

A STORM FROM LIVERPOOL:
BRITISH SEAMEN AND THEIR UNION, 1920-1970

by

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Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements
of the University of Liverpool
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

October 10 1984



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ABSTRACT

The establishment, maintenance and subsequent decline of the British maritime imperial state had profound consequences for the lives of British seamen.

This study describes and analyses the relationships between the state, the shipowners and the seamen's union and then discusses the conflicts and controversies to which this triangular relation gave rise within the ranks of the seafarers themselves.

The study covers the period from the formation of the National Maritime Board in 1920 until 1970 - a period that begins with the forging of a triangular consensus and ends with its disintegration. There is considerable emphasis on the struggle for control within the union - from the isolated and hopeless cases of the 1920s and 1930s through to the formation of the National Seamen's Reform Movement in the 1960s which culminated in the national strike of 1966.

The internal struggle within the union was a battle for democratic control and the gains made in democratisation grew as the number of seamen declined. Under the impact of technological change, multinational shipowners hiding behind flags of convenience, the growth of Third World fleets and the concomitant fading of imperial and Commonwealth connections, the British fleet contracted as the seafarers, for the first time in their union's history, took substantial control.

Apart from dealing with the specific questions of the shipping industry the thesis has also sought to provide a case study of how consensual industrial relationships were forged in the early years of the century only to be undermined fifty years later as the final impact of the loss of empire came to be felt.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people to whom I am indebted in this brief history of the seaman's movement and they cannot all be named. They include all those I have met in cafes, various bars, Seaman's missions and different homes all over the country; to Maritime House, the TUC library staff and those at the Register of Seamen and Shipping at Llantrissant. I would like to thank them all. Perhaps a few might be mentioned: Mrs Minnie Coward, Harry Carrabine, Pat Doherty, Sid Foster, Jack Jones, Eddy Judge, Billy Kerrigan, Pat Milner, Jim Slater, Mrs Pat Taylor and not least my supervisor Tony Lane another ex seaman whose criticisms and arguments have kept me going over a long period of time; also the Research group to whom I was attached at Liverpool and in particular Ron Noon and Andy Shallice for all their help and comments. Finally the persons to whom I am also truly grateful and who have since died are Billy Donaghie, Joe Kenny and Frank Campion, Liverpool seamen all and without whom large sections of this work could not have been completed.

PREFACE

"Up there for thinkin' down there for dancin'" I was always taught and likewise thought a formal thesis was no way I could express myself in writing about the Seaman's history especially from Liverpool. The reason for this was part of my own history. Since leaving the Merchant Navy in 1968 all I wanted to do was to write stories.

This obsession continued ten years later and through a research period at Liverpool University between 1977-1980. At the end of that period there was a mass of half written research and the beginnings of a novel. A couple of years later, the novel, the postscript of which is included in the appendix was going to be the PhD.

The authorities would not have it. A certain formality was required. A novel can capture many things, notably the world that goes beyond fact and it is not only an egocentric who can suggest this sometimes stands in clearer light than the historical record of date and number. Theory stands guard in an opposite corner. Again the search for a method of presentation. The result is this clumsy mixture of sociology and history but which at least contains a systematic account of the seaman's struggle.

Yet perhaps in order to read this dissertation the better with the ideas in which it was first conceived, the appendices beyond the bibliography convey something of the lived experience within the form of a story. Seamen like others within the "nether world" have a million stories and a million histories that no one mirror can attempt to capture. This sequence of events is an attempt at a rescue act, to bring the appendices into being within their own right and as an important addition to the Seaman's history.

INTRODUCTION: TO BUILD THE BRIDGES

In May 1970 representatives of British seamen voted at the Annual General Meeting of their union, the National Union of Seamen, by seventy votes to sixty-three to conduct discussions with the Transport and General Workers Union with a view towards amalgamation.¹ This was perhaps the most dramatic gesture and the most significant statement of policy on the part of some middle ranking union officials, other oppositionists from which these officials had sprung since 1960 and certain causes since that time that had inspired the rank and file. It hardly mattered that the proposed amalgamation failed to materialise. Rather the vote was a demonstration of how a coalition of seamen at the lower levels within the union were advocating greater involvement within the wider reaches of the trade union movement and thus bringing back into focus the visions of a historic dream.

