ships and the regimentation of seamen, the government tried a new tack. In the first frantic days following Pearl Harbor, a meeting of all seamen's representatives and steamship operators was called in Washington. "National Unity" for the war effort was now brought forward to do what the previous anti-union program had failed to achieve.

The conference was not a complete success from the point of view of the administration. Its real aim was to insure against strike action by coaxing the union leaders to give up the right of direct collective bargaining with the shipowners on questions of bonus rates. What resulted was a new agency, the Maritime War Emergency Board, as a recommendation of the conference.

The following men were appointed by President Roosevelt to the Board and were accepted by all parties to the conference:

CAPTAIN MACAULEY, *Chairman*, representing the Maritime Commission.

DR. JOHN R. STEELMAN, head of the U.S. Conciliation Service.

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PROFESSOR FRANK GRAHAM, University of North Carolina—representing the "public."

But, at the conference, the unions, having already renounced their political independence in advance, consequently had to sacrifice the strike weapon. The "anti-politicals," representing the AFL unions, and the so-called "independents," who are a faint-hearted opposition to the Stalinists in the Marine Firemen's Union on the Pacific Coast and have kept that union from affiliating to either the AFL or CIO, had declared their full support of the war in advance. In Washington they were asked to pay off on their declaration. You support the war! Good, how much do you give? The "anti-politicals" were not prepared for this. But the Stalinists, who had also declared full support of the war for American imperialism, were. They went to Washington with a carefully prepared program which Frederick Myers, one of the Communist Party spokesmen in the NMU, presented during the conference in the form of the following summary and proposal:

The conference convened by the Maritime Commission and the Department of Labor for the purpose of mobilizing all interests in the shipping industry in the maximum war effort has already given an inspiring example to the nation of the type of democratic unity which is essential for the ultimate defeat of fascism.

The first question to be considered by the conference was the vital question of insuring uninterrupted shipping facilities to guarantee the success of our war effort. Consistent with that purpose, it is gratifying to report that every labor organization present at this conference unequivocally pledged that it would abstain from the exercises of its fundamental and inalienable right to take economic action for the settlement of disputes.

It is equally gratifying to note that the Maritime Commission, speaking for the government, in turn pledged that it would be the policy of the government that collective bargaining rights should not be infringed upon nor curtailed, and that proper and appropriate substitute machinery should be made available in return for labor's agreement to give up its right to exercise economic action.

Finally, the shipowners' representatives stated that in recognition of the generous attitude taken by labor in this national emergency, they will make every effort to adjust all disputes amicably under their existing collective bargaining agreements, and furthermore, that all questions arising which cannot be settled within the framework of these agreements shall be submitted, as labor has suggested, to a tribunal, the composition of which shall guarantee fair adjudication of *all problems* submitted to it.

In order to guarantee that the basic program of this conference—that is, the defense of the nation and the defeat of the Axis powers—may be accomplished, we believe that it is absolutely essen-

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tial that any board set up be designed to reflect the composition of this conference. Failure to set up a board on this national, coordinated basis would be to abandon the democratic principles which have brought this conference into session.

We propose, therefore, specifically, that this conference go on record urging the establishment of a board consisting of representatives of all the labor organizations, the shipowners and the interested government agencies. For the purpose of *voting on any question submitted to the board*, the shipowners and the *labor organizations shall have an equal vote*, with the appropriate government agency casting the *deciding vote*. We believe this conference should act on this basic policy immediately.

Generally speaking the functions of the board will be to formulate and put into operation a program which will make use of all the existing facilities and all the personnel available in the maritime industry in the manner most consistent with the national defense effort. *Among other things the board may wish to conduct an inventory of facilities and personnel and recommend their allocation.*

Many subsidiary and corollary questions will arise as to the functioning of the board. Undoubtedly the board will establish panels for the consideration of specialized problems referring to different sections of the industry. In addition, the board will undoubtedly consider the desirability of setting up regional mechanics along the lines of the National Labor Relations Board.

