

CHAPTER I

The Lookout of the Labor Movement

(1885)

The Coast Seamen's Union, which was to become the Sailors' Union of the Pacific, AFL-CIO, was founded on March 6, 1885, with a call for labor organization - the "Sailors' Declaration of Independence" - from a lumber pile on the Folsom Street Wharf in San Francisco.

California: A Meeting Place

The maritime exploration of the California littoral began with the conquest of Mexico by the Spanish. The conquistador Hernan Cortes marched to the Gulf of California, and the peninsula of Lower (Baja) California was soon extensively colonized by Spanish church missions, first administered by the Jesuits, and then by the Dominicans. The coast of Upper (Alta) California remained more or less neglected until the end of the 18th century, when the Russians, having established their Siberian imperial enterprise, began voyaging into the Pacific. In response to the threatened capture of the California Indians by the Russian Orthodox rather than the Catholic faith, the Spanish in Mexico decreed the establishment of missions and military outposts, or presidios, north from San Diego to San Francisco Bay. Missionary activities in Upper California were directed by the Franciscans.

As noted by author Richard Henry Dana, by the 1830's the California coast, then controlled by the independent government of the Mexican Republic, was the scene of a thriving trade in hides and tallow, with the merchants of Boston trading in American bottoms. As early as the 1780's, Boston navigators had sailed the Northwest Coast, opening the U.S. fur trade. With discovery of the "Japan grounds" in the 1820's, American whalers started penetrating the Pacific, flocking by the hundreds, years before the Gold Rush, to Lahaina and Honolulu. Hawaii became "the emporium of the Pacific," where all trade centered; the sea lanes between Hawaii and California were increasingly used by the Yankee traders, and development of trade with China attracted even more American ships. Between 1846 and 1848, control of the northerly Mexican-held territories, including California, passed outright to the United States.

Condition of Seamen

In the hides trade, on the whaling ships, and in the trade with China, the lot of the American seaman was often unenviable. Wages were low, food was bad, and quarters were cramped. Dana's *Two Years Before The Mast* was the first widely-read book to expose the occasional extreme brutality of life aboard Yankee vessels. His unforgettable description of the flogging of a seaman Dana called "Sam," followed by that of Dana's friend, "John the Swede," who suffered only for having verbally questioned Sam's punishment, scandalized the nation. Dana tells of the maniacal captain screaming "If you want to know what I flog you for, I'll tell you. It's because I like to do it! -Because I like to do it! -It suits me! That's what I do it for!" To an America as yet unaccustomed to what would today be called a sadistic sexual perversion, such a spectacle was frightful. Dana's account of shipboard cruelty was, indeed, the earliest major protest against the physical abuse of seamen under the U.S. flag. It was not the last.

The labor historian Ira B. Cross, in his article on "First Coast Seamen's Unions" published in 1908, justly commented that "it is impossible to do justice to the brutality shown to the sailors in those days." Along with the reign of cruel "bucko" mates and masters, the seamen were afflicted with a legal status that made them virtual slaves. Cross points out that in the years before the discovery of gold in California, sailors from the hide and tallow ships that tied up at the southern end of San Francisco Bay routinely jumped ship, an action deemed criminal, under the heading of "desertion," by the civil authorities in California ports, who were anxious to maintain good relations with the sailors' employers. An ordinance was passed in October 1847 in San Francisco, prescribing six months of hard labor for desertion, with a \$50 bounty for each captured runaway sailor.

The discovery of gold in 1848 created a "marvelous change" in California, Cross declares. Hundreds of ships were abandoned in the ports as the men, often including officers, headed for the mines. Anti-desertion ordinances fell into disuse and sailors' wages rose on vessels heading back to the East. In August 1850, the first San Francisco seamen's strike took place, following a wage cut (to \$25 per month) imposed as the ranks of prospective crew members filled with disillusioned miners anxious to return home. The strike was defeated by the excess number of failed treasure-hunters turned strikebreakers.

The first West Coast attempt at union organization of seamen came in 1866, with the setting up in San Francisco of the Seamen's Friendly Union and Protective Society, with Alfred Enquist as president and George McAlpine as secretary. However, the union could not be maintained for long because its members could not support a shoreside organization while they shipped.

In addition to the "bucko" brutality visited on the American seamen, there were other grievous forms of oppression: crimping, "blood money," and the practice of "shanghaiing." But the crimes of "bucko" officers were the sparks that first and foremost the mind of the sailor and, at times, the public. The constant violence of the officers has been explained away as the consequence of shipping with sailors who, having been shanghaiied, might prove to be tailors, or butchers, or clerks, and whose uselessness aboard a vessel was often only exceeded by the danger they represented to others. The men couldn't or wouldn't work, the theory goes, and the officers duly vented their rage on them.

An answer to this false version of the story was definitively provided in 1895 by *The Red Record*, a publication listing notorious cases of brutality aboard U.S. ships, in which the Sailors' Union argued that "the system" ...originated and is maintained upon the theory that brutal ships' officers can by threats and violence compel a small crew to do the work of the larger number of men required under a just system," thus permitting economies in wage payments.

In a sense, the story of the fight against the bucko system belongs further along in the Sailors' Union of the Pacific story, for it was only at the end of the 19th century, years after the union's foundation and in the period when the union was testing its growing strength, that the full horror of the Yankee "hell ships" was brought to the attention of the American people.

Legal Servitude

Undoubtedly, the most outrageous aspect of the brutal past oppression of American seamen was the complete lack of any means for redress of grievances. Basing themselves in traditional maritime custom, as it then existed worldwide, the U.S. shipowners easily maintained the seafarer in a state of barely-disguised servitude. As Paul S. Taylor, author of the first major history of the Sailors' Union of the Pacific (published in 1923), wrote, "the revolutions and emancipating decrees of Europe, and the thirteenth amendment in the United States (which abolished Black slavery - SAS) passed the sailor by. The passage of time not only failed to remove his bondage to the vessel but statutory enactment further stamped his status as peculiar and unfree."