What had brought them to this pass? Recent critiques of the concept of "Rank and Fileism" have stipulated correctly that trade union leaders were not all incorporate bureaucrats and that ultimately, "trade union leaders were thus acutely aware of the need to keep in touch with their members aspirations in the long term"², yet this applied less to seamen because of their traditional isolation than to other groups of industrial workers. What this meant was that their officials at certain periods enjoyed undisputed power in relation to the seagoing membership. There had been a change however in that relationship and this change was in connection with the breaking down of views of the seamen as

being somehow beyond industry and part of a wider national interest.

The theme of this thesis is the relationship between seamen and their union against the background of such change in the period 1920-1970. In the former year, agreement had been reached between the State, the Shipping Federation and the Seamen's Union - the National Sailors and Firemans Union - to form the National Maritime Board. The object of this Board was to secure "co-operation between all sides of the industry" and harmonise relationships, to the exclusion of local unrest, with the express aim of negotiating the chasm of Britain's lost markets incurred since the war. In this respect the harmonising of labour was to run alongside the central clause of the Maritime Board which was, "the maintenance of the supremacy of Shipping within the British Empire".³

This thesis explores the recurring tension between developments within the wider realm of the British Empire and developments within the British Economy as experienced by British seamen. By 1920, "An awareness had emerged across the whole field of Government among ministers and civil servants, of the need for the formal organisation of industrial politics; Churchill and Bonar Law were not alone in believing that only the Trade Union movement stood between the state and anarchy."⁴ Seamen were the first to feel the effects of this new awareness and the policies that resulted from it. The capturing of the allegiance of other trade unions did not come until after the defeat experienced in the General Strike in 1926. Why seamen,

and why so early? Again we return to their isolation and to the resolving of power in the part of their union leaders in conjunction with the Shipping Federation and the State. What 1920 did bring was the end of an era of rank and file activity that took until the 1960s to recapture within the machinery of the trade unions. The effects were to be far reaching and concern the crumbling of a consensus in British Industrial politics along all the frontiers of control.⁵

Prior to 1920 there had been an explosion of paradoxes, of different traditions between the old craft unions and the New Unionism of 1889-1914. James Hinton has written of the engineers, the paradox of craft and revolutionary explosion through the war years, "Central to any understanding of the Shop Stewards Movement is the fact that it was a movement of craft workers who felt their traditionally privileged position within the working class to be under the most severe pressure."⁶ Coming before this explosion and at the other end of the scale, the casual workers of the waterfront had erupted en masse in 1911, most notably in Liverpool. A fusion of different cultures imprinted themselves upon both upper and lower ends of the working class at a time when it was becoming increasingly homogenised. Yet just as seamen came so close to the rest of that class, they were then effectively isolated. Why?

"In the decade 1910-1920, British trade unionism was more clearly on the offensive than in any other period of its development before or since. Union membership advanced from 2½ million in 1910 to 8½ million by 1920. The number of officially recorded strikes which had averaged five

hundred a year in the previous decade escalated to three times that number in 1913 and after a lull caused by the 'war-time industrial truce' rose to a new peak in 1920."⁷

Syndicalism, the overcoming of sectionalism and the dreams of the one big union was, in many cases, the movement that fused so many different levels of dissent. The consequences of this development brought the State onto the industrial scene, determined to secure formal relationships between the employers and the leaders of the unions to quell "anarchic" rank and file revolt. If Syndicalism had challenged existing institutions in a wide attack on union trends before 1914⁸ then the State along with employers and latterly union leaders had struggled to regain power and consensus.

The death of the Shop Stewards Movement among craftsmen and the termination of the rank and file revolts among the unskilled and casual in this immediate post war period signalled the success in official-dominated trades unions in regaining the initiative. This was particularly experienced after 1920 in the swapping of grand bargains for increased power. Its effects were considerable. Hughie Gallagher wrote, "In 1918 we had marched through Glasgow a hundred thousand strong. On May 1st 1924 I led a demonstration through the streets. A hundred was our full muster."⁹ This did not come about by chance, rather it was a series of deliberate manoeuvres often engineered by the State. Between 1917-1920 "Lloyd George's design to raise up representative institutions of estates capable of resolving major industrial problems among themselves and of meeting government on political questions in

the manner of corporations addressing themselves to the state is the first overt attempt to create a formal triangular relationship."¹⁰

The National Industrial Conferences - Whitley Councils - for Industrial Peace reached their conclusions at the same time as the setting up of the Industrial Courts Act. They were masterly strokes by the coalition leader to get the trade unions to talk rather than act but more importantly to return to dominance the moderate leaders of the movement in dialogue with the employers' federations. For the forces of the State there could be no better advocate of what it was attempting to achieve than within the leadership of the Seamans trade union and its president Havelock Wilson. The working together of Ship-owners, State and Union led to the creation of a powerful National framework for resolving social contradictions in the NMB of 1920.

