

No Justice, No Ships Get Loaded: Political Boycotts on the San Francisco Bay and Durban Waterfronts*

PETER COLE

*Department of History, Western Illinois University
Macomb, IL 61455, USA*

E-mail: P-Cole@wiu.edu

ABSTRACT: Using a comparative methodology, this essay examines how and why longshore workers in both the San Francisco Bay area and Durban demonstrate a robust sense of working-class internationalism and solidarity. Longshore workers are more inclined than most to see their immediate, local struggles in larger, even global, contexts. Literally for decades, workers in both ports used their power to advocate for racial justice at home and in solidarity with social movements globally. While such notions might seem outdated in the twenty-first century, as unions have been on the decline for some decades, longshore workers grounded their ideals in the reality that they still occupied a central position in global trade. Hence, they combined their leftist and anti-racist ideological beliefs with a pragmatic understanding of their central role in the global economy. While not the norm, these longshore workers' attitudes and actions demand attention, as they challenge the notion that workers in recent decades are powerless to shape their world.

On 24 November 1984 the Dutch cargo ship *Nedlloyd Kimberley* docked at Pier 80 in San Francisco, on the Pacific coast of the United States. Rather than doing their job, the longshore workers – members of Local 10 of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) – refused to touch the auto parts, steel, and wine from South Africa though they unloaded the rest of the ship's cargo. For eleven days, as hundreds protested daily and the boycott made the national news, the South African cargo remained in the hold.¹ Adding another chapter to its long history of fighting for social

* Thanks to Ralph Callebert, Jim Gregory, Moon-Ho Jung, Nelson Lichtenstein, Prexy Nesbitt, Kathryn Oberdeck, Peter Rachleff, James Thindwa, Henry Trotter, and Lucien van der Walt, along with the anonymous referees and editors of this journal. Thanks to ILWU and SATAWU members, especially Alex Bagwell, Jane Barrett, Joseph V. Dube, Bhakitemba Simon Gumede, Jack Heyman, Howard Keylor, KZN Chairperson Mashiya, Herb Mills, Leo Robinson (who just “crossed the bar” in January 2013), Harvey Schwartz, and Gene Vrana.

1. “Rally at Pier in Protest of South African Apartheid”, *Associated Press*, 1 December 1984.

justice, particularly racial equality, this action reaffirmed the ILWU commitment to freedom struggles worldwide. When it came to the global fight against apartheid, the ILWU proved about the only US union willing to strike.²

Similarly, on 21 April 2008, the Chinese ship *Ai Yue Jiang* docked in Durban, on South Africa's Indian Ocean coast. "Carrying three million rounds of ammunition for AK-47 assault rifles and small arms, 3,500 mortars and mortar tubes as well as 1,500 rocket propelled grenades", the arsenal was heading for South Africa's landlocked neighbor, Zimbabwe. There, Robert Mugabe's government seemed to be imploding as he bitterly fought his opposition during a highly contested, violent election. The weapons were intended for Mugabe's military and police, which beat and murdered tens of thousands of Zimbabweans that year. Rather than unloading these weapons, members of the Durban branch of the South African Transport and Allied Workers' Union (SATAWU), highly militant and internationalist, boycotted – in solidarity with Zimbabwean workers opposed to the Mugabe regime. Subsequently, workers in several other southern African ports also refused to unload the ship, which returned to China with its cargo. This work stoppage was not the first or last time SATAWU used its power for political ends, mirroring the activism of Durban dockers in the long anti-apartheid struggle.³

This essay explores how – to this day – militant waterfront workers exert power that they have periodically wielded for political causes.⁴ It evolved out of a book project comparing Durban and San Francisco Bay Area dockworkers' support for social movements and responses to technological changes from 1960 onward. In both ports, strong unions still materially benefit their members, in contrast to many other industries that have seen unions decimated by changes in technology and global trade. These longshore workers use(d) their power to argue for racial

2. In 1974, longshoremen in Mobile, Alabama – members of the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) – refused to unload coal from South Africa. However, their primary motive seems to have been respecting a picket line of Alabama union miners. These mineworkers, largely white, clearly were concerned about their own jobs, not the conditions of black South Africans. By contrast, the mostly black longshoremen sympathized with freedom movements in South Africa and Rhodesia after hearing from the North American representative of the Zimbabwean African National Union (ZANU). See Robert H. Woodrum, *Everybody Was Black Down There: Race and Industrial Change in the Alabama Coalfields* (Athens, OH, 2007), ch. 6, esp. pp. 197–200.

3. "New Twist in Chinese Arms Shipment: Union Will Refuse to Handle Cargo", and "SA Government Says It Can't Interfere with China-Zim Shipment", both at *Ports and Ships*, 18 April 2008: ports.co.za/news/article_2008_04_18_1308.html, accessed 23 April 2011; Peter Godwin, *The Fear: Robert Mugabe and the Martyrdom of Zimbabwe* (New York, 2011).

4. This essay evolved out of a conference at the University of Washington in Seattle on race and radicalism on the US West coast, so devotes more attention to the US side of my project.

justice at home and in solidarity with social movements globally – despite intense repression from employers and governments. Importantly, workers in both ports, more inclined than most people to see their local struggles in global contexts, consistently root(ed) their actions in the context of racial equality, freedom, and power. While these notions might seem outdated in the twenty-first century, when global capital seems dominant and unions ever weaker, these workers remain quite aware of their central role in global trade and, thus, their potential power. Indeed, San Francisco Bay area and Durban longshore workers have combined leftist and anti-racist ideological beliefs with a pragmatic understanding of the importance of their work to the global economy in order to promote a social justice agenda.

ILWU Local 10 staked out a radical stance on racial inclusivity, starting in the 1930s, though it took more than a generation to implement racial equality fully in its own ranks. Oft referred to as “civil rights unionism” in the US historiography, in contrast to those that practice “pure and simple” or “business unionism”, the ILWU generally, and Local 10 especially, promoted racial equality as they embraced social justice causes beyond their workplaces. Despite anti-communist repression during the Cold War and the container revolution – both of which could have destroyed the union – Local 10 continued articulating radical stances, including for racial equality, in the SF Bay area and faraway lands. In particular, black and white rank-and-filers fought for decades against white minority rule in South Africa.⁵

Similarly, Durban dockers have proved, for more than half a century, willing to “down tools” on behalf of the ideals of equality and power for (black) workers in South Africa and other countries. They did so despite tremendous repression in the apartheid era and containerization, both of which involved mass layoffs. In the South African historiography, unions that actively fought apartheid and, more generally, engaged in actions in support of the larger community, have been labeled “social movement” unions. Durban dockworkers, sometimes as members of a union and other times without one, frequently engaged in workplace actions that impacted the anti-apartheid movement. Though unions affiliated to COSATU (Congress of South African Trade Unions), including what became SATAWU, actively engaged in the anti-apartheid struggle, not all unions did; in fact, vigorous splits amongst “workerist” and “populist” unions existed in 1980s South Africa. As South African labor historian Steven Friedman ably summarizes, “This debate had originally centred on

5. Robert R. Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth-Century South* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2003); “SF Labor Council Resolution to Defend ILWU Local 10’s April 4 Solidarity Action”, at <http://www.transportworkers.org>, last accessed 11 December 2011.

the appropriate role for the union movement – ‘workerists’ wanted to shield the labour movement from the nationalism of the ANC and its United Democratic Front ally while ‘populists’ saw an alliance with the nationalist movement as essential to the defeat of apartheid.” Friedman perhaps conflates a desire by unions to act independently of the UDF-ANC with being apolitical; some workers and unions actively opposed apartheid but used different means. More recently, while true racial equality remains elusive in post-apartheid South Africa, black dockers in Durban’s SATAWU branch still strive to aid black workers in Zimbabwe and elsewhere.

This article affirms that both Durban and SF Bay area longshore workers have demonstrated a profound commitment to promoting causes beyond their immediate needs and workplaces. Despite somewhat different terminology, then, these longshore workers share much in common and suggest a need for further studies of longshore unions.⁶ In order to examine this complicated storyline and in keeping with this project’s comparative nature, this essay will shift back and forth, between San Francisco and Durban, in order to trace both stories as well as illustrate similarities and differences.

COMPARATIVE HISTORY

Historians, sociologists, political scientists, literary critics, and others, have compared South Africa (SA) and the United States (US) for decades. Many scholars have explored the ways both societies grappled with diversity and experienced powerful social movements combating racial inequality. Both nations have overcome the worst of their systems of racial oppression – while also inspiring people, worldwide, with the promise of freedom and equality. Among the many differences include levels of economic development, formal rights held by people of color, worker rights, and – perhaps most significantly – that African Americans are a distinct minority of the US population while blacks comprise the great majority in South Africa. A handful of comparative historians, led somewhat recently by Peter Alexander and Rick Halpern, have started examining intersections of labor and race; my research builds upon this foundation.⁷

6. Steven Friedman, “Before and After: Reflections on Regime Change and its Aftermath”, *Transformation*, 75 (2011), pp. 4–12; D. Glaser, “A Reflection on the Von Holdt–Plaut Debate”, *Transformation*, 7 (1988), pp. 80–86.

7. The widely acknowledged, if deceased, “dean” of comparative SA–US history remains George Fredrickson; see, esp., *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study of American and South African History* (New York, 1982) and *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* (New York, 1996). *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies* devoted an entire issue, 7:1 (2006), to white supremacy on

The nature of longshore work was and remains remarkably similar, be it in San Francisco or Durban, Rotterdam or Valparaiso, thereby facilitating this study. In the pre-container era, longshoremen – generally on a casual basis – normally labored in gangs for long hours and under hard and dangerous conditions though, of course, every port and society was distinctive. Once containers remade global shipping, the work drastically changed – but in similar ways, though the persistence of some casual labor in Durban is quite different from the Bay area. Before and during the container era, longshore workers have been quick to organize themselves and exert power at the point of production. Furthermore, dockers have demonstrated their political beliefs by occasionally boycotting ships in solidarity with issues they supported. This article examines several causes that longshore workers fought for and how they did so.