As long ago as 1790, the new government of the United States legislated the arrest, imprisonment, and return to their ship of "deserting" sailors. The 1872 Shipping Commissioner's Act reinforced this degrading rule. Taylor states that "in recognition of the peculiar status of seamen, modern maritime nations... regarded them as 'wards of admiralty' incapable of making a freeman's contract, and deserving special care from their guardian, the state with the exception of the rate of wages, the life of the sailor from the moment of signing articles to the time of paying off (had) always been regulated by law to the minutest detail. Only the power of self-help and self-protection has been denied. Workmen ashore have long been free to quit work, thereby incurring...no criminal liability, for that would smack of involuntary servitude. On the other hand, the very word 'deserter' applied to the sailor who quits his ship implies a different status."

Crimps and Boarding Masters

In addition to their legal servitude and the brutality of bucko officers, the seamen had to contend with "land sharks," the crimps and boarding masters, parasites feeding on "blood money," and experts in shanghaiing. The crimp, a middleman between the shipping employer and the seaman, was usually a shipping or boarding master, who extorted payment for arranging a job. The system was simple: in many cases, the crimp collected "blood money" from the master of the ship which was then deducted from the seaman's pay as a

spurious allotment. Payments to crimps, who swindled seamen "on the beach" (ashore) into accumulating large debts, could virtually wipe out a seaman's pay. The crimps were assisted by runners who went aboard newly-arrived ships to hustle men into saloons and boarding houses; a common incident was the pulling of men off ships during a swarming attack on the vessel and its officers by crimps and runners. Once in the crimps' hands ashore, the sailor sometimes often found himself shanghaied onto a new vessel by the next day. The day aboard a vessel when the seaman celebrated the final working-off of an allotment to a crimp might feature an elaborate ceremony with the destruction of a dummy, the "dead horse," symbolizing the burden that had been imposed on the mariner's income, and the singing of a traditional chantey, "The Dead Horse."

Historian Paul Taylor noted that the crimps organized before the sailors: "the deepwater boarding masters in the early 1860's, and later the coasting boarding masters, organized into associations to control the sailor market." Taylor goes on to describe how "the law allowing holding of sailors' clothing for debt strengthened this power" of the crimp over the sea-man, and the payment of wages in advance made the business profitable. And because a sailor in a deep-water vessel was entitled to two, three, or four months' 'advance' and was especially helpless, "the deepwater boarding masters were the first to gain control of their sailor market and the last to give it up. The coasting boarding masters were never so powerful, nor was their reign so long. But during the decades in which the boarding masters were in control, no master could get a crew except from the crimps and then only after paying them the sailors' advance." Taylor summarizes the oppression of the 19th century sailor by saying that "it all meant virtual economic slavery for the sailor and perpetual poverty, as he was usually working to payoff a 'debt.' "

Impact of the West Coast Lumber Trade

But the comparative weakness of the West Coast crimps, as indicated by Taylor, seems to have been among the factors that made it easier for the first permanent seamen's union in the world, the Coast Seamen's Union, to be organized. One element undermining the hold of crimps on the West Coast was the short duration of voyages. Another was the tremendous expansion of the West Coast lumber trade between the close of the Civil War and the end of the century. With the spread of settlement throughout the coast region, the demand for construction materials boomed so that while California had around 300 small sawmills working in the redwoods in 1860, in 1885 the Humboldt Bay area alone had 400. Redwood lumber was especially prized because of its fire-and insect-resistant qualities. The construction of line-haul railroads into the redwood country would wait until the very last decade of the 19th century, so that soon after 1865 a respectable fleet of two-masted lumber schooners had begun operating between the North Coast and San Francisco. They were later supplemented by three- and four-masted and then by the steam schooners, a few of which were still in service in the 1950s.

Several characteristics distinguished the lumber trade. First, the ethnic background of its work force was almost exclusively Nordic, giving the ships the nickname 'the Scandinavian navy.' Secondly, on the lumber ships the sailors worked cargo, in contrast with deepwater ships which were increasingly loaded and unloaded by "men along the shore," or longshoremen. The small lumber ports of the California and Northwest coasts had no longshoremen; in addition, the lumber vessels' cargo was usually loaded high on the deck and required constant attention during the voyage. Finally, the coast seamen were in their home ports more often. A breed of seafarer emerged from 'the Scandinavian navy' whose skills were difficult to replace in case of dismissal or strike. These skilled men commanded higher wage rates. Most importantly they had brought with them from Europe the labor and progressive consciousness that drew them to unionism. Their struggle for dignity and the good things of life on the distant shores of America paralleled the rise of the labor and social movements in their original homelands.

Following the failure of the 1866 seaman's union movement, the field lay open until 1878 when a second attempt was made, the so-called "Seaman's Protective Union:" set up with the questionable help of a number of boarding masters. The 1878 "union" was, however, mostly concerned with anti-Chinese agitation and the threat of the deepwater sailors to the coasting men's high wages and it, too, soon collapsed. In 1880, as noted by Ira Cross, a group of steamship sailors and firemen, mainly under the aegis of Frank Roney, an Irish revolutionary and socialist with close ties to the anti-Chinese labor movement in San Francisco, made a third try at unionizing sailors under the title of the "Seamen's Protective Association." However, most of the leaders of the group, including Roney, were not seafarers. This third effort also had fallen apart by November 1882.