We have here pledged ourselves to submerge all petty differences and to avoid all factional disputes. In light of the immensity of the problem confronting us, we cannot afford to take a narrow or provincial point of view of *any problem* in the maritime industry. On the contrary, *every* problem must be examined from the basic viewpoint of its effect on the national war effort.

Obviously we are engaging the Axis enemy on all fronts simultaneously. Therefore only through a national, coordinated board on which all parties have representation can these parties have the opportunity of making their maximum contribution. The Army, the Navy and our Federal Government operate on the basis of one army, one navy, one nation. Therefore, the maritime industry has the obvious responsibility of applying the same democratic principle in the solution of its problems.*

This is as clear a statement of the government's aims as could have been given at that time. But no one was prepared to go that far except the Stalinists. The "anti-politicals" balked and the government decided not to press the question just then.

Although the unions were unprepared to counter the war-time emergency drive of the Maritime Commission, they did succeed in slowing it up. And this was accomplished in spite of the Stalinists

**Seafarers' Log*, December 23, 1941. It is significant that this sell-out document was never published in the *NMU Pilot*.

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who seconded the Maritime Commission's every move. Indeed, they anticipated the government's moves and laid claim to them as their own, which must have proved somewhat embarrassing to the Maritime Commission Admirals.

The government, however, got a measure of insurance against strikes. This was given verbally by the majority of union representatives in conference with the ship operators. They signed a statement of principles which said: Without waiving the right to strike, maritime labor gives the government firm assurance that the exercise of this right will be absolutely withheld for the period of the war; on a voluntary basis therefore this is a guarantee there will be no lockouts for the period of the war.

In its first days the Maritime War Emergency Board ostensibly confined itself to such practical questions of the moment as bonus rates for various war zones. But this was only for the record. What really interested the government was utilizing the Board to press its new advantage against the unions. The Board was hardly two months old when its chairman, Edward Macauley, opened the campaign for "discipline." He sent a letter to all unions signatory "to the statement of principles agreed upon at the Conference held in Washington during December." The fears of the government are hardly concealed by the threats in the letter. It deserves quotation in full:

The commission is in receipt of many statements reporting loose discipline on board U.S. Merchant Marine vessels and improper behavior of American seamen in foreign ports. I am often forced to defend my belief that our maritime personnel are capable, self-respecting seagoing men who are performing their duty properly, creditably and bravely. The complaints are frequently reiterated, and there seems to be considerable evidence that some of the masters and other licensed officers on our merchant ships are unable to control members of their crews because of threats, real or implied, and fear of reprisals or pressure which make their work more difficult and might eventually cost them their jobs.

Last week I attended a meeting of the highest officers of our Navy at which it was again urged that the entire Merchant Marine be taken over and operated by the Navy under Naval conditions and discipline. I have consistently opposed such action. If we are to retain the manning of our ships by American seamen chosen from union membership through the hiring halls and are to make our ships efficient and of the greatest use to our war effort, steps must be taken to control those elements that have given rise to the complaints above referred to.

Don't misunderstand me. Having spent a great part of my life at sea and on board ship, I do not expect seagoing men to be

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angels, but they should be dependable, competent and obedient to orders from proper authorities.

One or two cases of bad conduct will get more publicity and do more harm to our efforts to prevent the taking over of the Merchant Marine by the Navy than the favorable effect of 100 cases of exemplary behavior which are not conspicuous. It is therefore of the utmost importance that the unions cooperate to the fullest extent in the maintenance of that discipline that is necessary to the proper and efficient handling of ships.

Ship's delegates should be more carefully chosen and impressed with the importance and responsibility of their positions. By example and advice these delegates should influence and control recalcitrant or non-cooperative individuals who by thoughtless or ill-chosen conduct or attitude may reflect discredit on the maritime labor movement to the detriment of its independence, progress and perpetuation.

If the Maritime Commission, the Maritime War Emergency Board and the Maritime Unions are to cooperate successfully in these critical times, as we should, then you must exert every effort to put the organized maritime labor movement in the high position in which I believe it belongs. If we are to preserve the improved working conditions and advantages that Maritime Unions have gained in the past five years, it is up to you to see that not only some but all of its membership are responsible and disciplined, a credit individually and collectively to that movement and to our own nation.