Within the fields of labor and maritime history, some scholars have productively deployed comparative (and/or transnational) methodologies in order to examine political activism. The obvious starting point is the two-volume collection, edited by Sam Davies and others, entitled *Dock Workers: International Explorations in Comparative Labour History*. The editors make the crucial point – re-emphasized here – that there is no norm in comparative history; one must strive not to judge any port's experience based upon another's, as no one history is the prototype for others. The contributions to *Dock Workers*, alas, do not extend into the container era.⁸

This article compares how two sets of dockers employed boycotts owing to similar ideological beliefs and political understanding of their position in the global economy. By examining two stories, side by side, we can see the many similarities in the dockers' actions and more fully comprehend the internationalist consciousness of marine transport workers. A comparative approach also enhances our understanding of the vital matters of labor and race in each country, an endeavor relevant to other countries with diverse working classes and labor movements. Comparisons also help scholars to think about the transnational dimension of labor activism, for only by investigating workers in more than one nation can scholars truly appreciate the politics, history, and impacts. Finally, this article suggests that longshore workers' history, despite much

its 25th anniversary. On comparative SA–US labor history, see the issue devoted to the subject in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 30:1 (March 2004), esp. Peter Alexander and Rick Halpern, "Introduction: Comparing Race and Labour in South Africa and the United States", pp. 5–18.

8. Sam Davies *et al.* (eds), *Dock Workers: International Explorations in Comparative Labour History, 1790–1970*, 2 vols (Aldershot, 2000), I, esp. pp. 4–5, 10–11; Colin Davis, *Waterfront Revolts: New York and London Dockworkers, 1946–61* (Urbana, IL, 2003) also stops prior to containerization.

research, demands further attention, including more comparative studies. This article, and the larger project, is among the first to compare both the experiences of dockers in the container era and how they engaged in political boycotts.⁹

LONGSHORE WORK(ERS) BEFORE AND AFTER CONTAINERIZATION

Historians have devoted considerable attention to longshore workers,¹⁰ justifiably so given their propensity to strike, unionize, and take international solidarity actions. The collective nature of their work begins to explain their long history of strikes and unionism. Literally for thousands of years, workers loading and unloading cargo have done so in gangs; moreover, much of the heavy lifting demanded that dockers work in pairs. Thus, the nature of the work inculcated a collective identity among workers. Further, in many ports, including San Francisco, longshoremen had regular partners; sometimes, partners worked together exclusively for years and some even refused jobs unless their partners were also dispatched to the same ship. Moreover, dangerous workplaces often encourage workers to think of each other as a close-knit “family”. Hence, be it Hamburg, Hong Kong, or elsewhere, longshore workers often organized, formally or informally, to improve wages, safety, and other work conditions.¹¹

Not only have longshore workers frequently seen each other more as family than co-workers, they are unusually cosmopolitan, knowing much more about the world than many people. The nature of marine transport – moving goods, people, and information – explains why longshore workers

9. My understanding of comparative and transnational approaches to labor history have benefited immeasurably from conversations with and writings of Lucien van der Walt.

10. Many terms exist to describe the work of loading and unloading ships – and their meanings vary across cultures. In the twentieth-century USA, the term generally used was “longshoreman”, though recently the gender-neutral longshore worker is sometimes used. “Stevedore” was more common in the early twentieth century and earlier, but sometimes stevedore referred to the worker and other times to foremen and hiring bosses. In South Africa, the most widely used term is “docker”, though “stevedore” was also used. This essay will use the terms longshoreman, longshore worker, and docker interchangeably; I choose to avoid using “stevedore” because its meaning varies.

11. The excellent, vast literature on longshore workers and unions includes: Charles B. Barnes, *The Longshoremen* (New York, 1915); Eric Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour* (London, 1964); Bruce Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s* (Urbana, IL, 1990); Frederick Cooper, *On the African Waterfront: Urban Disorder and the Transformation of Work in Colonial Mombasa* (New Haven, CT, 1987); Peter Cole, *Wobblies on the Waterfront: Interracial Unionism in Progressive-Era Philadelphia* (Urbana, IL, 2007), esp. ch. 1; Davis, *Waterfront Revolts*; Davies, *Dock Workers*. In numerous interviews, SF Bay area longshoremen referenced their work partners, as a matter of course; e.g. interview with Eugene Vrana, San Francisco, 11 July 2011.

(and sailors) are so worldly. Thus, many longshore workers, with access to information and people who travel the proverbial seven seas, interpret their lives, work, and world through a global lens. Occasionally, they become internationalist in their thoughts and deeds. Moreover, certain political ideologies are overtly international in their imagination and intention; many longshoremen, including in the SF Bay area and Durban, embraced leftist, Pan-African, or both of these ideologies – which demand transnational thoughts and actions. Not all longshore activism, though, was motivated by leftist ideologies; during the Cold War, union longshoremen in New York City protested ships from the Soviet Union. Naturally, not all longshoremen are internationalist, but the propensity of longshore workers to think in such ways is remarkable. Just as ideas now travel more quickly due to new information technologies, other technologies transformed marine transport.¹²

In the past half-century, the shipping industry has proven integral to the dramatic growth in the market-driven global economy and a key factor was the introduction of containers. Seeking larger profits and facilitated by allies in governments, shipping corporations introduced a new technology and process, called containerization, without which globalization could not have occurred. Due to containers – standardized metal boxes holding cargo and loaded by huge cranes – global trade has exploded since the 1960s. Thus, longshore workers found themselves in the “eye of the storm” of modern globalization, moving ever more containers with ever fewer workers.¹³ Containerization weakened longshore workers across the planet, but many of their unions survived, and their members in many nations now earn higher wages – again with far fewer workers. Crucially, due to their vital role in the global economy, longshore workers still command significant power. Aware of their central role in global trade, they occasionally use this power for their own benefit and, as this article argues, on behalf of others.¹⁴

12. Marcus Rediker and Peter Linebaugh, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston, MA, 2000); Fran Shor, “Left Labor Agitators in the Early Twentieth Century Pacific Rim”, *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 67 (2005), pp. 148–163; Marcel van der Linden, “On the Importance of Crossing Boundaries”, *Labor History*, 40 (1999), pp. 362–365; Bruce Nelson, *Divided We Stand: American Workers and the Struggle for Black Equality* (Princeton, NJ, 2001), chs 1–2. The Jamaican-born, Harlem-based leftist Claude McKay’s novel, *Banjo*, set in 1920s Marseilles, is a great example of the cosmopolitan nature of maritime workers and the African diaspora, as is Ousmane Sembene’s novel *Le Docker Noir* (1956).

13. Marc Levinson, *The Box: How the Shipping Container Made the World Smaller and the World Economy Bigger* (Princeton, NJ, 2006); Lincoln Fairley, *Facing Mechanization: The West Coast Longshore Plan* (Los Angeles, CA, 1979); Bernard Dubbeld, “Breaking the Buffalo: The Transformation of Stevedoring Work in Durban between 1970 and 1990”, *International Review of Social History*, 48 (2003), pp. 97–122.

14. Peter Cole, “The Tip of the Spear: How Longshore Workers in the San Francisco Bay Area Survived the Container Revolution”, *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*,

THE PRAXIS OF LOCAL 10: LEFTIST AND PAN-AFRICAN
IDEOLOGIES AND STRIKING APARTHEID

Local 10's strong commitment to civil rights is appreciated, if not fully documented, and demands mention here to comprehend its solidarity actions with South African workers. While not spotless, it must be noted how "advanced" Local 10 has been on race relations, especially in integrating its own ranks. Since the 1930s, white leftists, in the local's leadership and rank and file, consciously promoted policies that resulted in a massive increase in African-American membership. Notably, African Americans never have been a statistically large presence in the city of San Francisco. Even Oakland has never had an African-American majority though, after World War II, a large and growing black population emerged, most famously birthing the Black Panthers. Yet by the late 1960s, African Americans made up a majority of Local 10's approximately 4,000 members. Also in that decade, the rank and file elected African Americans to many leadership posts, with Joe Mosely as chief dispatcher (arguably the most powerful local position) and Cleophas Williams the first black president, in 1967, serving three more terms before retiring. No other local in the entire ILWU was (or is) majority black; in fact, several large locals (Los Angeles and Portland) have troubling records of race relations. Thus, while the ILWU generally is racially progressive, Local 10 led (or pulled) the entire union.¹⁵

Building upon these gains, Local 10 activists, black and white, pushed for the inclusion of more African Americans in other ILWU locals, particularly the SF Bay area shipping clerks (Local 34), that, as late as 1960, had only one African American out of 1,000 members. Working with white leftists on the inside and International leaders Harry Bridges and William "Bill" Chester (an African American originally from Local 10), Local 34 hired many blacks in the 1960s. Local 10 activists also pushed for the hiring of black workers in other occupations – from

forthcoming (2013); *idem*, "The Ships Must Sail on Time: The Histories of Longshore Workers and Why Their Unions Still Matter", *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 83 (2013), forthcoming. My book, tentatively titled *The Buffalo Are Strong: Labor, Race, and Technology on the Durban and San Francisco Bay Waterfronts, 1950–2010*, will have a chapter on containers.

15. Interview with Cleophas Williams, 22 June 2011, Emeryville, CA; interviews with Herb Mills, 18 June 2010 and 15 June 2011, Berkeley, CA; conversations and e-mail exchanges with Jack Heyman and Howard Keylor (San Francisco and Oakland, CA), 2010–2012, and interview with both, Oakland, 3 August 2011; Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ, 2003), pp. 159–170; Donna Murch, *Living for the City: Education, and the Rise of the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2010); Nelson, *Divided We Stand*, Part 1; <http://www.bayareacensus.ca.gov/cities/Oakland.htm>, last accessed 2 December 2011.

San Francisco streetcar drivers in the 1950s to jobs in the employers' own Pacific Maritime Association. Similarly, the ILWU actively embraced the southern black freedom struggle, carrying dozens of stories on the civil rights movement in its paper, the *Dispatcher*, contributing money to the cause, and participating in Bay area civil rights demonstrations. Local 10's reputation was so renowned that, in 1967, Dr Martin Luther King, Jr visited its San Francisco hall and became an honorary member (like Paul Robeson before him). King addressed a large gathering: "I don't feel like a stranger here in the midst of the ILWU. We have been strengthened and energized by the support you have given to our struggles [...]. We've learned from labor the meaning of power."¹⁶

This long-term commitment to racial equality by Local 10 contains both ideological components (in syndicalist, communist, and other socialist ideologies that one's class identity trumps race and ethnicity) and pragmatic ones (a union is stronger with more workers). Initially, this effort came from leftist whites who forged alliances in the SF Bay area's black community to prevent African Americans from crossing picket lines in the union's founding 1934 strike. Harry Bridges, earlier a member of the syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World (IWW or Wobblies), emerged in the 1930s as the leader of the entire ILWU; Bridges often receives credit for the union's racial inclusivity though numerous leftist whites embraced equality. As work swelled during World War II, more than 1,000 African Americans found jobs on the waterfront and, after the war, leftist whites pushed for racial inclusion despite declining work, arguably acting as "race traitors" but earning tremendous loyalty from the growing African-American contingent. Cleophas Williams recalled, "When I first came on the waterfront [1944], many black workers felt that Local 10 was a utopia." Not only was it racially inclusive, Williams claimed, "Local 10 was the most democratic organization I've ever belonged to". As historian Robert Self concludes, the ILWU "forged an intense solidarity, and Harry Bridges and cosmopolitan radicals of both communist and syndicalist persuasion turned this solidarity into a force for racial equality".¹⁷

The strike against the *Nedlloyd Kimberley* was not the first (nor last) time that the ILWU engaged in a work stoppage for political ends and with a

16. Cleophas Williams, Bill Chester, and Don Watson interviews, in Harvey Schwartz, *Solidarity Stories: An Oral History of the ILWU* (Seattle, WA, 2009), pp. 38–45, 45–51, 55–57; *ILWU Dispatcher*, 29 September 1967, pp. 1, 8; Martin Luther King, Jr, "All Labor Has Dignity", ed. and intro. by Michael K. Honey (Boston, MA, 2011).