March 1885: Coast Seamen's Union Founded

By March 1885, under severe depression conditions, seamen's wages had fallen to \$20 for deepwater and \$25 on the coast. The morning of March 3, 1885, in San Francisco, according to a version of the story put forward by Cross in 1908, Ed Andersen, a Norwegian, and George Thompson, a Swede, two seamen who were members of a radical labor group, the San Francisco-based 'International Workmen's Association' (I. W.A.), began discussing the possibility of a seamen's strike for higher wages. They were joined by John Reade, a fellow sailor, and resolved to publish a news- paper notice calling on the seamen to strike. By the next morning, crews had begun walking off ships and were congregating on the city waterfront, talking over the situation. On the evening of March 4, a meeting was held on the Howard Street Wharf with a second assembly scheduled for Garibaldi Hall the night of March 5. Thanks to Andersen, Thompson, and Rasmus Nielson, a young Dane and, says Cross, also a member of the enigmatic radical group, the International Work- men's Association, the leading personality in the I.W.A., Burnette G. Haskell, a socialist lawyer and journalist, and P. Ross Martin, another I. W.A. leader, addressed the Garibaldi Hall meeting. The next meeting was set for the evening of March 6, on the Folsom Street Wharf, to organize a union of coasting sailors. A contrasting but better-authenticated account of the circumstances behind the March 6 meeting is provided by a *Constitution and History* of the Coast Seamen's Union published soon after the event, in 1885. This earlier version states that on March 5, around noon, Sigismund Danielewicz, the corresponding secretary in the Italian language for the International Workmen's Association, passed by a crowd of striking sailors on the waterfront. Danielewicz had just returned from Hawaii where "he had been vigorously engaged in the labor struggle." Aside from his revolutionary activities with the I. W.A. and, apparently, some time as a coasting sailor, Danielewicz also contributed to the founding of a San Francisco barbers' union. The 1885 history states that Danielewicz suggested the sailors meet on the Folsom Street Wharf the next day, and promised to obtain speakers from the I.W.A.

The night of March 6 a crowd of around three hundred met on the Folsom Street Wharf. George Thompson was prevailed on to act as chairman. The speakers were B.B. Carter and Joseph Kelly of the Steamshipmen's Protective Association, a phantom organization, along with P. Ross Martin of the I.W.A. and the Knights of Labor, I. W.A. member J.J. Martin, Martin Schneider (I. W.A. corresponding secretary for the German language) , Danielewicz, and Burnette G. Haskell. The first entry in the *Minute Book* of the Coast Seamen's Union, inscribed in J.J. Martin's hand, reads as follows:

"Folsom St. Wharf San Francisco March 6th 1885. By general desire of those interested and at the call of George Thompson, R. Nilson and others a mass meeting of about 300 of the Coasting Seamen on strike was held at Folsom Street Wharf at 7:30 p.m. to con- sider a raise of wages from \$25 per month to \$30 per month for inside ports and from \$30 per month to \$35 for outside ports and also to consider what steps should be taken towards forming a permanent protective union. George Thompson was called to the chair. An organizing committee from the International Workmen's Association was present, viz. B.G. Haskell, Jos. Kelly, S. Danielewicz, M. Schneider, R.P. Martin and J.J. Martin. The meeting was addressed by various speakers who advocated unity of action and resistance to oppression in any and every form. Great enthusiasm prevailed. It was determined at once to form a permanent organization and at the suggestion of B.G. Haskell of the I.W.A. Committee. Those who had pencil and paper proceeded to take the names and subscriptions of those who wished to form a union. Two hundred and twenty-two (222) names were enrolled and thirty-four 60/00-\$34.60 were collected. It was then decided that the meeting adjourn until (tomorrow) Saturday eve at 7:30 p.m. the place of meeting to be Irish American Hall. B.G. Haskell of the I. W.A. Committee was instructed to take charge of the funds, secure the hall, and insert the necessary advertisements in the daily papers giving notice of the meeting and pay for same, also for all other necessary expenses. Before dispersing Three Cheers were given for the "International" which was responded to by the I.W.A. Committee."

To these eloquent words we might only add the details described by Cross: that rain fell upon the assembled sailors during the meeting but was ignored, and that the fiery speeches were delivered without the light of torches or lanterns, but with only the feeble glow of a few candles, rapidly quenched.

C.S.U. Continues Its Work

For some time after the March 6 meeting, the members of the new Coast Seaman's Union held meetings almost daily. The exhilaration of the moment, combined with a determination to win the strike for higher wages, kept the sailors and their I.W.A. comrades constantly active.

Haskell and J.J. Martin, his I. W.A. associate, had acted as, respectively, temporary treasurer and secretary beginning with the second meeting, on March 7th. At the fourth meeting, which was the first in which the name "Coast Sailors' Union" was used, permanent officers were elected. George Thompson became the first president with Rasmus Neilson as secretary and Haskell continuing as treasurer. accord *with* the constitution drawn up by Haskell. An advisory committee to the Union made up of I.W.A. members was also elected, consisting of Haskell, J. J. Martin, P. R. Martin, Martin Schneider, and Sigismund Danielewicz. It was also decided to divide up the San Francisco waterfront into six sections and to appoint patrolmen for each section. The patrolmen were authorized to procure boats for their work.

By July, the Union had established its first link with a fellow-organization in a foreign land: a regular correspondence was set up with the Federated Seamen's Union in New South Wales, Australia. At the same time the office of President was replaced by a board of six vice-presidents. The following month saw an event that although minor in its immediate effect was a herald of the future for the waterfront labor movement: "steps had been taken to federate all the waterfront unions," with each union to send three delegates to a San Francisco meeting early in September. The Coast Seamen's Union also called for a city-wide union convention to meet October 14th. Ferment in labor was matched at the time by increasing agitation on the so-called "coolie" issue, involving the importation of Asian laborers.

In the meeting of September 28th, Haskell warned the Coast Seamen's Union of the danger that the "anti-coolie excitement" might promote unscrupulous demagogues. "He explained how one man could use his influence over a great body of men to ride himself into power," stated Rasmus Neilson's minutes. In outlining the creation of this mighty weapon for the improvement of the sailors' conditions, the Coast Seamen's Union, we must emphasize three elements: the political awareness of the Scandinavian immigrants, the specialized character of coastal shipping work, and the support of the radical I.W.A. To these might be added a fourth: the special nature of San Francisco as a crucible for new political and social developments. A group comparable to the Haskell I. W.A. probably could not flourish anywhere else in the United States. There was a special feeling of freedom in the city; it combined with the will of the seamen and the tension of the 1880's to produce an organization ready to set a new course: the Coast Seamen's Union which would come to be called, by Colorado I.W.A. organizer Joseph Buchanan, "the lookout of the labor movement."



Andrew

CHAPTER II

New Horizons

(1885-1900)

As noted in the preceding chapter, the 1880's, the decade in which the Coast Seamen's Union was born, was marked by a wide-ranging labor upheaval in the United States. Workers were radicalized by depressed economic conditions, as well as by the visible growth of wealth in the hands of the rich and an accompanying extension of the power of corporations.