The adherence of the Maritime Unions to the Statement of Principles agreed upon at the Conference held in Washington during December, the agreement by the unions not to strike, their faithful observance of this pledge, and their continued and determined courageous sailing of vessels into the danger zones are recognized and appreciated by the Maritime War Emergency Board, by the Maritime Commission and, I believe, in great measure by your fellow countrymen.

It is important that a reply to this letter should be received at the earliest possible date.

Yours sincerely,

EDWARD MACAULEY, *Chairman MWEB*

Chairman Macauley got his reply, quickly. The *Seafarers' Log*, official organ of the Seafarers International Union, published it in full for all members of the union to study. Seamen are pretty wise to this old hard-cop-soft-cop game.

But the government was merely momentarily checked, not really thrown back. It renewed the attack from other quarters. This time the MWEB tried to use the Navy and other government agencies as bogeymen, in an effort to cajole and con the seamen along. Thus Colonel Knox, Secretary of the Navy, began to "study" a plan for the Navy to absorb the merchant marine. But before the Colonel

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completed his "study," another government agency, the War Shipping Administration, which is supposed to be concerned only with big-time deals in shipbuilding and trading, suddenly stepped forward with a full-blown plan to smash the union hiring hall.

The plan provided for "establishment of a Division of Manning in the War Shipping Administration which shall have responsibility for the personnel employed in ships of the American Merchant Marine for the duration of the War. The Division of Manning shall establish a central hiring set-up in all ports of continental United States frequented by the vessels under the control of the War Shipping Administration." And next the training-ship program. The Division of Manning would "participate in the various Government programs for recruitment and training of personnel." Also it would "coordinate the various Government agencies administering laws pertaining to discipline on board ship" and "eliminate disloyal elements from the present personnel of the Merchant Marine." Last, but still very important to them, the Fink Book. The Division of Manning would "direct and coordinate the various Government agencies issuing seamen's Identification papers." The Book is still optional. And doubtless under this set-up the Division of Manning could convince most seamen to pack it.

Before there was time for discussion of the War Shipping Board's proposed plan, a new attack was launched: the Board itself chartered the entire merchant fleet of the nation. This was designed to make the War Shipping Board the employer. The Board was now in a position to issue its famous Administrative Order governing personnel. Some interesting points in the War Shipping Board's new regulations were the following:

1. Selection of Crew. The master shall have the responsibility and the duty of selecting the crew and approving or disapproving any man for employment as a member of the crew.
2. Complaints or suggestions for the good of the service. Whenever an unlicensed department head or special rating has a suggestion or complaint he may submit it through his immediate superior to the master for adjustment.

The union hiring halls are relegated to a subsidiary role in the order in the following way:

3. The War Shipping Administration will establish and maintain pools of seagoing personnel, both licensed and unlicensed, who will be available for employment on vessels operated for account of the War Shipping Administration. Men will be furnished to these pools from training stations established and maintained by the Coast Guard and from union hiring halls. They may also be furnished to those pools from vessels temporarily laid up or from any other sources approved by the War Shipping Administration.

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It is the policy of the War Shipping Administration to cooperate with the labor unions and to seek the cooperation of the unions in the proper manning of merchant vessels with civilian crews.

The last sentence, it will be noted, comes at the end of a long series of Regulations which contradicts the entire meaning of the union hiring hall, denies men the right to union representation in the settlement of beefs on board ship, and does away with virtually all payment of overtime. And the War Shipping Administration says it wants to "cooperate" with the unions! This is more of the kind of "cooperation" seamen got from the U.S. Shipping Board after the last war.

This move by the War Shipping Administration to charter and operate the entire American merchant marine under open-shop conditions represents the high point to date in the government's drive to smash the union hiring hall in this vital industry. Here again an attempt was made to use the tough method, the way of the old U.S. Shipping Board. But the seamen's unions today do not gasp and die simply by fiat of administrative order from Washington. Most of the unions were prepared to make a fight for self-preservation. The Seafarers International Union stated its position unequivocally:

The time has arrived to fight! The time has arrived to serve notice upon our enemies that the SIU has no intention of folding up shop and returning the seamen to the days of the Fink Hall and slavery! In 1939, 12,000 men banded together in the SIU to protect themselves against the avaricious shipowners and the reactionary politicians—they will not disband now! Let the shipowners mark these words! Let the Maritime Commission mark them! Let Knox and Macauley and Admiral Land and Joe Curran mark them!