17. Williams quotation in Schwartz, *Solidarity Stories*, pp. 38–45; Mills interview; Herb Mills, "The San Francisco Waterfront: The Extension of Community", Article 25, esp. pp. 1–6, <http://www.ilwu10hermills.com/articles/articles.cfm>; Self, *American Babylon*, pp. 53, 84.

racial tinge. Since the union's inception, radicals in Local 10 – sometimes with support of elected leaders (local and/or international) – have boycotted ships to demonstrate solidarity with workers in other countries. Herb Mills, a Local 10 leader who earned his Ph.D. in political science while on leave from the docks, writes:

The International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) has a long history of rank-and-file action in support of domestic and international issues of social justice. That history for its Local 10 of San Francisco dockers began in 1935 – less than a year after the monumental 1934 west coast maritime strike – when it refused to load nickel, brass and zinc destined for the Italian Fascist war machine then ravaging Abyssinia [Ethiopia]. Shortly thereafter, the members of 10 also refused to load scrap iron destined for a Japan bent upon ruling the nations of Asia. Such actions were in part underwritten by the still very powerful spirit of the 1934 struggle.¹⁸

Later, in the 1970s, Local 10 activists boycotted ships from nations with repressive and/or racist politics. In 1978 Local 10 refused to load US-made military supplies intended for the Chilean military dictator, General Augusto Pinochet. In the 1980s, the ILWU did the same to protest military dictatorships in El Salvador and South Korea. The stand that Local 10 took against apartheid South Africa belongs to this eighty-year tradition.¹⁹

The first time that ILWU Local 10 stopped work to protest apartheid occurred in 1962, in coordination with the American Committee on Africa (ACOA). Mary Louise Hooper, a leading US anti-apartheid activist and West Coast Representative of ACOA, teamed with the ILWU to successfully boycott South African cargo, likely the first such action in the United States. On 17 December 1962 Hooper led picketing of the Dutch ship *Raki* that arrived at Pier 19 in San Francisco loaded with asbestos, coffee, and hemp from South Africa. Along with the ACOA – the era's leading US organization on African issues – members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Northern California Committee for Africa, and Congress of Racial Equality picketed the *Raki*. More than 100 Local 10 members refused to cross this community picket line so the ship remained unloaded for the day and night shifts (see Figure 1). Bill Chester, ILWU Regional Director for Northern California and the

18. *Idem*, “Dockers Stop Arms to Pinochet: The West Coast Longshore Union's 1978 Refusal to Load US Military Aid to Chile's Dictator, Augusto Pinochet”, *Social Policy*, 35:4 (2005), pp. 24–28 (quotation from 24).

19. *ILWU Dispatcher*, 5 October 1984, p. 2; conversations with Mills and his unpublished manuscript, *Presente!* (in possession of the author). The most recent *international* solidarity action of Local 10 members was against an Israeli ship in 2010 to protest Israeli attacks on an international flotilla of activists; “Historic Victory at Oakland Port – Israeli Ship Blocked from Unloading”, at <http://www.transportworkers.org/>, last accessed 25 June 2010.



Figure 1. When the *Raki* docked with South African cargo, longshoremen refused to cross a picket line, led by the American Committee on Africa's Mary Louise Hooper. *ILWU Dispatcher*, 28 December 1962, *International Longshore & Warehouse Union*. Used with permission.

International's highest-ranking African American, served as the union's primary contact with Hooper; Chester had a long, distinguished history of civil rights activism in the SF Bay area. This boycott sought to raise awareness of the horrors of apartheid and encourage the USA to join the United Nations boycott of South African goods. A few months later the *ILWU Dispatcher* published a letter of thanks from John Gaetsewe, Acting Secretary-General of the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU), which had been bitterly persecuted by the South African government for organizing black workers and fighting apartheid. This letter partially illuminates still-hidden networks that existed among the ILWU, US anti-apartheid activists, and South African activists operating in America, Great Britain, and across Africa.²⁰

20. <http://africanactivist.msu.edu/organization.php?name=American+Committee+on+Africa>, last accessed 15 April 2011; <http://africanactivist.msu.edu/image.php?objectid=32-131-18D>, last accessed 8 April 2011; *ILWU Dispatcher*, 28 December 1962, p. 3, 8 March 1963, p. 10, and 25 February 2005; ILWU Africa subject file, ILWU Library, San Francisco; William Minter and Sylvia Hill, "Anti-Apartheid Solidarity in United States-South Africa Relations", in South African Democracy Education Trust, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, III: *International*

THE LONG, MILITANT HISTORY OF DURBAN'S DOCKERS

The militancy of Durban dockers offers an important example of “social movement unionism” and their long history of activism and self-organization is widely appreciated. Scholar-activist David Hemson ably and fully explores how Durban dockers were among the first group of Africans to challenge the apartheid regime’s labor and urban policies, which sought to maintain large surpluses of black labor in the rural “homelands” (or “reserves”) and limit blacks in cities. Indeed, dockworker activism proved vital to the city’s black working class as well as the anti-apartheid struggle. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the state brutally repressed black labor and anti-apartheid organizations, including SACTU, that allied with the African National Congress (ANC) and other groups to fight apartheid. Repression against Durban’s dockers in 1958–1959 foreshadowed repression against the wider anti-apartheid movement, resulting in a “quiet decade” from 1964 to 1973. Dockers again rose up prior to other elements of Durban’s black and Indian working class, striking in 1969, threatening to do so in 1971, and striking again in late 1972. This last action helped launch the mammoth “Durban strikes” in early 1973 that shaped the trajectory of the national anti-apartheid movement in the mid-1970s. In most waterfront strikes, Durban employers took extreme measures – firing the entire workforce several times to squash militancy – confirming the links between economic and political struggles.²¹

A political boycott in an earlier generation confirms the long history of subaltern activism on the Durban waterfront. In his dissertation, historian Ralph Callebert briefly describes a fascinating strike in 1935, an action both political and internationalist. Despite a labor surplus, Durban dockers refused to load meat aboard the *Perla*, for this cargo was destined for Italian troops in Ethiopia. Apparently, these black workers did not wish to help Italian fascists defeat the last independent African nation, but local police broke the picket line and loading resumed. This action and another one shortly thereafter indicate a workforce well-informed about

Solidarity, Part 2 (Pretoria, 2008), pp. 758, 766–767; William Minter *et al.* (eds), *No Easy Victories: African Liberation and American Activists over a Half Century, 1950–2000* (Trenton, NJ, 2008), p. 182; “Bill Chester: ILWU Civil Rights and Community Leader, 1938–1969”, introduction by Harvey Schwartz, at: <http://www.ilwu.org/?p=834>, last accessed 26 June 2011; Robinson interview.

21. F. Fisher and P.G. Mare (eds), *The Durban Strikes 1973: “Human Beings with Souls”* (Durban, 1974). Worth noting is that a huge Indian working class existed in Durban but dockers were blacks, mostly Zulu and Pondo. See also David Hemson, “Class Consciousness and Migrant Workers: Dockworkers of Durban”, (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Warwick University, 1979); Bill Freund, *Insiders and Outsiders: The Indian Working Class of Durban, 1910–1990* (Pietermaritzburg [etc.], 1995); Ralph Callebert, *Urban Means Towards a Rural Goal: Livelihood Strategies of Dockworkers in Durban in the 1950s* (Burlington, VT, 2010), in possession of the author.

international events and one willing to engage in politically motivated direct action in support of black people far from Durban.²²

Similar to that action, a 1959 strike evolved out of a national “stayaway” campaign waged by the ANC, SACTU, and other groups. Of course, most dock strikes in Durban dealt with wages, including several during World War II as well as in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Generally, the state (many dockers were employed by the state-owned South African Railway and Harbours administration) and private employers dealt with all strikes in the same manner – vehemently cracking down; that dockers repeatedly struck despite such repression confirms their militancy.²³ The great majority of Durban dockers were Zulu, who hailed from rural KwaZulu and supposedly were conservative; yet these men repeatedly “downed tools”, suggesting that the work regime on the docks was a major, perhaps the major, factor in their militancy. Ironically, the interlocking systems of labor and race relations on the docks (and country generally) contributed to the radicalism that political and business elites sought to contain and, ultimately, contributed to apartheid’s demise.²⁴

Durban dockers’ willingness to strike, despite repression, inspired other black workers in the city of Durban and the province of Natal. Hemson contends,

In Durban the base was laid for the mass organization of industrial workers which developed in the 1950s with the growth of SACTU (the South African Congress of Trade Unions), a phenomenon which placed the Durban area as a leading centre of militant trade unionism, mass political activity, and a high level of strike activity.²⁵

Scholar Rob Lambert, who also writes on SACTU in Natal, convincingly argues that Durban’s working class stood at the forefront of the nation’s labor movement and that SACTU played a leading role in the era’s anti-apartheid

22. Ralph Frans Callebert, “Livelihood Strategies of Dock Workers in Durban, c.1900–1959” (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Queen’s University, 2011), pp. 279–280. Similarly, some African Americans also paid close attention to and fought against Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia; Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York, 1996), ch. 6.

23. David Hemson, “Beyond the Frontier of Control? Trade Unionism and the Labour Market in the Durban Docks”, *Transformation*, 30 (1996), pp. 83–114, 84, and *idem*, “In the Eye of the Storm: Dock-Workers in Durban”, in Paul Maylam and Iain Edwards (eds), *The People’s City: African Life in Twentieth-Century Durban* (Pietermaritzburg, 1996), pp. 145–173, 155–159.

24. Discussion with David Hemson, Durban, 13 July 2009 and Jane Barrett, a SATAWU official, Johannesburg, July 2009; Mike Morris, “Stevedoring and the General Workers Union”, Part I, *South African Labour Bulletin*, 11 (1986), pp. 90–114, 100–102; Callebert, “Urban Means Towards a Rural Goal”; Anthony Marx, *Making Race and Nation: A Comparison of the United States, South Africa, and Brazil* (New York, 1998).