New Faces: Anders Furuseth

Within the Coast Seamen's Union, the role of the I.W.A. was beginning to diminish as non-socialist rank and filers began to come to the fore. Among these latter stood Anders Furuseth, a young Norwegian destined to play a greater role in the history of the Union, and of maritime labor, than any of the I.W.A. partisans. When, in December 1885 Alfred Fuhrman reported to the C.S.U. that its treasury was troubled by considerable losses of funds, a committee made up of Fuhrman, Xavier Leder, Hugo Westling and "Fourcet" (whom we presume was Furuseth) reorganized the financial situation of the Union to the satisfaction of the membership.

The Coast Seamen's Union and Haskell were active early in 1886 in setting up the San Francisco Federated Trades Council, the forerunner of the present-day San Francisco Labor Council. In the meeting of the C.S.U. for February 1, Haskell discussed a "coming strike," indicating that the Union was preparing for a major showdown with the waterfront employers. At the March 1 meeting, wage demands were formulated: San Francisco to Puget Sound, \$35 per month; to the "outside" or unprotected lumber ports, \$40 per month; to the Hawaiian Islands, \$30 per month. In the intervening weeks, the Union had adopted the procedure, maintained until 1921, of electing a chair at each meeting, where before the position had been occupied by a vice-president. At the end of March, Anders Furuseth was elected secretary of the Union; but early in April, Furuseth reported he could not secure bond, and the position went to John Haist.

1886 Strike

Dissatisfied with the failure of attempts to destroy the Union through direct intimidation, through the crimps, and through the police, in June 1886 the employers set up the Shipowners' Association of the Pacific Coast. A strike of all unlicensed seafaring personnel, led by a group of firemen, had begun on the Spreckels line. The Shipowners' Association announced that its members would only employ seamen contracted through an association shipping office, and would require workers to keep "grade books" listing qualifications and employment history. To obtain a grade book each crew member would be required to surrender his union book.

On August 25, 1886, the Union declared a strike on the entire coast against the grade book. This strike is chronicled by Pete Gill, a sailor born in Norway in 1863, who joined the C.S.U. (book number 43) on May 3, 1886, became the Union's agent in the Port of Seattle, and wrote, with labor historian Ottilie Markholt, an encyclopedic history of the Union from 1885 to 1929 -truly an invaluable document although still, today, unpublished (Gill died in 1945). In their narrative, Gill and Markholt state that "to understand the reasons for the 'great strike' of 1886, one must look to the revolutionary character of the labor movement. The preceding two years saw the development of the Knights of Labor into a frankly revolutionary body, declaring that 'the attitude of our Order to the existing industrial system is necessarily one of war.' Its slogan, "an injury to one is the concern of all," was being literally demonstrated in widespread successful boycotts, with their implications of sympathetic action. It had challenged .11y Gould successfully in his Southwestern railroad system and subsequently on other roads. So infectious was the philosophy of mass action that the Federation of Organized Trade and Labor Unions (later the American Federation of Labor-SAS) in 1884 named May 1, 1886 as day for a general strike for the eight-hour day in all trades. San Francisco shared the spirit of the times."

During the 1886 seamen's strike, the C.S.U. issued strike duty cards with the following message printed on the back:

"Carry this Strike Card on your person with your Union Card and show when demanded, and while you have it on you go to no place where you would not show it with pride, and do nothing to put on the Stain of Dishonor. When the strike is over the Secretary will endorse upon this card the fact (if true) that you have assisted in saving the Union. And then when sailors are free enough to (word illegible) to marry and have children this will be your certificate of honor to them. This strike was ordered to SAVE THE UNION, to enforce your rights as free men, as Americans, as haters of slavery. Never give it up until ordered by the Union. Never yield a single inch. Remember that BUCHANAN of Colorado called you the 'Lookout of the American Labor Movement,' the backbone of organized Labor on the Pacific Coast. Remember your glorious history and die in the streets of San Francisco of starvation before you think of yielding. And remember that if we have to beg the public of San Francisco for food,

then I will be the first man to go from house to house for dry bread to keep life in our bodies while we are fighting for the right of the sailor to resist the blood-moned infamies of San Francisco." Burnette G. Haskell, Chairman, Advisory Committee

In launching the strike, the Union demanded either the complete abolition of the Shipowners' Association hiring office, or, as alternatives, joint control of hiring by the employers and the Union, or full Union control. The employers conceded nothing. Strikebreakers

were obtained from deep-water vessels; early in September striker Charles Norgreen, killed by a scab, was buried by the Union. Twenty C.S.U. members were arrested in Eureka and charged with inciting a riot.

The Union lost the strike of '86. Notwithstanding their fighting spirit and the idealism of Haskell and their other socialist allies, the C.S.U. could not yet prevail over the might of the employers. The Union *Minutes* show that by September 30, 1886, although the strike was not officially called off, the Union's members were authorized to find work wherever they could, with Haskell later reporting some opportunities on the railroads.

Furuseth Replaces Neilson

Early in January 1887, Anders Furuseth was elected to replace Rasmus Neilson, who had alternated with other members as the Union's secretary. Burnette Haskell briefly departed San Francisco for Denver, Colorado, to take over editorial responsibility for the *Labor Enquirer*, an important newspaper published by his friend, Buchanan. At Haskell's suggestion, a new advisory committee was set up, consisting of R. A. Gilbride, P. R. Martin, E. W. Thunnan, Arthur Vinette, William Christie, W. C. Owen, and Buchanan, along with Haskell, under the chairmanship of V Hoffmeyer, who, like Haskell before him, was to play a major role as an outside ally for the Union. According to Ira Cross, Hoffmeyer was a Dane, a professional musician and music teacher, active in the Knights of Labor, and had been involved in an unsuccessful attempt to set up a Knights of Labor Neptune Assembly made up of seamen.