The reference to Curran was no mere personalism, for here again the Stalinists, with Curran as their chief spokesman in his capacity as president of the NMU, were in their pro-war frenzy advocating a government shipping pool for all seamen. (For a full statement of the Stalinists' program, see section IV.)

The Maritime Commission found itself faced with a united front opposition of all marine unions except the NMU. It duplicated the situation at the December conference, only here the government was applying much more pressure. It had confronted the union with an accomplished fact. But the War Shipping Administration's "surprise" move was a bit premature. The Maritime Commission was compelled to countermand the Administrative Order. The War Shipping Administration signed a "Statement of Policy" in which "it is understood that all disputes shall be settled through the regular machinery now in existence under the collective bargaining agreements between the unions and the steamship operators."

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But if the pool has not yet replaced the union hiring hall in this country it does not mean that the government has given up. It has simply taken another tack. It could afford to wait. For the immediate problem of manning its fleet it had the complete cooperation of the union leadership and could rely on the union hiring hall for crew replacements. Meanwhile, following its policy of putting on the pressure in one sector the moment it was forced back in another, the government tried experimenting with a still further method.

For there were plenty of other ways of accomplishing the same end. Once general policy had been defined—and this had been done six years earlier in the Merchant Marine Act of 1936—the tactics to be used in effecting this policy could be very flexible. Faced with a divided maritime labor movement in its own country, and prompted by the international needs of Anglo-U.S. imperialism, the U.S. government decided to use the servile leadership of the British seamen's union as a front. In May 1942 it launched this "clever" backhanded scheme to drag the U.S. seamen into a pool anyway. It took the form of attempting to establish a giant international shipping pool for all seamen of the United Nations. It was proposed formally at the session of the Joint Maritime Commission, a sub-committee of the International Labor Organization (of the League of Nations), in London, June 26-30, 1942. Said Omer Becu, representative of the International Transport Workers Federation in this country:

The ITF proposal vests sweeping powers in the proposed tripartite Maritime Commission and demands that seamen now serving in the armies of their countries be released for employment in the merchant marine. Several features of the plan are already in operation in Great Britain and corresponding action is as necessary on this side of the Atlantic as on the other.

Joseph Curran, who represented the NMU at the London session of the ILO, seconded the motion. Addressing the meeting he said:

The shortages of United Nations seamen has caused vital war materials to be delayed in reaching their destination. The National Maritime Union has suggested to the American government that to solve this problem and avoid delays in departure a central hiring pool, jointly operated by the American government and the representatives of the United Nations' operators be set up in the major ports of the United States.

Very magnanimous. By this time the Stalinists were asking nothing, proposed to give up everything.

Although the Seafarers International Union (AFL) formally affiliated to the International Transport Workers Federation in June just prior to the ILO conference, government hopes for immediately establishing an Allied shipping pool were shattered when Morris

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Weisberger, SIU delegate to the London session, made known the following instructions from his membership:

We [SIU-SUP] are opposed to joint boards of labor, operators and government. We firmly believe that the disputes and conditions relating to merchant seamen should be directly handled between the shipowners and the unions. With the three-cornered boards composed of government, operators and unions, the seamen have two strikes against them because, in the final analysis, invariably the government will take the side of the shipowner. Furthermore, the seamen do not want to be serfs or wards of the government. Seamen are free men and should be allowed to maintain their status as such.

On this basis, the SIU rejected the pool. That kind of stand was pretty hard for the Maritime Commission to get around at that time. But the London proposals served to intimidate further the leaders of U.S. seamen by demonstrating what reserves the government has in its anti-labor arsenal. Regardless of what national differences may exist among them, the employing classes of all nations can always find agreement on a labor policy, since their attitude toward the working man is basically the same throughout the world.