25. David Hemson, “Dock Workers, Labour Circulation, and Class Struggles in Durban, 1940–59”, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 4 (1977), pp. 88–124, 90.

struggle. Lambert also demonstrates that SACTU in Natal was probably the most resolutely Marxist and radical of any region.²⁶

That Durban was a national center of labor and left radicalism from the 1950s into the 1970s – not unlike the SF Bay area, considered the most progressive metro area in the USA – remains undeniable. Hemson himself belonged to a group of radical, white university students inspired by the global New Left as well as currents in Durban, including Stephen Biko's growing Black Consciousness movement and Professor Rick Turner's activism. Further, many Durban dockers were active in SACTU. For instance, Curnick Ndlovu, a Zulu, found a job as a "casual dock worker" in 1953 and continued working into the mid 1960s. He belonged to the South African Railway and Harbour Workers' Union (SARHWU), an all-black union whose origins dated back to the 1930s, and SACTU, which SARHWU co-founded. Like other SARHWU activists, Ndlovu became a regional commander of the ANC's armed underground, Umkhonto we Sizwe ("Spear of the Nation" or MK), in Durban in the 1960s. According to the circumspect Ndlovu (interviewed in 1983, i.e. during apartheid), he was active in various "day-to-day struggles" in this period, which earned him a prison sentence on Robben Island for almost twenty years, along with more famous prisoners, Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu.²⁷

Not surprising given their long-standing activism, Durban dockworkers returned to the struggle, prior to most others, in 1969. Owing to massive state repression, only 2,000 black workers struck annually nationwide in the 1960s, but Durban dockers matched that in April 1969, when just as many struck for wage increases – predictable given the poverty of African workers. Also predictably, police beat, fired, and "endorsed out" (i.e. deported) strikers to their "homeland". Again, employers replaced the strikers with fresh recruits from rural KwaZulu – supposedly more "traditional", i.e. loyal to Zulu royalty and the apartheid state as well as without class-consciousness. However, as Hemson writes, "The strike of dock workers in 1969 signalled the reawakening of black working class action after the suppression of the labour movement in the early 1960s."²⁸ Historian Steven

26. Robert Lambert, "Political Unionism in South Africa: The South African Congress of Trade Unions, 1955–1965" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1988).

27. Grace Davie, "Strength in Numbers: The Durban Student Wages Commission, Dockworkers and the Poverty Datum Line, 1971–1973", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 33 (2007), pp. 401–420; Ian Macqueen, "Re-Imagining South Africa: Black Consciousness, Radical Christianity and the New Left, 1967–1977" (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Sussex, 2011); Eddie Webster, "The Impact of Intellectuals on the Labour Movement", *Transformation*, 18 (1992), pp. 88–92; Curnick Ndlovu interview by Jenni Duggan, KCAV 853, Workshop on African Urban Life in 20th Century Durban, University of Natal, Durban, 26–27 October 1983, Killie Campbell Africana Library, University of KwaZulu-Natal.

28. Hemson, "Dock Workers, Labour Circulation, and Class Struggles", p. 123 (quotation); *idem*, "Beyond the Frontier of Control?" p. 84; *idem*, "In the Eye of the Storm", p. 160.

Friedman agrees: “In 1969, Durban dock workers struck for more pay and their stoppage was later seen as the start of a new worker militancy.”²⁹ Hemson notes, ironically, that this strike occurred at “precisely the same time as the ANC and SACP had concluded at the Morogoro Conference that mass action among the working class had been exhausted as a means of resistance to apartheid”.³⁰ Long-time labor activist Ray Alexander, who could not make the Morogoro conference, sent a letter suggesting that Durban’s longshoremen offered a blueprint of how to revive the labor movement: “We must organise under any name – the Mutual Benefit Societies, Co-ops. We may even have to consider utilising the ‘Works Committee’. It was the Works Committee at Durban Docks that led the dockers’ strike this month.” The 1969 strike also helped inspire radical white students at the University of Natal-Durban, including Hemson: “As a result of the strike by the dockworkers, activists launched the idea of students undertaking research into the wages of black workers as a means of organising them.”³¹

Durban dockers resumed their struggle without formal organization (as unions, essentially, remained illegal for blacks), striking in 1971 and 1972. The 1972 strike was the culmination of months of growing agitation for wage increases – and demonstrated remarkable organization in the absence of a formal union, in part thanks to local white student radicals. Not only did hundreds push for raises (recall that previous efforts resulted in mass firings), they also challenged the authority of their Zulu foremen, who were often corrupt and detested for collaborating with (white) managers. Harriet Bolton, a long-time white activist and colleague of Hemson’s, recalled a pivotal 1972 meeting of the Department of Labour Wage Board, a state-appointed institution that set wages:

[...] for years, the board’s hearing had been attended by an “induna” or African foreman who employers had appointed to represent workers – his chief role was to thank the employers for their efforts on workers’ behalf. To the consternation of the board, the stevedores angrily challenged his right to speak for them – and his claim to be a dock worker.

Bolton continued, “The board’s faces were a picture [...]. I don’t think they’d ever heard a real worker speak at a hearing before.” By October 1972, however, the Wage Board had not issued its ruling, so workers struck at Maydon Wharf and “the Point”, the heart of the port, shutting

29. Steven Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today: African Workers in Trade Unions, 1970–84* (Johannesburg, 1987), p. 44.

30. Hemson, “In the Eye of the Storm”, p. 160.

31. David Hemson, Martin Legassick, and Nicole Ulrich, “White Activists and the Revival of the Workers’ Movement”, in South African Democracy Education Trust, *Road to Democracy in South Africa, II: 1970–1980* (Pretoria, 2004), pp. 248–252 (Alexander quotation, 248; final quotation, 252).

down the harbor. The dockers refused to elect a delegation and, instead, shouted (as a group) their demands to management to avoid having their leaders fired, a key precedent. Not long after, the dockers won a modest raise as well as annual increases that, by 1978, meant a doubling of wages.³²

The significance of this strike proved far greater than the raise – it helped ignite the legendary “Durban strikes” that launched a “domino effect” of rising protests against apartheid. Hemson writes, “On October 23, 1972 1,000 stevedores went on strike and signalled the beginnings of mass opposition to apartheid.” Historian Robinduth Toli and I agree with Hemson: “their strike and agitation was an advance shock wave of the earthquake of the 1973 strikes which followed and the opening of a new era of resistance”.³³ The dockers had struck less than two months before several thousand black workers at Coronation brick “officially” started the wave. In his fascinating, but little referenced, 1991 thesis, Toli convincingly argues that the 1972 dock strike greatly influenced Coronation’s workers: “the strike at Coronation was made possible when African workers, having been emboldened by the 1972 dock workers’ strike and having become acutely conscious of their problems were encouraged to take militant action on 9 January [1973]”.³⁴ Scholar Julian Brown also recently noted that those first to strike, after Coronation, worked in transport on Point Road; that is, before the larger textile factories downed tools, those who struck worked “primarily in the transport and marine sectors”.³⁵

32. Labour History Group, *Durban Strikes* (Salt River, 1987), pp. 6–7 (Bolton quotations); Davie, “Strength in Numbers”, pp. 413–416; Hemson, “In the Eye of the Storm”, p. 160; *idem*, “Class Consciousness and Migrant Workers”, ch. 7; Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, pp. 45–46, 62; Ndlovu interview; Hemson, “Beyond the Frontier of Control?”, p. 84; Robinduth Toli, “The Origins of the Durban Strikes, 1973” (M.A. thesis, University of Durban-Westville, 1991), p. 213; Morris, “Stevedoring and the General Workers Union”, pp. 107–108. The dockers’ tactic of *not* electing leaders to negotiate predated this era; in the 1940s and 1950s, the most well-known dock leader, Zulu Phungula, was banished twice – contributing to the end of those strikes. Despite turnover, the dockers’ collective memory remembered that repression; Callebert, “Livelihood Strategies of Dock Workers in Durban”, pp. 290–291.

33. Hemson, “Beyond the Frontier of Control?”, p. 84 (both quotations); L. Douwes Dekker *et al.*, “Case Studies in African Labour Action in South Africa and Namibia (South West Africa)”, in R. Sandbrook and R. Cohen (eds) *The Development of an African Working Class* (London, 1975), pp. 219–226.

34. Toli, “Origins of the Durban Strikes”, abstract and p. 1.

35. Julian Brown, “The Durban Strikes of 1973: Political Identities and the Management of Protest”, in William Beinart and Marcelle C. Dawson (eds), *Popular Politics and Resistance Movements in South Africa* (Johannesburg, 2010), pp. 31–51, 36. Brown, as some before him, seems ignorant of the late 1972 dock strike; he does not mention it, despite noting the transport workers striking in 1973 as well as citing Hemson and Toli. The other significant work on the role of labor in the anti-apartheid struggle devotes little attention to the 1969 or 1972 dock strikes; Jabulani Sithole and Sifiso Ndlovu, “The Revival of the Labour Movement,

Given the nature of apartheid, *any* strike of African workers was political, particularly as tens of thousands, in dozens of workplaces, struck from January to March 1973. After all, the Bantu Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act of 1953 made African strikes illegal. After the strike, dockers marched with railway workers in downtown Durban (near the Point), demanding that SACTU be made un-banned. Labor activity (in Durban and nationally) continued from 1973 onwards. On the docks, the Transport, General and Allied Workers' Union (TGWU) as well as General Workers' Union (GWU) emerged, in Durban and Cape Town, the country's second-largest port. Although worker activism grew nationwide after the Durban strikes, Hemson notes, "unions grew quickest in Natal"; he continues, "The dockworkers of Durban – have had a decisive part in the initiation of mass working class resistance in South Africa." Ultimately, as Toli concludes, "the Durban dock worker strikes were a forerunner of the 1973 strikes and foreshadowed a reawakening of black worker struggles in the 1970s", though that belief remains less accepted than it should be.³⁶

SF BAY LONGSHORE WORKERS BOYCOTT APARTHEID, AGAIN

The struggle against apartheid surged in the 1970s, as global solidarity efforts expanded in response to the emergence of protests in South Africa. First, the 1973 Durban strikes, partially launched by the 1972 dock strike, shook the nation out of the repression-induced "quiet decade". Then, the 1976 uprising of black students in Soweto took the movement to the next level. Despite ferocious repression, the Soweto rebellion quickly spread nationwide and dramatically increased opposition to apartheid worldwide, including in the USA. In both South Africa and worldwide, organized labor played a major role in this fight.³⁷

Following the lead of historian Francis Njubi Nesbitt, this article suggests that the African American longshoremen who fought apartheid fell into one of three categories: leftist, nationalist, or liberal – with the leftists and nationalists sharing anti-imperialist views and the nationalists divided into economic and cultural groups. While not all black Local

1970–1980", in South African Democracy Education Trust, *Road to Democracy in South Africa*, II, pp. 187–241, 191.