But Furuseth was by now the most important of the "new men" of the C.S.U. According to his main English-language biographer, Hyman Neintraub, this man who was to play so great a part in the eventual emancipation of the world's seamen, was born in Norway, on March 12, 1854, the son of Andreas Nielsen and Marthe Jensdatter. Anders Furuseth, the fifth in a family of ten children, grew up in exceptionally hard circumstances. His father earned a slender living, once as a lock tender at a dam, and the family diet was often reduced to potatoes and rough bread, supplemented by wild game and fish. Anders was sent to work on a farm at the age of eight. There he stayed for eight years until he went to the city of Christiania (now Oslo) where he clerked, unsuccessfully sought entrance into a maritime school, and taught himself several modern languages. Finally, in 1873, he sailed in the crew of the bark *Marie* from the port of Draman. After shipping in Norwegian, Swedish, British, French, and U.S. vessels, and possibly fishing on the Grand Bank of Newfoundland, Anders Furuseth landed in California in August 1880. Soon after the "lumber pile" meeting of March 6, 1885, he joined the Coast Seamen's Union.

1887 Hearings: Role of Hoffmeyer

In June 1887, the California state labor commissioner's office invited representatives of the C.S.U. to participate in hearings on the condition of the coast sailors. The Union accepted enthusiastically, with its presentation coordinated by Hoffmeyer as chairman of the Union's advisory committee. Notable testimony was delivered by Furuseth and by Ed Andersen. In a pamphlet summary of the inquiry, Hoffmeyer eloquently and concisely outlined the grievances that had brought the Union into being and for which resolution the organization had pledged itself to combat.

"It is common talk on the waterfront that the coast sailor is no longer what he used to be," Hoffmeyer wrote. "Why? Simply because a shortsighted policy among the shipowners has made them drive off the coast so many men whom they accused of having taken part in the disturbances during the past year and has replaced them with others who were willing to be used as tools wherewith to compel the former to submit. What the seaman wants," Hoffmeyer continued, "just like any other human being, is recognition, not to be considered a mere machine, a drudge, a something to be an abject ball for the caprices or brutality of anyone whom fate may have placed over him. Recognition he asks for, recognition as a human being endowed with the same gifts, strength, privileges, and rights as any other man. . . The recognition of sailors' rights will come here as it has come in other places," he added, pointing to contemporary organizing activities on the Great Lakes and in Australia. He went on to demand that "the shipowners recognize the Union by giving the shipping office into their hands," and to argue that "the demand is not new. It has already been granted to one class of sailors. The steamship sailors conduct their own shipping and, therefore, we find the members of this Union, which was started by the aid and assistance of the Coast Seamen's Union, free from the pestilence and scourge which is constantly blasting the hopes of the coast sailors -namely, the boardinghouse system."

The Union's representatives graphically supported Hoffmeyer's angry statements in their testimony. They described how the boardinghouse crimps kept their hold over the seamen by developing usurious bills for lodging, food, liquor, and provisions, enabling the crimps to collect the sailor's wages through the payment of advances. Boardinghouse masters, clothing merchants, and others who appeared before the investigation admitted, in so many words, to the existence of a conspiracy between them and the masters of vessels for payment of "blood money" to obtain seamen. Other abuses that called forth the protest of the Union at the

inquiry included short wages, the operation of the crimping "Sailors' Home," and the blacklisting of union men. The Union also strongly attacked the attempt of the Shipowner's Association to break the Union through the employers' shipping hall and grade books.

Hoffmeyer's pamphlet stressed that the Union recognized that reform in the shape of legislation must mainly refer to the deepwater sailor. It is the advance system which is at the bottom of all the trouble. By means of this system, it becomes possible for the boardinghouse master to fasten himself, like a leech, upon the sailors. Were the advance system abolished, the boardinghouses would disappear in-the course of a few years. The blood-money system (by blood- money is understood any money paid BY the captain to secure the services of a sailor, or TO the captain to secure a berth in a ship) is of far smaller consequence."

The Union, through Hoffmeyer, asked that boarding masters be prohibited from being present in the Shipping Commissioner's office when men were hired, so that the sailors could arrange their conditions of hire with captains on their own; a ban on payment of advances; a rule against appointment of boarding masters as shipping commissioners; full payment of wages in any port of discharge; and trial and disposition of any case on recovery of seamen's wages before a court within 48 hours of filing, all to be included within a national law.

Coast Seamen's Journal

The progress of the Union toward these aims was soon to be significantly aided by the foundation of a newspaper, the *Coast Seamens Journal*, a project first conceived during a steamer trip to San Diego by Andrew Furuseth (as he now began to sign himself) and Xaver H. Leder, a member of the C.S.U. (and I.W.A.), who together had been delegated to the south- ern port to handle Union affairs.

The October 17, 1887 meeting took up the proposal for publication of the *Coast Seamens Journal*, which had been further developed by a committee consisting of Hoffmeyer, Furuseth, Leder, Alfred Fuhrman, and John Haist. The first issue appeared on November 2, 1887 with Leder as its editor. Its opening message, or salutatory, asserted that "With a feeling of natural pride, we venture to present to the public this opening issue of the *Coast Seamen s Journal*- beyond a doubt the first newspaper that has ever been published exclusively in behalf of the myriads who live upon the watery part of this globe of ours, the seafaring class."

"In taking this step, we do not lend ourselves to any delusion; we fully conceive the immensity of our task. Descendants, as we are, of the House of Want, and the pupils of such grim teachers as extreme hardship and continuous toil, we have even now a woeful apprehension of the scolding, cuffing and general ill-treatment which this offspring of ours is to receive, especially at the hands of that class of parasites who have grown corpulent and lazy on the hard earnings, the ignorance, and the proverbial generosity of the sailors. How they will hate its voice; how they will endeavor to stifle it; how they will employ each conceivable soothing charm to rock it to sleep again -for its voice, tiny and insignificant as it may seem, is a menace to their objects, a death message to their very existence."

"The stories told in these columns will surely lack the fantastic sound of sea novels. They are not published to tickle your imagination but to arrest the thought of such men and women who are in search of Truth, and for the establishment of Justice, and who agree with us that Sailors have a right to aspire to as high a moral and mental standard as any other craft or class. Although published by the Coasting Sailors of the Pacific Coast, their *Journal* shall voice the appeals of our brethren---those upon deep water as well as upon the various coasts of the globe. The Sailors' cause is one which admits of no division. As long as the moral condition of the deep water sailor is such as to render him a wretched slave, morally, mentally, and physically, who bows in silent submission to the caprices and brutalities of unprincipled captains and greedy landsharks; so long as he may be overworked, underfed, beaten, swindled, and driven out of their vessels and forced upon our coast to enter into the most bitter competition for bread with ourselves, just so long will our struggle be worse than futile."