Before 1920 and on the crest of the tidal wave of Syndicalism the seaman's union had been formally and nationally recognised. Perhaps because of the speed of that organisation and the ideology that surrounded it, rebellion was always latent within that body. Now the tables were turned and with the formation of the NMB the conquest was that of the union leadership. Seamen became once more an isolated and restricted group of workers. This development was to pre-figure the same phenomenon on shore before the decade was through.

There was always a wider arena in which seamen were to be centred however and this concerned the British

Empire. After the First World War the Seamen's Union joined a relationship between the state and the shipowners that became ever more concrete since the rather informal developments of the mid-19th century and the industrialisation of the industry. What lay behind this objective was the necessity of controlling and managing a seagoing labour force as a concomitant feature of a secure Empire, especially after the crises of war and revolution in various parts. This objective became more urgent on the one hand as seamen and waterside labour became more organised and on the other hand as the loss of markets from the war and the post-war recession made the British economy still more dependent on traditional Imperial links.

The arrival of an organised seafaring labour force provided especial problems for the State and for shipowners because virtually all trade between the United Kingdom and Empire was carried in British ships. Since the uprising of 1911 some far-sighted shipowners, less blinkered by crude ideology, recognised that this growing organisation had to be accommodated. The Union's leadership, wearied by the war between itself and the Shipping Federation particularly between 1890-1910, caught up with revolts from below and the later patriotic flood of the war, was eager for security and stability. Between 1917-1920 it joined in effect an imperial alliance of capital and labour that was mediated by the State. This went beyond the war and the Empire nostrums of "a contented working class is indispensable"¹¹ to become an essential framework of power within the fabric of British industrial society.

This development was not to be paralleled within the leadership of the working class in general until after 1926 although all the portents had been there since 1920. The failure of the General Strike, and the legislation leading to the Trades Disputes and Trade Union bill in 1927, gave the opportunity for the General Council to report to the TUC Congress that the Trade Union movement, "should say boldly that not only is it concerned with the prosperity of industry but that it is going to have a voice as to the way the industry is carried on, so that it can influence the developments that are taking place. The ultimate policy of the movement can find more use for an efficient industry than a derelict one. And the unions can use their power to promote and guide the scientific re-organisation of industry as well as to obtain material advantages from that re-organisation." Walter Citrine was to argue that, "trades unionism has reached the end of a defensive stage in its evolution".¹² Nowhere was the new reality and the attitude of the TUC summed up better than by the delegate who said, "that he would have preferred the last eight years forgotten if it would have brought them to the position of today".¹³ Before that could happen however the old ideas of rank and file revolt had to be taken from the agenda. This, the seamen's leaders had accepted since 1920. If Havelock Wilson had said as early as 1892 that, "if only the owners would see that their interests are the same as ours",¹⁴ it had taken the State to formalise this process. By 1927 this was to happen to the trade union movement within the country.

In examining this process however and the question of how to avoid a class reductionist or essentialised view of the State and at the same time witness its interventions within a tradition that is far from autonomous, free from the ideas, presumptions and attitudes of the dominant forces in British Society and within the shipping world of other central institutions such as shipowners or the union, we must look to policies formulated over time and passed down within a discourse of protection and coercion.¹⁵

After 1920 situations became more formal in the relationship between Shipping Federation, State and Union and with them assumptions made at each level concerning the status of seamen. We may categorise them as power structures through time, interpretable and intelligible only in terms of their own constructions and categories and made possible by conscious political and industrial decisions.