36. Toli, "Origins of the Durban Strikes", pp. 210–212; Morris, "Stevedoring and the General Workers Union", Part I; Margaret Kiloh and Archie Sibeko (Zola Zembe), *A Fighting Union: An Oral History of the South African Railway and Harbour Workers' Union* (Randburg, 2000), pp. 68–69; Hemson, "Class Consciousness and Migrant Workers", p. 719; Leonard Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (New Haven, CT, 1990), pp. 212, 224; Sithole and Ndlovu, "Revival of the Labour Movement, 1970–1980", p. 202.

37. Anthony Carew, "South Africa: The Fight for Freedom" in Marcel van der Linden (ed.), *The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions* (Bern [etc.], 2000), pp. 397–413.

10 members were leftists, the leaders of the anti-apartheid movement were, and they also inhabited, following Nesbitt, the left side of the black nationalist spectrum. Leo Robinson, the leading activist in the 1977 and 1984 actions, first became interested during the Soweto uprising, having only a vague sense of South Africa previously. As an African American whose left politics always incorporated anti-racism, Robinson authored a resolution, shortly after Soweto, to create the Southern Africa Liberation Support Committee (SALSC) and Local 10's rank and file officially voted to do so. The group's name merits highlighting, indicating the fight against apartheid belonged to interlocking struggles across the sub-continent. Subsequently, this committee, made up mostly of African Americans, engaged in a wide series of actions over many years in solidarity with black workers in South Africa, Mozambique, Rhodesia, and elsewhere – consciously not limiting its gaze to South Africa.³⁸

Other SALSC activists, black and white, were leftists whose political beliefs demanded solidarity actions. These longshoremen saw black South African workers oppressed by a racist, capitalist regime and believed the best method of undermining it was via direct action on the job. This syndicalist approach informed other political boycotts and strikes undertaken by the ILWU. As noted earlier, the ILWU has a long tradition of leaning left, despite Cold War repression. For example, the ILWU motto reads: “an injury to one is an injury to all”, a popular mantra crafted by the most radical union in the early twentieth century, the IWW – which shaped the ILWU.³⁹

The ideologies of Local 10 activists, who embraced a variety of leftist views (communist, Trotskyite, syndicalist) and/or the left side of Pan-Africanism, explains why they took on this fight. For years prior to the *Nedlloyd Kimberley* action, activists – led by Robinson, Dave Stewart (an African American active in the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists or CBTU), Bill Proctor (a white leftist whose stepfather was a well-known black communist in Local 10), Larry Wright (white, raised by communist parents, who first worked on behalf of African liberation in the 1960s while at university) Howard Keylor (a white leftist committed to anti-racism, who

38. Francis Njubi Nesbitt, *Race for Sanctions: African Americans against Apartheid, 1946–1994* (Bloomington, IN, 2004), preface; Minter *et al.*, *No Easy Victories*, pp. 182–183; Robinson interview; Robert W. Cherny, “Longshoremen of San Francisco Bay, 1849–1960”, in *Dock Workers*, I, pp. 102–140, 108f, 138; “Judge Orders Halt to South African Boycott”, *Associated Press*, 4 December 1984. African American activists in other Bay area locals included Alex Bagwell (34) and Leroy King (6). Also see Fredrickson, *Black Liberation*, esp. chs 4, 5, and 7, though only ch. 7 investigates the post-World-War-II era.

39. Another example of IWW influence in Local 10 is the “back to the bench” rule that forbids elected officials from serving more than two years before returning to the rank and file; see Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*; Heyman/Keylor interview; Mills interviews. For an alternate view, see Cherny, “Longshoremen of San Francisco Bay”, p. 134.

later became involved) – educated Local 10 members and others via the SALSC. This committee raised awareness about apartheid and colonialism, to ready Local 10 and others for direct action. This “anti-apartheid labor committee”, according to Robinson the first in the country, also took the issue to the AFL-CIO via the CBTU, a caucus of militant African Americans that served as a conduit in coordinating anti-apartheid activists nationwide.⁴⁰

Local 10’s activism mirrored what unionists elsewhere did to combat apartheid in the 1970s. Working people around the world expanded their protests, in individual unions as well as via the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), a massive conglomeration of unions from across the non-communist world. The ICFTU provided significant financial and moral assistance to the struggle for decades. While commendable, rarely did ICFTU-affiliated unions engage in direct action. Notably, dockworkers in New Zealand, who refused to unload South African cargo, were one of the few other examples of “striking” apartheid.⁴¹

Turning rhetoric into action, on Easter Sunday in 1977 Local 10 members boycotted a ship loaded with South African cargo as part of a week of international union actions. When the *Nedlloyd Kimberley* docked, a Local 10 dispatcher privy to the plan selected workers committed to this cause who refused to cross a “community picket” at Pier 27. According to the ILWU contract, if a workplace situation (including getting to a ship) is a threat to a union member’s “health and safety”, s/he can refuse to work. As many as 500 people, especially from churches, cheered the workers while hoisting banners including one that said, “Apartheid is Crucifixion”. In 1978 the SALSC collected many tons of food, clothing, medicine, and other essentials, convinced shipping companies to donate two containers, and loaded the goods for South Africans in exile in Tanzania, where the ANC had a huge training camp. Another tactic employed by ILWU activists was screening the 1973 documentary film *Last Grave at Dimbaza*. This powerful movie, secretly filmed in and smuggled out of South Africa, proved a popular organizing tool in the global struggle. Wright and Robinson showed the film to dozens of audiences up and down the Pacific

40. Kaylor and Robinson interviews; interview with Larry Wright, Oakland, CA, 19 July 2011; Minter, *No Easy Victories*, pp. 182–183; CBTU history at: <http://www.cbtu.org/about.html>, last accessed 22 April 2011. Other long-time members of the SALSC included Charlie Jones and Leron “Ned” Ingram, both African-American; Stewart, Jones, and Ingram all passed away well before I began my project.

41. Van der Linden, *The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions*; the chapter by Rebecca Gumbrell-McCormick explores the ICFTU fighting apartheid; on New Zealand, see pp. 404, 408–410. Also see Peter Limb, “The Anti-Apartheid Movement in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand”, in South African Democracy Education Trust, *Road to Democracy in South Africa*, III: *International Solidarity*, Part 2, pp. 907–982.

coast in the 1970s and 1980s, laying the groundwork for the important 1984 action.⁴²

Indeed, a screening of *Last Grave at Dimbaza* in late 1984, before about 400 Local 10 members, provided the spark of the longest and most important boycott against apartheid in US history. After workers, approximately half African-American, watched the film, Robinson made a motion that Local 10 should boycott the next Nedlloyd Line ship that arrived with South African cargo; Keylor also participated in this strategic motion. The timing was apt, since that fall a group of black South African union miners had been arrested and faced long prison sentences. The longshore workers already knew about the issues in South Africa, having been exposed to them since the 1976, and were primed to act – particularly in solidarity with the persecution of unionists, something Local 10 workers had fought against in Chile, El Salvador, and elsewhere.⁴³

On 24 November 1984, the *Nedlloyd Kimberley*, an older ship that carried break-bulk (i.e. not containerized) cargo, arrived from Australia with some South African cargo. Local 10 activists knew of the ship's arrival thanks to Alex Bagwell, an African American in Local 34 (shipping clerks). After being assigned to the ship by a Local 10 dispatcher "in" on the plan, another sympathetic clerk who supervised unloading (the "supercargo"), informed longshoremen which cargo was South African: that is, they unloaded all the cargo *except* the South African goods. In a dramatic retelling by a principal activist, Bill Proctor recounts the boycott's start:

As luck would have it, South African cargo was not the only cargo, so we worked some breakbulk cargo from Argentina as I recall, then after about two hours, from below deck I heard our Ships Clerk yell up to me, "that's it Proctor, nothing left down here but Razor Wire (Cortina) and Auto Glass from South Africa." I then said, and I shall never forget it..., "okay fellas, come on out of the hold, I ain't hoisting one ounce of cargo from South Africa" and the movement of cargo came to a halt, we then left the ship.⁴⁴

During these eleven days, many community members demonstrated their support. Each day at San Francisco's Pier 80, hundreds picketed, thereby providing a legal rationale, if needed, for workers to refuse to unload the

42. *ILWU Dispatcher*, 9 July 1976, p. 1; 28 January 1977, pp. 1, 8; and 11 February 1977, p. 1; Wright and Robinson interviews; *New York Times*, 11 April 1977, n.p. Though the ILWU International Executive Board endorsed anti-apartheid actions in 1977, only Local 10 boycotted a ship.

43. Minter, *No Easy Victories*, pp. 182–183; phone interviews with Jack Heyman (8 April 2011) and Howard Keylor (16 March 2011); Robinson interview.

44. I reconstructed strike details from interviews, conversations, and e-mails, especially with Bagwell, Heyman, Keylor, Robinson, and Wright; quotation from Bill Proctor e-mail to ILWU Yahoo Group, 18 January 2013 (ellipses in original).

ship – as well as invaluable moral support and publicity. However, this time workers had voted to boycott the next ship with South African cargo – that is, they did *not* use the community picket for legal cover. Instead, they directly violated their contract and refused to unload a ship though they also received enormous community support. For example, on 2 December, about 700 people from other unions, religious groups, and civil rights organizations, rallied near the pier; many joined the newly created Bay Area Free South Africa Movement. Among those who spoke in solidarity were the legendary activist Angela Davis and Congressman Ron Dellums, a prominent, progressive African American who represented nearby Oakland and Berkeley.⁴⁵

Boycotting workers materially sacrificed for this cause. The Pacific Maritime Association (PMA), which represents west coast shipping corporations in dealings with the ILWU, filed a federal injunction claiming the work stoppage was illegal. As a result, the workers forfeited their minimum guaranteed weekly pay, an issue already discussed inside Local 10. Robinson's motion before the membership and Keylor's motion to Local 10's Executive Board highlighted that the members would work all cargo except for the South African goods. In doing so, they hoped to avoid an injunction. Also, Local 10's and the International's leaders (including International President Jimmy Herman) consistently claimed the action was performed by *individual* workers on the basis of their own consciences, i.e. the boycott was not officially sanctioned. Activist David Bacon explains: "The Pacific Maritime Association went to Federal court to get an injunction against Local 10 to force it to work the ship. To avoid huge fines and its officers possibly going to prison, the local eventually unloaded the ship."⁴⁶ Thus, Local 10 President Larry Wing and Secretary-Treasurer Tom Lupher, during and after the action, stuck to this line. In the (surprisingly) brief story in the union's paper, shortly after the boycott, the article began, "Longshoremen from ILWU Local 10, whose 10-day refusal to unload South African cargo coincided with growing national protest against that country's racial policies." The *Dispatcher* quotes Lupher that "the workers' boycott [...] was made on an 'individual basis'".⁴⁷

However, several SALSC activists later suggested that Wing and Lupher were sympathetic to the cause and firm believers in union democracy; that is, since the membership had voted to endorse this

45. *ILWU Dispatcher*, 11 December 1984, p. 8; David Bacon, "Work a Day for Freedom! A Short History of the Bay Area Free South Africa Labor Committee": http://www.noeasyvictories.org/research/bacon_bafsalc.php, last accessed 10 March 2011.