"Let us have a craft of intelligent men. We here, upon our coast, who have more advantages -we should see to it that a glimpse of light fall upon the mid-ocean. Let us read, let us discuss, let us educate ourselves; let the results of our education be sent broadcast across the ocean. This is the task of our union -surely one worthy of all the energy and goodwill within us."

It has been observed that the reception of the *Journal* "was varied -'the seamen were proud and enthusiastic; the seamen's friends were amused and skeptical; the seamen's enemies were openly contemptuous.'" But Gill and Markholt note that "in succeeding years the proud boast of the first editorial was fulfilled. The *Journal* became a powerful weapon in the seamen's hands for preservation of the Union and advancement of their battles for freedom. It was in fact a 'death message' to sea slavery."

The early *Coast Seamens Journal* under Leder was fairly typical of the labor press of its time, interspersing union news, maritime affairs, features and poetry, along with such documents as the Knights of Labor declaration of principles. The newspaper published, in full, the testimony delivered before the California state labor commissioner by Hoffmeyer, Furuseth, Andersen, and other C.S.U. members in 1887. A radical tinge did remain visible for some time, with the *Journal* publishing essays by Karl Marx on wages and on the working day, in 1888.

Already fighting anti-labor currents in society, the Union had begun, as the '80s wore on, to emerge from its somewhat chaotic and haphazard origins, with a distinct program for alleviation of the seamen's grievances. The Hoffmeyer presentation in 1887 had indicated the option of legislative action which was taken up and expanded under the encouragement of Furuseth. The Union's enemies were powerful and widespread. Gill and Markholt quote a newspaper editorial from the *San Diego Sun* advising that the

Sailors' Union "stands between the American sailor (who is usually too self-respecting to submit to its un-American methods) and a livelihood; and, yet, lays claim in its broken English to the honor of having kept up the standard of American wages."

Campaigns Against 'Buckoism'

For the next three years, the Union's members applied themselves to the strengthening of their internal organization, betterment of the *Journal*, and campaigns for improvement of wages and conditions. In January 1889, Furuseth was temporarily replaced as secretary by W. T. Burke but the Union was strong enough in spirit to keep up the fight regardless of any individual leader. In March, the *Journal* publicized the dreadful conditions aboard the bark *Aquidneck*, commanded by Captain Joshua Slocum, known for his navigational achievements. In April, the *Journal* was taken over by two excellent writers, w: J. B. Mackay and Walter Macarthur. v./e should here note that, among the circle of men who became leaders of the Union in this period, Macarthur stands out as one of the best and most dedicated. Macarthur was born in Glasgow, Scotland, in 1862, and joined the Coast Seamen's Union in 1889. According to Paul Scharrenberg, who later replaced him as editor of the *Journal*, "Macarthur participated in virtually every forward move by the labor movement." Almost immediately, the tone of the paper changed perceptibly, as it began to concentrate its fire on the horrors of "buckoism," along with the bad food and cramped quarters offered the seamen. Furuseth returned to San Francisco and began serving as C.S.U. representative to the San Francisco Federated Trades Council, a position previously occupied by Haskell, Hoffmeyer, and others.

Unfortunately, the year 1890 saw the passage of legislation with a sinister meaning for the coast sailors. By law, arrest and imprisonment for "desertion" was restored by an amendment to the 1872 Shipping Commissioners' Act. The new law, according to Paul Taylor, "applied the penal clauses of the Act to seamen in the coasting trade shipped before a U.S. shipping Commissioner without granting them the protection and privileges of that act. Previous to this time, no actual injustice had been worked because the sailors had refused to ship before a Commissioner."

Sailors' Union of the Pacific Founded

Although the Steamship Sailors had organized in 1886 with the help of Burnette Haskell and the C.S.U., relations between the two unions had not always been good. The Steamship Sailors did not have to contend with the crimps and boarding-masters since they shipped through their hall or "off the dock." The Steamship Sailors had managed to improve their wages and conditions since organizing but a serious jurisdictional dispute had emerged between them and the C.S.U. almost immediately, centering on the steam schooners that were introduced in the late 1880's. Late in 1887, the Steamship Sailors were expelled from the regional Federated Trades at the instance of the C.S.U., which charged the steamship organization with jurisdictional poaching and other anti-C.S.U. activities. The Steamship Sailors union was readmitted to the trades body in 1889 but relations between the two seagoing unions remained tense. The Steamship Sailors' union representatives argued against an exchange of union cards, claiming that the hold of the crimps over coast shipping put the coasting sailors at a disadvantage with which the steamer sailors did not want to contend. Finally, after extended negotiations, the Steamship union, now led by the Norwegian-born Nicholas Jortall, fused with the C.S.U. to form the organization that continues today: the SAILORS' UNION OF THE PACIFIC. The declining power of the crimps in the face of the C.S.U.'s will to battle had contributed to pro-merger sentiment among the Steamship union's members. The new S.U.P. counted a membership of around 4,000 and a treasury totaling \$50,000 and was "probably the strongest labor union local in the country at that time as it now began final preparations for a great effort. ..to wrest control of shipping from the Shipowner's and Coasting Boarding Masters Association and to abolish finally the abuses which had pursued the sailor wherever he went," according to Paul Taylor.

The following year, the stronger S.U.P. launched its biggest legislative effort yet to be seen. In January, the Union's Committee on Maritime Law was set up, including Ed Crangle, Nick Jortall, Frank Waterhouse, George M. Lynch and George Bolton. The immediate targets of the committee were the following grievances:

- "1. Involuntary servitude (penal punishment for violation of civil contract), as embodied in laws on 'desertion.'
 2. Corporal punishment (subject to being beat - en by, or by order of, the master) .
 3. Small and badly ventilated forecastles.
 4. Insufficient and unwholesome food.
 5. Insecurity of wages contracted for, caused first by the system of advances or allot- ments; secondly by dilatory proceedings in suits to recover wages when such are in dispute.
 6. No provisions for survey of sailing vessels, no regulation of manning of vessels and no standard of efficiency for such men as were actually shipped.
 7. Retention through contracts of wages al- ready earned until the contract time was served, except at the option of the master."
- The recommendations for legal redress of these points were presented in an 'Appeal to Congress.'