Gramsci wrote of the educative and formative role of the State in this period and that, "The massive structures of the modern democracies, both as state organisations and as complexes of associations in Civil Society, constitutes for the art of politics as it were, 'the trenches' and the permanent fortifications of the front in the war of position. They render merely 'partial' the element of movement which before used to be the whole war."¹⁶ The role of the State in shipping was at once precise and at the same time opaque. Set against the pronouncements of politicians that the Government could not have an active economic say in the post-war industry, was the diffusion of its power through different other agencies such as the Treasury, the Civil and

Criminal Courts, the Board of Trade with its staff of civil servants and the industrial consensus acts of politicians themselves. The combined effects of all these on the lives of seamen was considerable. 1920 was not just the end of a decade but the beginning of a new era in relations between the dominant institutions of the industry and the rank and file.

In this way the half century between 1920-1970 concerns the structure of seamen's trade unionism, its relationship to its members on the one hand and to the representatives of the shipowner, the Shipping Federation, and the State on the other. This thesis concerns itself with the shifting centres of control. It describes how this alliance and the parties to it have shifted their position as Britain has attempted to adjust to a world order in which shipping has had a decreasing economic significance. This went from a massive 44% of world trade to less than 10% before 1920 and after 1970.¹⁷ Within this period have been the struggles of seamen to understand and control the distant forces far outside of the reach of their daily existence and the growing recognition that better control of the terms of that existence required them to take their union out of the suffocating embrace of shipowners and the State.

The forms of that control were held in place for more than four decades. Marx may have noted that, "the process of history is nothing but the succession of separate generations, each of which exploits the materials, the capital funds, the productive forces handed down to it by preceding generations. On the one hand traditional activity in

changed circumstances and modified old circumstances with a completely changed activity,"¹⁸ yet as Gramsci was to describe, "relations of production that had outgrown their time could remain almost indefinitely because of the supportive structures of power".¹⁹ This not only has a bearing on social relationships between seamen and the institutions over them and on our understanding of how that control was negotiated: it is also relevant to the way in which in different periods control passed from one institution to another. In this there was not always to be found the symmetric language of acquiescence or strife but rather the relationship to power dependent on which particular institution could educate, control and gauge the climate of the shipping world and its wider relationship to British society. The problem is not only how seamen came to change in relation to the institutions surrounding them but how the very concept of control must be provisional and approximate to different situations.²⁰ The interventions of the State, for example, were very different in the seamen's unofficial strikes of 1933-47-55 from those of 1911-17-20 and 1966. At this level it is hardly worth enquiring whether there exists a "class in itself" or the tendency towards bureaucracy and corporatism within the nature of trade unions and their leaders, "What does interest us to know is that there exists a power structure. This macroscopic fact which goes through all history can be seen to be marked by power and the various transformations it has undergone in order to persist as such."²¹

In the same way as there can be no one essentialised history between 1920-1970 the history of specific organisations

touched and changed by power nevertheless played with dramatic effects upon the lives of seamen. As Jonathan Zeitlin has written of the post-war period, "since no objective criteria exists for judging the merits of any particular compromise, the road stands open for power struggles with trades unions which challenge established accommodations with employers and the state, and re-open debate about the organisation's goals and strategies."²²

Seamen were neither mere voluntarist actors without any conditions of existence in the world that they inhabited, "the evident importance of the actors in the drama does not mean that they are also dramatists, producers and stage designers".²³ The object of this thesis is to locate the processes and different structures of the industry to the forces that framed seamen's lives at every level and to measure the terrain upon which compromises and rebellions were enacted. Within this was a social process which allows an autonomy for social consciousness. If this has always to be determined by social being then like the State, shipping and seamen could not be categorised as monolithic but dispersed between many different sectors and trades, levels of activity and relationships to their own particular world and that of the wider society.

Culture and traditions again invoke themselves here for as Eric Hobsbawm found in one of the most perceptive of his essays in the difference in labour traditions between Britain and France, "historically speaking the process of building new institutions, new ideas, new theories and tactics rarely starts as a deliberate job of social

engineering, Men live, surrounded by a vast accumulation of past devices and it is natural to pick the most suitable of these and to adapt them for their own and novel purposes."²⁴ The theme behind the dominant consensus is to enquire into the structure of the union in relation to its workforce between 1920-1970, yet this must also take into consideration the hiatus between formal trade unionism and the culture of specific work-places, notably the intense world of the waterside.

Perhaps one of the most important problems this thesis sets out to explore is the reaction of seamen in Liverpool to policies formulated by the national union. Historically the problem stemmed from the mass struggle of the Liverpool seamen to have the union recognized on a national basis. Thereafter, particularly after 1920 the problem was reversed in that Liverpool became a "notorious blackspot" for a union leadership. This transformation is considered in Chapter One.