46. Bacon, "Work a Day for Freedom!". In 1960 the ILWU and PMA signed the Mechanization and Modernization agreement that, among other aspects, included a minimum amount of hours (and, hence, pay) for ILWU members; Fairley, *Facing Mechanization*; Levinson, *The Box*, ch. 6.

47. *ILWU Dispatcher*, 11 December 1984, pp. 1, 8.

act, the leaders were committed, too. In his telegram to International President Herman, Luper spoke more bluntly:

At its membership meeting of October 18, 1984, Local 10 ILWU voted unanimously to “boycott all cargo ships from South Africa or to South Africa carried on Nedlloyd Lines Ships.” This strong action resulted from the utter revulsion that the San Francisco Local 10 Longshoremen feel over the South African Governments [*sic*] bloody atrocities in its war against the South African black people, such action also conforms with ILWU Conventional International Resolutions [...]. We expect a massive community picket line to protest the South African tragedy.⁴⁸

Similarly, Herman did not want to go against the contract, so downplayed the matter – to the chagrin of activists. While generally an ally of progressive causes, Herman was conspicuously absent during the boycott; however, the following year, as the struggle heated up nationwide and gained popularity, Herman was arrested for civil disobedience against apartheid. Regardless, the key point is that anti-apartheid activism in the ILWU always was driven from the rank and file, not the elected leaders.⁴⁹

Shortly after the boycott, the ILWU issued an official position on apartheid. Typically, the ILWU called for the release of Nelson Mandela and other long-time prisoners, the unbanning of the ANC and other organizations though they also sought to aid the emerging labor movement, which in 1985 saw the formation of COSATU. Another result of the boycott was, according to local activist David Bacon, “The Bay Area Free South Africa Movement was born in those demonstrations.” SALSC leader Wright also claims, convincingly, that the Bay area’s entire anti-apartheid struggle was inspired by Local 10, including the large student sit-ins at the University of California Berkeley campus just months later.⁵⁰

The ILWU – and SF Bay area anti-apartheid movement – proved so important that Nelson Mandela visited Oakland on his legendary ten-day tour of the United States in 1990, shortly after his release from notorious Robben Island. After listening to freedom songs presented by the local choir Vukani Mawethu, to which ILWU activist Alex Bagwell and his

48. Telegram from Tom Luther [Luper] to James Herman, 14 November 1984, in “Boycott of South African Cargo, 1984. Corres. from public, ILWU Attorneys, Int’l Officers”, ILWU Library, SF.

49. Information also from interviews with Bagwell, Heyman, Keylor, Robinson, and Wright.
50. “Statement of Policy on Apartheid”, ILWU International Executive Board (IEB), 1985 and “Statement of Policy on South Africa”, ILWU IEB, 1986 – both in “ILWU History, Trade Union Relations, Foreign – Africa”, ILWU Library; Bacon, “Work a Day for Freedom!”, Wright interview; Minter, *No Easy Victories*, pp. 182–183; *Soweto to Berkeley*, VHS, directed by Richard C. Bock, Independent Projects, 1988.

wife belonged, Mandela singled out, before 60,000 people at the Oakland Coliseum, the longshoremen's action:

We salute members of the International Longshore & Warehouse Union Local 10 who refused to unload a South African cargo ship in 1984. In response to this demonstration, other workers, church people, community activists, and educators gathered each day at the docks to express their solidarity with the dockworkers. They established themselves as the frontline of the anti-apartheid movement in the Bay area.

Even if the role of unions in the anti-apartheid struggle has been underappreciated in the United States, that no less a figure than Mandela praised Local 10 speaks volumes as to what he considered an effective tactic to attack apartheid.⁵¹

DURBAN DOCKERS BOYCOTT TO SUPPORT ZIMBABWEAN DEMOCRACY

As with Local 10, Durban dockers repeatedly demonstrated a commitment to issues of social justice in South Africa and beyond, particularly involving working class matters. In the 1980s and after apartheid, they joined several different unions including the TGWU, a member of COSATU. The largest labor federation in South Africa since its formation in 1985, COSATU played a central role in the defeat of apartheid and remains part of the ruling "tripartite alliance" with the ANC and South African Communist Party (SACP). Just like the ILWU, the COSATU masthead includes the old IWW motto, suggesting these unions share core values. Among COSATU founding unions, several in transportation merged into the South African Transport and Allied Workers' Union (SATAWU), now the main union for transportation workers. Though few in number, the dockers remain a powerful and militant component of SATAWU, with workers in every port including Durban, still the largest in the country and, indeed, all of Africa. In 2008 they boycotted a ship on behalf of Zimbabwean workers and democracy activists in an effort to make tangible the ideal of working-class internationalism.⁵²

Like most South African workers in the post-apartheid era, dockers in Durban have experienced a chaotic few decades. At times it seemed that their collective power had been broken only to rise again, sometimes in a

51. Recording of "Nelson Mandela in Oakland", 30 June 1990, CV 004, Freedom Archives, San Francisco; Bacon, "Work a Day for Freedom!"; <http://www.vukani.com/>, last accessed 4 November 2012.

52. On COSATU see: <http://www.sahistory.org.za/topic/congress-south-african-trade-unions-cosatu>, last accessed 4 November 2012. Another excellent source for labor in late apartheid and post-apartheid South Africa is Karl von Holdt, *Transition from Below: Forging Trade Unionism and Workplace Change in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg, 2003).

different union. The two most important factors weakening dockers were the introduction of containers and return of casual workers. These issues involve economic, political, and technological aspects and have local, national, and international ramifications; of course, millions of other South African workers have experienced similar challenges, including new technologies, casualization, a marked increase in the informal economy, and a government that has not done enough to overcome the massive economic and racial inequalities inherited from apartheid. These issues have weakened COSATU and other unions. Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that SATAWU has managed to hold on to some power in Durban, as evidenced by its 2008 action. Indeed, that Durban dockers acted as they did, albeit atypical in the current of contemporary South African labor and political climate, makes their actions worth studying.⁵³

In 2008 the political crisis in neighboring Zimbabwe reached a boiling point as South Africans looked on with interest and sympathy, especially as President Mugabe had long supported the anti-apartheid struggle. Elected after Zimbabwean independence in 1980, Mugabe has held power ever since though, in recent years, he has increasingly been condemned – especially outside Africa – as a brutal dictator. Not surprisingly, the truth is more complicated, especially in the context of leftist internationalism and Pan-Africanism. First, Mugabe was an important ally of the ANC in the anti-apartheid struggle; for someone like SA President Thabo Mbeki, a long-time ANC leader-in-exile, Mugabe was an ally and comrade. Second, during Mugabe's reign, he often claimed to act on behalf of the black masses, using expressly Marxist rhetoric; for example, the major land redistribution program in which wealthy white farmers lost lands was frequently praised by black Zimbabweans and other Africans though condemned by the Western media. Nevertheless, Zimbabwe's economic decline and lack of democracy had over time resulted in rising opposition to Mugabe in his country as well as neighboring South Africa, due to a shared border along with countless cultural, demographic, economic, historical, and political ties. When Morgan Tsvangirai, the leader of

53. The literature on contemporary labor relations includes: Edward Webster, "Trade Unions and the Challenge of the Informalisation of Work", in Sakhela Buhlungu (ed.), *Trade Unions and Democracy: COSATU Workers' Political Attitudes in South Africa* (Pretoria, 2006), pp. 21–43; Franco Barchiesi, "Informality and Casualization as Challenges to South Africa's Industrial Unionism: Manufacturing Workers in the East Rand/Ekurhuleni Region in the 1990s", *African Studies Quarterly*, 11 (2010), pp. 67–85; *idem*, *Precarious Liberation: Workers, the State, and Contested Social Citizenship in Postapartheid South Africa* (Albany, NY [etc.], 2011); Beinart and Dawson, *Popular Politics and Resistance Movements in South Africa*; Von Holdt, *Transition from Below*. Webster's article includes a section on Durban's dockers but, curiously, ignores containerization. The informal nature of many South Africans' work is less relevant in shipping because the technologies and commodities involve enormous capital and international trade; that is, dockers cannot be "self-employed", as in many other industries.

the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), appeared to have won the 2008 presidential election, Mugabe's forces unleashed mass terror on the Zimbabwean people. This ugly conflict regularly made the international news and particularly concerned South Africans and the several million Zimbabwean refugees there. Many across the world looked towards Mbeki, a lion in the anti-apartheid movement who had worked with Mugabe during that long struggle, to mediate the dispute. However, Mbeki's attempts at "quiet diplomacy", behind closed doors and without uttering a single word of criticism of Mugabe's actions, failed to resolve the crisis.⁵⁴

Amidst this storm, and seemingly out of the blue, Durban dockers sent shockwaves through southern Africa and made international news by refusing to unload a ship full of weapons destined for Mugabe. Much like ILWU actions, SATAWU members in the Planning Department of Transnet, the South African port authority, provided essential information, including which Chinese ship was carrying the military cargo, when it would arrive, and where it would dock. Then SATAWU activists, led by Provincial Secretary Joseph V. "J.V." Dube, met with SATAWU members who worked for Transnet and used text messaging to spread the word to members about refusing to unload this cargo. As community activists, Zimbabweans, and South Africans picketed in solidarity, the ship remained in harbor for several days until leaving with its hold still loaded with millions of rounds of AK-47 ammunition, thousands of mortars, and RPGs.⁵⁵

The reasons for SATAWU's stand are myriad and complex but not unlike the ILWU's. First, most South Africans knew of the crisis in Zimbabwe; the politically aware appreciated Mugabe's and other Zimbabweans' support during the anti-apartheid struggle and, thus, regretted the sad irony of a revolutionary ally acting in anti-democratic ways to maintain power. Second, SATAWU maintains a program to educate its membership on the necessity to act in solidarity with other workers' struggles. Just like the ILWU and COSATU, the official slogan of SATAWU is the Wobbly one, "an injury to one is an injury to all". Moreover, the very nature of the marine transport industry, central to the

54. James Hamill and John Hoffman, "Quiet Diplomacy' or Appeasement? South African Policy towards Zimbabwe", *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs*, 98:402 (2009), pp. 373–384; Brent Meersman, "The Legacy of Thabo Mbeki", *Sajundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies* 13 (2012), pp. 425–432; Peter Godwin, "Day of the Crocodile", *Vanity Fair*, September 2008, www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2008/09/zimbabwe200809, last accessed 23 April 2011; "A Grim Image of Politics in Zimbabwe Emerges", www.nytimes.com/2008/06/27/world/africa/27zimbabwe.html, last accessed 23 April 2011.