Late in 1892, the S.U.P. endorsed James G. Maguire, a former Superior Court judge, for Congress, representing San Francisco, with the understanding that Maguire would fight to obtain congressional approval for a Seaman's Act securing the seven goals noted above. Maguire was duly elected and began working toward passage of the bill.

Curtin Bomb

On Sunday, September 24, 1893, the area of Main Street four blocks south of Market Street in San Francisco, was shaken by an explosion. Six non-union seamen had been on their way back to the boarding house of the notorious crimp, John Curtin, at 334 Main Street, when they had found a valise laying in the doorway of Curtin's establishment. Curtin's son, Johnny, who happened to be on the scene, was reported to have looked into the valise and shouted "Boys, it's dynamite" before dropping it and fleeing. The sailors were examining it themselves when it blew up. Four men were killed outright and a fifth died later. Curtin's son recovered from injuries. The front of Curtin's boardinghouse was destroyed and the sidewalk and adjacent buildings were severely damaged.

The Curtin bomb was immediately used as an excuse for the worst press campaign yet against the Sailors' Union. A notorious anti-labor figure, one Williams, declared in the *San Francisco Examiner* that "from British Columbia to San Diego there have been mutterings and threats from the army of nearly 4,000 sailors who are abjectly under the command of the Union." The Union responded to the Curtin outrage by voting a \$1,000 reward for the arrest and conviction of the bombers.

Soon after the incident, a non-Union deepwater sailor, Terrence Tracy, and two former S.U.P. members, John Tyrrell and James Wood, who had been removed from the Union's rolls for non-payment of dues, were charged with the blast on the strength of a claim by Curtin's wife that they had spoken threateningly to her. Police searched the lodgings of S.U.P. men, including Furuseth. Curiously, the bombing of Curtin's boarding house was followed within days by the revelation that "Williams" was actually Walthew and that under his original name he had been charged with various crimes in the state of Michigan, from whence he fled to

California to avoid prosecution. The *Coast Seamens Journal* ceased referring to him by the nickname "Walking Delegate Williams" and adopted that of "Criminal Walthew," repeatedly pointing out that in swearing under the name Williams in various proceedings, Walthew had committed perjury. But although Walthew's past should have made him a candidate for an interview by the San Francisco police for possible involvement in the Curtin affair, such an investigation never took place.

The forces of the law were, in 1893, firmly arrayed on the side of privilege. The legislation depriving the seamen of the right to quit a ship, the persecution of the Union by employer groups like the Shipowners' Association, and police violence against working people were all features of a nationwide offensive by the powerful "interests" to finish off the labor movement.

A coroner's jury declared that the Curtin blast was the work of "persons unknown," eliciting condemnation from the police who insisted on the guilt of Tyrrell, and Tracy. Finally, Tyrrell was charged. The S.U.P. helped set up a Tyrrell defense fund and hired Burnette Haskell and an Easterner, Guilfoyle, for the defense. Haskell handled the Tyrrell case masterfully and, on March 20, 1894, after six minutes deliberation, the jury voted for acquittal. This was, perhaps, Haskell's greatest moment. The Union extended its thanks to its old friend, stating that he "had a good case but his skillful handling of it deserves commendation and appreciation."

Simultaneous with the Curtin affair, the Union had to defend itself in the trial of James P. Hansen, first patrolman, on a charge of placing dynamite aboard a scab vessel. Fortunately, the testimony produced by the main state witness, one "Hoodlum Harry" Hendrickson, a crimps' runner, so discredited the prosecution that, following a hung jury and a second trial, Hansen was acquitted just before Tyrrell.

The true character of Walthew was just then spectacularly exposed to the entire public. In February 1894, the *San Francisco Examiner* published a letter of his to the Seattle representative of the Shipowners' Association, in which Walthew wrote the following: '~ dose of cold lead has a wonderful effect. Create the impression upon both the union men and the community in general that your greatest desire is to preserve peace; that you will do anything to avoid a conflict; that you will submit to any indignity without retaliation; but when it becomes necessary to guard the property of the association you will not hesitate to kill. Once you obtain that reputation, you will discover that you will have far less trouble."

'The Red Record'

By the time the Curtin bomb trial ended, the Sailors' Union had already set its course in a determined way toward a full reform of maritime labor laws. With the issue of the *Coast Seamens Journal* dated February 14, 1894, a new "feature" was introduced, headed by an engraving, printed in bright red ink, of a hand gripping a blood-covered belaying pin: "The Red Record", a chronicle of some of the more notable cases of abuses suffered by U.S. sailors since November 1887. The first listed case was that of the whaler *Hidalgo*, on which the captain had succeeded in enforcing a spurious claim of seamen's debts owed to the vessel by securing their arrest and delivery on board another vessel in Eureka -a case of "official shanghaiing."

"The Red Record" ran through several issues of the *Coast Seamens Journal* and was revised and published as a pamphlet by the National Seamen's Union at the end of 1895. This harrowing chronicle of oppression was sent to every periodical in the land and presented to legislators and other public figures. In pamphlet form, *The Red Record* enumerated 64 cases dealing only with actual violence, all of which had occurred within seven years, "proving that cruelty to seamen has not ceased with the notorious cases which happened at an earlier date," as N.S.U. president Elderkin noted in a prefatory statement "To The Public." Of the 64 cases, 40 were reported in San Francisco. The roster included 14 deaths "under circumstances which justify the charge of murder." Only three convictions for brutality by marine officers were secured. The rest were "either 'exonerated' or dismissed on the ground of 'lack of evidence,' 'justifiable discipline,' or, in the case of the seaman's death, because no 'official' charge had been made."

The following excerpts convey the flavor of "The Red Record:"

"*Tam O'Shanter*, Captain Peabody, arrived in San Francisco, September 6, 1888. First-Mate Swain arrested on three charges of cruelty preferred by Seamen Fraser, Williams and Wilson. Captain defended his mate on the ground of incompetent crew; did not say how he came to sail with incompetent men. Mate released on \$450 bond. Case still in the courts.