The importance of Syndicalism whilst not to be underestimated must likewise not be overstressed. If it had the firm historical distinction of providing the movement that enabled the Liverpool casual workers to organise in the first place - union membership went from 25,000 to over 90,000 between 1910 and 1911²⁵ - then it also became fused with local issues and partly explains the recurring tensions between locality and national union between the 1920s and the latter 1960s.

Added to this came the traditions of communism, of working for change completely within the boundaries of

the new transformed union; "the heirs of the pre-1914 anti-organisation rebels were to be the super organisations of the communist parties. What else could be expected? Narrower experience shows that if industrial workers have the choice between even a corrupt union and no union at all, few would hesitate."²⁶ Yet as late as 1956 union leaders spoke of the need for continued progress in relations at the port between the union and the seamen, "let us hope this continues on Merseyside because in truth it has been the most difficult port in the history of this organisation".²⁷ In the strike of 1960 the General Secretary had become, "philosophically resigned to the fact that Liverpool is full of dissidents".²⁸

It was not until the 1960 strike however that all the differing strands of dissent came to fight within and change the union. Until that time it was the measure of that organisation's success and that of its general secretaries that it could effectively dismiss all expressions of dissent as being merely dominated by Liverpool and its troublemakers, disputes being engineered yet ultimately "fragmented, isolated and eventually unsupported". This was not without truth. The product of the changes made however came in 1969-1970 when seamen proposed that their union amalgamate with the Transport and General Workers for a one union waterside all around the ports. It was not only the support of the Liverpool delegation and the promises of autonomy on the part of an ex-Liverpool docker - as General Secretary of the TGWU - that prompted the conference to look into ways of amalgamation but the way in

which coordinated rank and file activity had spread to traditionally conservative ports.²⁹

The 1920s was the formative age of the different institutions of the shipping industry coalescing above the seaman's head. By the 1970s this age had passed. It had been bypassed not only by the seaman's rebellion but by new technological developments within shipping, the increasing diversification of shipowners, the preponderance of flags of convenience shipping and, of note, the death of Empire and steady decrease of Commonwealth shipping. By the 1970s Empire was materially if not mentally moribund: ships and seamen were no longer needed. Seamen protested for they had invested themselves and their lives within the industry. Shipowners on the other hand employed capital, a far more portable and transferable and ultimately international commodity.

In the seamen's attempts to meet with other groups of port workers, to act and organise within a prospective one union waterside, they demonstrated that control does not reside in one place but has different parameters for every sphere of time. Like consciousness it is not subject to one particular yardstick but emanates both within a general culture and at specific moments within its own framework and that of general changes within society.

If in 1920 the problem for shipowners was to have both an efficient workforce and achieve necessary profits, then the role of the State was to mediate between industrial peace, reining and promoting by turns, the power of a newly recognised force in the industry, the union. For the union,

it was not only to have itself recognised as a forceful broker in relation to these other forces but to be sure of its own constant legitimation against those forces below, the volcanic masses, the nether world that came to take such part in the battles of the previous decade. Within this "residium"³⁰ there was the constant attempts to understand and fight against the forces above them and the "deals" made for them in the name of the grand coalition

In this way seamen became emblematic of the structure of the development of the British economy since 1920 and its system of industrial relations.³¹ Perhaps this is too grand a claim for them. Yet encased within the development of their organisation throughout these years are all the vexed problems of control: problems that become irretrievably entwined within the history of the labour movement and its relationship not only with the wider society but to ideas and social forces themselves; in short the tools of enquiry that produce certain perspectives to social being and social consciousness. Of necessity then is this history interpretative and leaves out as many questions as it tries to explore, "in sentiments, illusions, habits of thought and conceptions of life".³²

These absences include the history of those thousands of Lascar, Black, Arab and Chinese seamen that sailed, undercut in wages and conditions through the high years of British shipping and its Empire. The categorising of the chapters below will identify those absences and in contrast identify the major areas of research as the union continued on its long passage through the half century

between 1920-1970.