55. Interview with Bhekitemba Simon Gumede (shop steward at Transnet) and Joseph V. Dube, SATAWU offices, Durban, 29 July 2010.

global economy, facilitates international connections. For politicized South Africans, and there are many, there also remains an appreciation of how labor unions (not just political leaders) in other countries offered major support in the struggle against apartheid. When interviewed, Dube cited Zimbabwean unions' assistance in the anti-apartheid struggle as well as those of other unions outside South Africa that carried out solidarity actions.⁵⁶

Though fraught with complexity, Durban dockers struck because of their commitment to international working-class solidarity. In brief, when Rhodesia's black majority overthrew its white minority in 1980, the labor movement had played an important role and Mugabe frequently claimed to rule on behalf of the masses; later though, when growing numbers of Zimbabweans demanded that Mugabe be ousted, opposition arose out of Zimbabwe's labor movement. However, Mugabe's earlier contributions to the fight against apartheid (and other anti-colonial struggles) made it painful for South Africans, particularly Mbeki, to take a stand against Mugabe. Yet, increasingly, Mbeki was criticized for seeming to do nothing as Zimbabwe imploded, especially after the MDC appeared to win the 2008 election. When asked for SATAWU's motivation to aid the Zimbabwean opposition, Dube's answer was clear: SATAWU did so in solidarity with Zimbabwean workers and the belief that, if Mugabe gained more weapons, they would be used against Zimbabwean unionists and civilians, who were – after all – workers. COSATU's press release echoed Dube, "Workers of the world unite in solidarity with the workers and people of Zimbabwe in their fight for democracy, peace and food!"⁵⁷

As with the ILWU, many individuals and organizations praised SATAWU for its boycott. The Anglican Church, powerful in both South Africa and Zimbabwe, supported the strike, as did some other religious groups. Since millions of Zimbabweans live in South Africa, some demonstrated in solidarity with SATAWU in both Durban and the Chinese embassy in Pretoria. Countless congratulatory emails and letters poured into SATAWU headquarters in Johannesburg.⁵⁸

56. Interview with Gumede and Dube; Peter Cole and Lucien van der Walt, "Crossing the Color Lines, Crossing the Continents: Comparing the Racial Politics of the IWW in South Africa and the United States, 1905–1925", *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies*, 12 (2011), pp. 69–96.

57. Hamill and Hoffman, "Quiet Diplomacy' or Appeasement?", p. 379; COSATU, "COSATU calls for International Boycott of Zimbabwe Arms Ship", 21 April 2008: <http://historymatters.co.za/cosat-press-statements/>, last accessed 23 May 2013. That SATAWU belongs to COSATU – part of the ruling alliance – added another dimension to the action's political significance.

58. Azad Essa, "Opposition to Israeli Cargo at Durban's Dock: The Significance of Dockworkers' Refusal to Offload Israeli Goods", *Pambazuka* 419 (12 February 2009): pambazuka.org/en/category/comment/54031, last accessed April 8, 2011; "Chinese Ship Carrying Arms for Zimbabwe

Unlike in the United States, where the ILWU's political actions might be opposed – or, at least, not celebrated – by the broader labor movement, COSATU declared:

The Congress of South African Trade Unions congratulates its affiliate, the SA Transport and Allied Workers Union, on its historic victory in the fight to prevent the Chinese vessel, *Ai Yue Jiang*, from unloading its deadly cargo of weapons and ammunition destined for the illegitimate government of Zimbabwe. We shall never know how many lives of Zimbabwean workers will have been saved thanks to SATAWU members' act of international solidarity.

The COSATU press release also encouraged dockers in neighboring Mozambique and Angola to follow SATAWU's lead; COSATU even contacted labor federations in these nations. Both SATAWU and the ILWU belong to the International Transport Federation (ITF), which also has member unions in Mozambique and Angola. In fact, the ITF supported and boasted about the boycott as well. Further, SATAWU Secretary-General Randall Howard was a leader in the ITF and Durban hosted the 41st ITF Congress in 2006. Subsequently, the *Ai Yue Jiang* was turned away from several other African ports so returned to China. South African journalist-activist Azad Essa, for one, commended "COSATU's resolve and desire to continue its internationalisation against oppressive forces around the world".⁵⁹

A notable difference between the ILWU and SATAWU actions was their two nations' legal structures. While the South African constitution legally protected SATAWU, the ILWU was slapped with a federal injunction. The constitution ratified in post-apartheid South Africa guarantees the right to be in a union and strike (section 23). By contrast, US worker rights are not enshrined in their constitution and, while still supported by most Americans, such rights are insecure; witness that the SF Bay area employers' association successfully filed suit in federal court. Thus, although its action was shorter, SATAWU did not fear a government crackdown – even though the union's position contradicted Mbeki's "quiet diplomacy" (see Figure 2).⁶⁰

Refused Entry to Durban", *Ports & Ships*, 17 April 2008: ports.co.za/news/article_2008_04_17_5052.html#one, last accessed 23 April 2011; Charlayne Hunter-Gault, "South Africa Absorbs Zimbabwean Refugees", <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=9269300>, last accessed 24 April 2011; "Zimbabwean Refugees in South Africa", http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2009/01/24/world/0124-ZIMBABWE_index.html?_r=0, last accessed 24 April 2011; SATAWU's Jane Barrett shared a sampling of e-mails received by the union. 59. "COSATU calls for International Boycott of Zimbabwe Arms Ship"; Essa, "Opposition to Israeli Cargo"; www.itfglobal.org/congress/index.cfm, last accessed 24 April 2011.

60. John Cantius Mubangizi, "The Constitutional Protection of Socio-Economic Rights in Selected African Countries: A Comparative Evaluation", *African Journal of Legal Studies*, 2 (2006), pp. 1–19, 5; <http://www.info.gov.za/documents/constitution/>, last accessed 6 November 2012. Thanks to Henry Trotter for highlighting this constitutional issue.



Figure 2. Thabo Mbeki claimed to be practicing “quiet diplomacy” in his dealings with Robert Mugabe. The work stoppage by Durban dockers was anything but quiet despite this clever illustration by David Anderson.

David Anderson, Sunday Times (Johannesburg), 27 April 2008. See also <http://davidandersonillustration.com/>. Used with permission.

Finally, what this action also suggests is that, despite the twin whipsaws of containerization and massive casualization, SATAWU remains a vital force on the Durban waterfront. While some scholars, notably Bernard Dubbeld, have thoughtfully and impressively chronicled the devastating impact of containers, his study stops in the early 1990s and concludes that Durban dockers were permanently weakened; clearly, that prediction proved incorrect. Similarly, while the profound impacts of casualization on South African workers are real, Durban dockers have managed to weather this storm, too. Quite recently, scholar Franco Barchiesi made a powerful case of the increasing “precariousness” of work (and life) in contemporary South Africa. No-one who lives there or who has visited can deny this troubling reality. Without seeking to contest Barchiesi’s overall thesis, this essay suggests that Durban dockers’ actions in 2008 – years after Barchiesi conducted his interviews, none of which were with dockers – are both impressive and worth studying. While Barchiesi convincingly writes about the “precariousness” of workers – and unions – marine transport does not fit neatly into his model. Indeed, longshore workers in many ports still hold surprising power, but those in the SF Bay area and Durban have used theirs

to particular effect, suggesting the need to appreciate local context and forces as well as the general nature of longshore workers worldwide.⁶¹

CONCLUSIONS: THE WORKING CLASS
INTERNATIONALISM OF LONGSHORE WORKERS
IN SAN FRANCISCO AND DURBAN

This article argues that Durban and SF Bay area longshore workers have demonstrated, repeatedly and over time, a passionate commitment to social justice causes. The dockers in Durban now belong to SATAWU, affiliated with COSATU, and definitely act in accordance with the principles of social movement unionism. After the democratic elections of 1994, and with COSATU a key player in the ruling alliance, some question what role COSATU can play as a force to press for real social change, i.e. pushing against the now dominant ANC. Clearly, the 2008 boycott confirms that SATAWU acts as a social movement union, even willing to stake a position against the ANC. In the words of South African journalist Essa,

The actions of COSATU and its affiliate SATAWU suggest a dramatic shift back to the social movement unionism that defined the union movement at the height of the liberation struggle. It was a time when workplace bread-and-butter issues were not separated from the socio-political inequities and challenges that existed outside the workplace.

Essa quotes SATAWU General Secretary Randall Howard, “I don’t think COSATU has ever shifted away from the community issues. We always knew that our role was always going to be more than merely workplace based issues.” Patrick Bond, a well-known activist-scholar, agrees, “COSATU’s philosophy of internationalism is exceptional, far advanced amongst the world’s working classes. We’ve seen great actions against oppression in Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Burma and now Palestine.”⁶²

Bond’s analysis of SATAWU echoes what many say of ILWU Local 10, which the San Francisco Labor Council recently described as “the heart and soul of the San Francisco labor movement”. Rank-and-file activists in Local 10, more so than their elected leaders at local or international level (and other unions in the Bay area), continue to agitate on behalf of social justice causes they believe important to the ILWU and labor movement in the United States and globally.

61. Dubbeld, “Breaking the Buffalo”; Webster, “Trade Unions and the Challenge of the Informalisation of Work”; Barchiesi, “Informality and Casualization”; *idem*, *Precarious Liberation*; Von Holdt, *Transition from Below*.

62. Quotations from Essa, “Opposition to Israeli Cargo at Durban’s Dock”; Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism*; Friedman, “Before and After”, p. 4.