"*Hecla*. Captain Snow, arrived in Tacoma, November 1, 1888. Sixteen seamen, being all-hands forward, entered complaint of cruelty in the District Court. Near Cape Horn captain attacked the carpenter; struck him with a heavy instrument, breaking his jaw and knocking out several teeth. Captain nearly killed another man, and, with the aid of the first-mate, beat several of the crew. Crew were put in the hold for forty-eight hours and secured in such a manner that they could neither stand erect, sit nor lie down. One man was tied to a stanchion four days and kept without food. The latter was placed within sight, but out of reach. In Acapulco the crew were imprisoned ashore until the ship was ready to sail. Application was made to the Consul for assistance, but the latter refused, saying the only thing to be done was to "rough it." Captain Snow boasted that he had never been beaten in a difficulty with seamen ashore, and refused to pay his crew the wages due them (\$600 in all) for the passage from Cardiff.

"*Solitaire*, Captain Sewall (son of the Bath ship-builder and owner of that ilk), arrived in Dunkirk, France, about January, 1889. In the Channel the mate called a seaman from aloft, knocked him down, jumped on his breast and inflicted wounds from which he died next day. The body was kept in the after hatch for four days. When the corpse was so black that the bruises could not be distinguished the story was given out to the authorities that the man died of consumption. Captain beat two men for talking while at work; first-mate also set upon them and broke one man's nose. Second-mate beat one of the boatswains with knuckle-dusters because the latter omitted the usual "sir" from his address. A sick seaman was hauled out of his bunk and made to go aloft. Another seaman accidentally spat on the deck; was made to go down on his knees and lick it up. Boatswains were beaten for refusing, or being unable to beat the seamen. An *old* seaman was given liquor and then plied to tell tales about the crew. With the cues thus received the officers made occasion to beat the seamen. At Dunkirk the second-mate fled to England, and remained in hiding until the *Solitaire* was ready to proceed to sea again.

Arago Case

The powerful interests opposed to seamen's emancipation were not prepared to concede without a struggle. In May 1895, the scandalous case of the barkentine *Arago* erupted. Four seamen who shipped on the vessel in San Francisco for a voyage to the Columbia River and thence to Chile attempted to quit the vessel at Knapton, Washington. They were arrested and imprisoned until the sailing of the *Arago*, when they were carried on board in irons. They refused to turn to and were removed from the ship in San Francisco, where they were arrested on a charge of "refusing duty." The seamen's case was carried to the U.S. Supreme Court and Representative Maguire appeared to argue in their favor. But when the decision was finally handed down in January 1897, the Supreme Court justices shockingly upheld imprisonment for desertion, holding that the "surrender of personal liberty" involved in the seamen's contract was valid, and was not nullified by the Thirteenth Amendment, which had purportedly abolished involuntary servitude. The court supported its judgment by citing precedents derived from medieval maritime law, including the Catalan compilation known as the *Consolat de Mar*, which evolved as an authority for Mediterranean shipping between the years 1200 and 1400 A.D., and the Visby rules, a Baltic maritime code, some of whose provisions remain in effect today. They further appealed to the archaic status of the seaman as a "ward of the nation." The message of the high court was unmistakable: so far as the sea was concerned, the laws regulating the freedom of the laboring class *would* not recognize the abolition of feudalism; further, the *rulers* of the nation were intent on crushing unions and *would* balk at no measure in this quest.

The only member of the Court to dissent from the case was Justice John Harlan, who stated that "we may now look for advertisements, not for runaway servants as in the days of slavery, but for runaway seamen." The decision was immediately labeled the "Dred Scott decision number II", and the response of the Union was understandably bitter. A petition for a rehearing of the matter was presented to the Court. The Sailors' Union, asked to join in festivities for July 4, 1897, in San Francisco, replied by stating that they, "being mindful of our status...that of involuntary servitude we felt it *would* be an imposition on our part to inflict our presence, the presence of bondsmen upon the freemen who will on the Fourth of July celebrate their freedom."

In January 1898, the Supreme Court refused a new hearing on the matter and the Union that year again declined to celebrate Independence Day, declaring that "the spectacle of a slave worshipping his chains would be *less* ludicrous than that of the American seamen celebrating Independence Day." The *Coast Seamens Journal* soon noted the effects of the *Arago* decision in the shoreside unionized trades, with a contract signed by the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company at two plants in Indiana "filed in the county court (with) a violation of it considered as contempt of court. That is to say, either party is liable to imprisonment without trial by jury. This is a practical reversion to the statutory wage system of the 16th and 17th centuries," the *Journal* commented. 14

White Act A number of the early clauses of the Maguire Act had been dropped during the congressional fight for its passage and soon the seamen's organization, which in 1896 changed its title from the National Seamen's Union to the International Seamen's Union, sought to introduce them anew. In March 1897 Senator Stephen White of California proposed a Senate version of the original 1896 Maguire bills with Maguire himself handling the battle in the lower house. The White Act passed the House in

December 1898; the main thrust of the act was to cut down the power of the crimps, with a fine for payment of advances and for charging of a shipping fee.

The seamen had gained significantly in their fight for recognition. But as the century came to an end, the fortunes of the Union may have yet seemed mixed: each legislative victory was balanced by the maintenance of "escape clauses" for the shipowners. At least the rotten crimping system has been dealt a severe blow. The Union had withstood the attacks of a venal press, and those who sought to defeat the seamen's movement through the tactics of libel and slander, smearing the Union as "un-American" and "radical," had discovered that their efforts only strengthened the sailors' will to resist oppression. The Sailors' Union had reached a position of eminence within the ranks of labor on the West Coast nationally and internationally. The year 1900 saw the beginning of a major campaign to organize seamen on the Great Lakes and, in 1901, the Union joined in the organization of a City Front Federation of San Francisco "wharf and wave" unions. But the enemies of labor were prepared for another, even better organized, attack. Walthew had eventually been abandoned by the employers as a liability but his ruthlessness was to be revived and applied anew in the mighty battle of the 1901 San Francisco transportation strike.