Chapter One somewhat pre-figures these years and deals with the period 1910-1920. It gives an account of how the Shipping Federation and seamen's union attempted to come together after a war of more than two decades in order to distinguish between syndicalist and respectable trades unionism. This was the interregnum between the last incandescent light of the new unionism and the later developments of the amalgamated unions of the unskilled in the early 1920s.³³

This process was as much set in train by the great Liverpool strike as that port was to feature in every opposition to the union over the next four decades. The State was to provide the glue that enabled the ship-owners and the union to work together so successfully. As Eric Hobsbawm noted of this earlier and in many ways decisive period especially in the conditioning of the State towards labour and employers, "this triple re-orientation explains the tendency of the waterside to develop all embracing and general unions in spite of a tendency to a local and sectional self-sufficiency".³⁴ If this was true of the dockside then it was even more the case with the seamen.

The complex relationships between different ports, the dominant institutions of the shipping world and how these latter negotiated national perspectives and quelled local discontent is a constant theme of this chapter. What was of consequence here was the increased stratification of working class society and the conflicts between

union hierarchies that rose within them especially after the earlier melting pot intensity of the period 1910-1920. Given the explosion of the war years, particularly 1917, and the necessity of conciliation machinery, this was to lead in the seamen's case to the formation of the National Maritime Board in 1920. What it was also to feature was the future circumscribing of any forms of dissidence below as the union secured its place in this machinery, "These were factors which the state and political parties could not ignore".³⁵

Chapter Two continues to feature this process with more emphasis placed upon the union itself; with its corollary of the intermeshing and harmony of the triangular relationships on the one hand and the isolation of seamen from other groups of workers on the other. The union's role as direct strike breaker could be seen with increasing clarity with the Cooks and Stewards and the stoppages of the Miners in 1921. This pattern was continued with increasing vehemence in 1925 and 1926. After successfully resisting challenges to its legitimacy in 1922 and 1925 the union changed its name from the National Sailors and Firemens Union to the National Union of Seamen in 1926. This was the same year in which it refused to take part in the General Strike and sacked a number of officials in Liverpool and London.³⁶ These events were part of a process that went back to the other General Strike in Liverpool in 1911.

That process adds weight to our emphasis that as soon as it had helped consolidate itself, the union

withdrew from those very liaisons with other groups of workers that had helped support it. The result was of great significance in the continued isolation of seamen. This was no iron law of oligarchy, rather the fusing of certain interests and the question of deliberate choices. This was especially the case in the early 1920s when the union withdrew from the National and then the International Transport Workers Federation. When in 1922 the union entered into the mighty right of joint control of the supply of labour with the Shipping Federation, it did so to destroy a syndicalist union competing for the seaman's allegiance.³⁷ The fact that this union wanted one big union across the waterside and was eventually killed in the courts in the same year as the Mond-Turner talks is a good illustration of the process we are describing. Indeed the union came to be seen by shipowners and state as a bulwark of the Empire against the "Communist inspired"³⁸ internal activities of the transport workers and coal mining unions. This was given greater credibility with NUS support of the breakaway "Spencers Union" in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. Although after 1929 this desisted - after the death of Havelock Wilson and the threat by the Transport and General Workers to create its own sea-going labour force - nevertheless the union's grand isolation continued through the desperate years of the 1930s.

On the other hand its model behaviour which gave it a certain strength in relation to the other dominant institutions of the industry could be seen from 1936 when

it won substantial concessions at the I.L.O. conference. This was continued through to the war years 1940-1943 when new employment agreements were reached and cooks and stewards were brought formally into the union on the ratification of the State. Not until 1942 however did the NUS represent all sections of seamen.³⁹ Since the union had virtually what was tantamount to a closed shop agreement, as a result of extraordinary unanimity between themselves and shipowners since the 1920s, it again raises the problem of relationships between seamen and their union which were brought into focus by the state amidst the wider matrix of Britain's internal industrial relations. Chapter Two continues to develop the problem of the two-way flow of relationships between seamen and their union but more importantly the relationship between that organisation and the other dominant institutions of the industry between 1920-1943.

In contrast to Chapter Two, seamen's dissent in the three unofficial stoppages between the 1930s and the 1950s provides the focus for the third chapter. Its aim is to show how, "unconnected, spasmodic and eventually unsupported"⁴⁰ strikes involving substantial numbers of seamen tried to fight the dominant institutions and agreements made over which they had no control. This involved seamen with different ideas of dissent and political viewpoints; if this was expressed in the collective outbursts of 1933-1947-1955 then alongside this must be set the thousands of informal acts of rebellion that occurred and were registered only within individual ships log books.⁴¹

This chapter deals with the individual culture of dissent and places it in relationship to the larger strikes which shaped the Union.