Among the most important and relevant, in 2008 longshore activists in Local 10 convinced the Longshore Caucus, representing all ILWU locals on the US West Coast, to “stop work” for an entire day to protest the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq – the only US union to do so; that this action occurred on the international Labor Day, 1 May, only added to this action’s drama. In 2011, rank-and-file activists in Local 10 refused to work in solidarity with public-sector workers in the state of Wisconsin, who were experiencing a major effort by a newly elected governor to pass anti-union legislation; Local 10 was the only union in the nation that struck (in violation of their contract) on 4 April, the anniversary of the murder of Dr Martin Luther King, Jr. Finally, in 2012 and 2013, in the aftermath of the killings of striking platinum miners in Marikana, South Africa, Local 10 hosted a speaker representing the Marikana workers and wrote a letter to South African President Jacob Zuma condemning these actions. These actions suggest that Local 10 members continue to believe in the necessity of engaging in direct-action tactics on behalf of others social-justice causes, particularly working-class ones. Local 10 continues to demonstrate belief in a social movement unionist ideal.⁶³

The long trajectory of activism by SF Bay area longshore workers indirectly influenced Durban dockers and, now, the reverse also appears true. On several occasions in recent years, SATAWU and ILWU have boycotted ships in support of shared beliefs, particularly ongoing efforts to pressure Israel to recognize a Palestinian state. Not only do both the ILWU and SATAWU belong to the International Transport Federation, they pay attention to each other’s actions, meet at ITF conferences, and issue press releases praising each other’s stands. If the recent past is any indication, port activists will continue to use ITF connections to promote political causes, including on Palestine – a topic that resonates deeply in South Africa.⁶⁴

Longshore worker power (in San Francisco, Durban, or elsewhere) derives from two distinct avenues – both rooted in the work process.

63. “SF Labor Council Resolution to Defend ILWU Local 10’s April 4 Solidarity Action”, at <http://www.transportworkers.org>, last accessed 11 December 2011; “ILWU Joins the Battle in Wisconsin for Workers’ Rights”, *ILWU Dispatcher*, March 2011, pp. 1, 3; Josh Eidelson, “Longshore Workers’ Solidarity Strike Settlement Raises Questions for Future Union Actions”, *Alternet*, 17 August 2011, at: http://www.alternet.org/story/152084/longshore_workers_solidarity_strike_settlement_raises_questions_for_future_union_actions, last accessed 19 August 2011; Peter Cole, “Longshore Union Strikes Against War”, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, 30 April 2008; Mike Villegiante, letter to Jacob Zuma, 2 October 2012 (author’s possession, courtesy of Jack Heyman); notes of Jara’s speech to Local 10, 17 January 2013 (also from Heyman).

64. Conversations and e-mail exchanges with SATAWU’s Jane Barrett and ILWU’s Jack Heyman. Swedish and Turkish longshore workers in ITF also protested Israeli ships over the Palestinian question; “Swedish Dockworkers Block Israeli Goods in Boycott Action”, and “Turkish Dock Workers’ Union Joins Boycott against Israel”, both at <http://www.transportworkers.org/>, last accessed 25 June 2010. A recent collection, from South Africa, analyzing apartheid in Israel is Na’eem Jeenah, *Pretending Democracy: Israel, an Ethnocratic State* (Johannesburg, 2012).

Traditionally, dockworkers were relatively strong, militant, and willing to strike and/or unionize because the nature of the work cultivated solidarity among the workers; this reality was demonstrated repeatedly across time and cultures. However, technological changes – containerization – threatened this tradition by transforming the work process, which drastically reduced the number of (sometimes better paid) workers who, potentially, might not believe or act in solidarity with other workers. Enter the second key factor explaining longshore workers’ enduring power: their strategic location in the global economy. While some posit that containerization fatally wounded dock unions, such a contention oversimplifies and distorts the reality.⁶⁵ Undeniably, the work changed and number of workers plunged, yet dockers remain aware of their important work and demonstrate a willingness to deploy that power. Witness Local 10 activists stopping work in 2008 to protest US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, in 2010 to protest Israel’s policy in Gaza, and in 2011 in solidarity with embattled public sector workers in Wisconsin. Of course, the particular, local histories of workers in these ports must also be considered. That is, to draw meaningful parallels and observations one must combine a general understanding of longshore worker activism with the particular history of a port.⁶⁶

In short, dockers possess some power to protect their own interests and act on behalf of workers in other nations. This power, rooted in their appreciation of their strategic niche in global trade, exists even though their industry continues to be transformed and traditional working-class port communities have disappeared. Combining pragmatism with leftist and anti-racist ideologies, SF Bay area and Durban longshore workers have translated their beliefs in the need for and possibilities of solidarity into tangible actions: boycotting ships to protest apartheid and other forms of political oppression. Such boycotts, arguably, are more possible now due to the ever greater links created by global trade and transnational labor organizations like the ITF. For instance, for several years in this new millennium, workers across the United States and Europe boycotted ships, threatened to boycott ships, and donated money in support of Charleston, South Carolina’s unionized longshore workers under assault by a company that (with government aid) sought to destroy their union.⁶⁷

65. Levinson, *The Box*, esp. chs 5, 6, and 10; Dubbeld, “Breaking the Buffalo”; Herb Mills has written extensively and insightfully on the deleterious impacts of containers on longshore culture and power; <http://www.ilwu10hmills.com/index.cfm>

66. Peter Cole, “Longshore Union Strikes Against War”; “Historic Victory at Oakland Port – Israeli Ship Blocked from Unloading”; Clarence Thomas interview, KPFA, 5 April 2011, at: <http://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2011/04/06/18676499.php>, last accessed 6 April 2011.

67. Suzan Erem and E. Paul Durrenberger, *On the Global Waterfront: The Fight to Free the Charleston 5* (New York, 2008).

Currently, employers, governments, and global capitalism present tremendous challenges to workers and their power. Despite containerization, globalization, and other forces, longshore workers hold on to their unions better than many other blue-collar workers in both the United States and South Africa (along with other ports from Marseilles to Melbourne). While not suggesting that they represent the norm of all manual workers, dockers' experiences are suggestive of what others can accomplish even as technology and powerful economic forces threaten to weaken and destroy unions. In both the San Francisco Bay area and Durban, longshore workers demonstrate(d) a robust sense of working-class internationalism.

TRANSLATED ABSTRACTS
FRENCH – GERMAN – SPANISH

Peter Cole. *Pas de justice, pas de chargements de bateaux : boycotts politiques sur les rives de la baie de durban et de la baie de San Francisco.*

Appliquant une méthodologie comparative, cette essai examine comment et pourquoi les débardeurs, tant dans la région de la baie de San Francisco qu'à Durban, font preuve d'un robuste sens de l'internationalisme et de la solidarité de la classe ouvrière. Les débardeurs sont plus enclins que d'autres à voir leurs luttes immédiates et locales dans des contextes plus larges et même mondiaux. Pendant des décennies, littéralement, les travailleurs dans ces deux ports utilisèrent leur puissance pour militer pour la justice raciale dans leur pays et en solidarité avec des mouvements sociaux dans le monde. Si ces idées peuvent paraître démodées au XXIème siècle, les syndicats étant en régression depuis plusieurs décennies, les débardeurs enracinèrent leur idéal dans le fait réel qu'ils occupaient encore une position centrale dans le commerce mondial. De la sorte, ils combinèrent leurs convictions idéologiques de gauche et antiracistes avec une compréhension pragmatique de leur rôle central dans l'économie mondiale. Bien que n'étant pas la norme, ces attitudes et actions des débardeurs méritent notre attention, car elles réfutent l'idée que les travailleurs sont ces dernières décennies impuissants à façonner leur monde.

Traduction: *Christine Krätke-Plard*

Peter Cole. *Ohne Gerechtigkeit werden die Schiffe nicht beladen: politische Boykotte in den Häfen von Durban und San Francisco.*

Dieser Aufsatz untersucht, unter Verwendung einer komparativen Methode, wie und weshalb die Hafentarbeiter sowohl der San Francisco Bay als auch Durban einen robusten Arbeiter-Internationalismus und eine ebenso robuste Solidarität aufweisen. Hafentarbeiter neigen mehr als die meisten dazu, ihre unmittelbaren, lokalen Kämpfe in umfassendere, sogar globale Kontexte einzuordnen. Arbeiter aus beiden Häfen setzten ihre Macht tatsächlich jahrzehntelang ein, um gegen rassistische Ausgrenzung

in ihren Heimatländern einzutreten und sich mit Sozialbewegungen aus aller Welt zu solidarisieren. Solche Vorstellungen mögen zwar im 21. Jahrhundert veraltet erscheinen, sind doch die Gewerkschaften bereits seit einigen Jahrzehnten im Niedergang begriffen, doch die Hafendarbeiter stützten ihre Ideale auf der Realität, dass sie innerhalb des globalen Handels nach wie vor eine Schlüsselstellung einnahmen. So verbanden sie ihre linken und antirassistischen ideologischen Ansichten mit einem pragmatischen Verständnis ihrer Schlüsselrolle innerhalb der Weltökonomie. Die Einstellungen und Handlungen der Hafendarbeiter mögen nicht die Norm gewesen sein, verlangen aber dennoch nach unserer Aufmerksamkeit, da sie die Auffassung in Frage stellen, Arbeitern sei es in den letzten Jahrzehnten nicht möglich gewesen, ihre Welt zu gestalten.

Übersetzung: *Max Henninger*

Peter Cole. *Sin Justicia, ningún barco se cargará: los boicots políticos en los muelles de las bahías de Durban y de San Francisco.*

Haciendo uso de una metodología comparativa este artículo examina cómo y porqué los trabajadores portuarios tanto del área de la bahía de San Francisco como los de la bahía de Durban manifiestan un sólido sentido de internacionalismo y solidaridad de la clase obrera. Los trabajadores de los muelles se inclinan más que otros sectores a imbricar sus conflictos locales e inmediatos en contextos más amplios y globales. De forma literal, durante décadas los trabajadores de las zonas portuarias citadas hicieron uso de su poder para defender la justicia racial en su propio entorno y la solidaridad con los movimientos sociales en un marco más global. Mientras tales nociones parecen haber quedado obsoletas en el siglo XXI, de la misma forma que se ha visto declinar la influencia de las organizaciones sindicales a lo largo de varias décadas, los trabajadores portuarios basaron sus ideales en la percepción real de que ellos todavía ocupaban una posición central en el comercio global. Por tanto, combinaron sus principios ideológicos izquierdistas y antirracistas con una concepción pragmática de su rol central en la economía global. Así, aunque no sea lo más habitual, tanto las actitudes como las acciones de estos trabajadores portuarios deben de ser objeto de atención en tanto que supusieron un reto a la idea de que a lo largo de las últimas décadas la capacidad de los trabajadores por configurar su propio mundo ha ido en decadencia.

Traducción: *Vicent Sanz Rozalén*