The government was again momentarily set back. But as the war continues and with the supply of new men coming into the industry funneled through government training schools and the hands of the unions tied and unable to keep conditions aboard ship up to union standards, the main body of maritime labor will soon come under direct government control. That is the day in the not very distant future when the government will be in a position to ignore the unions if it does not first absorb the union leadership into its own maritime apparatus.

The SIU position at the ILO conference in London was essentially defensive. It was of course correct in rejecting the pool, but it betrays a misunderstanding of the part the government plays today in the shipping industry. All questions *should* be settled directly between the union and the shipowner. Now, however, the government is the shipowner. Who are these people referred to as shipowners? They do not build ships. They do not own ships. They do not load ships. They do not route ships. And they have nothing to say about wages and conditions on ships today except in their capacity as appointed government representatives. These questions are all settled in Washington between the unions and the Maritime Commission or one of its agencies. In turn, of course, the Maritime Commission is under the control of the handful of really big shipping magnates, who openly sit on the War Shipping Administration (pp. 54-55). And certainly, having wiped out the smaller fry, the government

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after the war will turn the ships over to the big operators. But the essence of the problem of the unions today and for a long time to come, is that they are confronted by the government and not by private operators.

This, then, is the crooked set-up that seamen face. The Maritime Commission has a bag full of tricks. After the London Conference of the ILO, the Commission appeared to be cooking up another scheme, probably awaiting developments within the union movement itself. Meanwhile the unions were attacked from another quarter. The Army requisitioned ships and operated them under open-shop conditions, openly violating all the government pledges to the unions made by such agencies under the Maritime Commission as the War Shipping Administration and the Maritime War Emergency Board. And when the unions demanded that the Maritime Commission get the Army to live up to those commitments, they were given the off-the-record apologetic answer: "You know how the Army is." Just as the Army is thus used to intimidate the unions, so is it used against the individual seaman. He is told that the Army will put him in uniform if he fights to save union conditions.

The U.S. Navy Department also worked a new wrinkle on the same theme. From the Navy Recruiting Station in Seattle, Washington, came an announcement last October.

Attention Maritime Men:

Is your draft number likely to remove you from the duties you have chosen as your life's work at sea?

Are you confronted with the idea that the war is going to haul you ashore and place you high and dry with a bayonet for your tool of war?

That worry need not haunt you. There is a way out!

The United States Navy has opened class M-1 for just such men as you, so you can stay on your ship and do your regular job. By enlisting in an active status with the Navy's M-1 program, you can remain aboard the ship you are now on until such time as the Navy may have to take over that ship. You will not be subject to call by selective service. You will be in the service of your country.

No other procedure could so adequately protect the personnel and guarantee the operation of much needed merchant marine. That's why the Navy has opened its M-1 branch.

At Navy recruiting headquarters, Federal Office Building, Seattle, there is a special enlistment officer to see to it that men of the merchant marine are handled quickly and efficiently in the process of enlistment into this new Navy reserve unit. It's your only chance to safeguard your job at sea!

Seamen here are presented with a choice: remain in the union and go to the Army, or give up the union and join a branch of the

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Navy. It took a young ensign in the Navy to think that one up.

How closely the fate of seamen is tied to the military machine is demonstrated by the half-veiled threats in the Navy's M-1 plan. This is not the first time labor has heard the dictum: work or fight (in either event without benefit of unions). The government mobilizes manpower for both fronts: military and industrial. Standing between the two, merchant seamen have been crowded fast by the government; long subject to attack and from all quarters, they have already experienced what is now being leveled against the rest of the labor movement.

Seamen today have to take ships to the far corners of the world for a war that has meant only more concentrated attacks upon their democratic rights and more profits for the "private operators." The operators, naturally, will be around after the war because they "operate" without risk of life or property today. But thousands of today's seamen will not be here then. The seaman is in danger wherever he turns. At sea he faces the Nazi submarines. At home he faces the dictatorial government agencies and brass-hats. The inspiring fact is that, in the face of all this, the seamen and their unions have come through with the union hiring hall still in existence.

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