To this extent Chapter Three overlaps in time the periods 1920-1943 and 1943-1967 which form the narrative to Chapters Two and Four. This is an attempt to understand how different sections within the union tried to either ignore, fight against or grapple with and influence its machinery and how attitudes changed or remained fixed in time simply because of the weight of the dominance above. If in the 1930s, "organised labour settled down to live with organised management, both clinging to the state in a hostile economic environment, assisting it willingly or not in its aims of avoiding internal crisis"⁴² then by the latter 1950s the terms of this reference had changed especially for the undermass. "Whether the turn-down related to economic, imperial or domestic political decline or to general, social and cultural transformations"⁴³ was difficult to determine. What was undeniable was that dissent at the lower levels was ceasing to be a merely marginal and imperceptible force.

The intention of this chapter is to show how the history of these movements led seamen back into fighting the organised structure within their own union and to a certain extent, regain the heritage of the years before 1920. It was this that led to the theme expressed in Chapter Four in the recapturing of radicalism within the union especially between 1960 and 1966. In the former year Liverpool seamen demonstrated at the dockside with

the phrase, "Remember 1911" blazoned across the top of their demand sheet which called for radical changes in the union.

The two unofficial strikes in the summer of 1960 brought the National Seaman's Reform Movement as an organised grassroots force working for change within the union. The legacy of its policy, of "fighting the battle for the Institutions"⁴⁴ was eventually to find its expression throughout the next decade. 1966 saw the union involved in the first official strike since that called before 1920; it showed the extent to which the rank and file had found voice within that organisation after having been stilled for so long. Perhaps this was to be reflected in the bitterness of the dispute particularly between the union and the State. At a general level it reflected developments within the trade unions in the 1960s as more and more official hierarchies sought to accommodate grassroots dissent and endeavour for change.

The consequences for the triangular set of relationships established with such authority in the 1920s were enormous. Indeed one commentator has suggested that between the latter 1960s and the early 1970s the State suffered a recurring and haemorrhaging crisis and that a half century of carefully cultivated liaisons had broken down. "Indeed from the late 1920s until about 1965 the trend (was) for governments to ensure public compliance in the process rather than drum up popular protest against blackmail by the institution".⁴⁵ Just as the seaman's leadership had pre-figured the direction taken by the TUC in 1927

by some seven years; the irony of the breakdown could have been seen with the Prime Minister's final denunciation of the seaman's strike in 1966 as politically motivated and Communist inspired.⁴⁶ The seamen's union exemplified the vacuum and loss of control wrought from the grip of the trade union leaders and their capacity to deliver over the heads of their membership. This was shaken further in all the political and industrial developments over the next seven years. In a curious way, for men so traditionally isolated, the seamen became the weathervane of the labour movement.

Chapter Five continues to document the changes taking place within the seamen's union, when the General Secretary characterised the mood of, "a union going through a period of re-birth with the members awakening to their democratic responsibilities".⁴⁷ This mood was to dominate the years after the strike up to the 1970s with the imprint of those who went away and their relationships to the Shipping Federation and the State. Yet it is also to note changes taking place within the State, its attitude to shipping laws and seamen in general. This came at a time when shipowners themselves were expanding away from the old traditional arrangements. In short, there was a tremendous period of flux within the industry. An industry that was once so dependent on Imperial connections was going to go the same way as Empire. No longer within this framework was there a need for hundreds of ships and thousands of seamen to ferry the produce of Empire and its administrators to and from the metropolis.

For seamen this coalition of control had lasted formally for half a century and yet when it was broken it conferred no lasting reward to those who had been subject to its dictates. New sets of power and circumstances had arisen. Britain had used her Empire and her Imperial concessions to negotiate the chasms of the inter-war period. Her commonwealth continued to provide privileged trading up until the 1960s and a share in American global expansion.⁴⁸ Afterwards, radical shifts in transport technology and trading patterns withered the old frameworks. External relationships as much as the internal ones that had bound seamen between seamen-shipowners and state were going through a decisive period of change. The implications were to be found at every political and industrial level.

This thesis concentrates on the consolidation and opposition to that power brought into being in 1920 and lasting until nearly 1970. Oppositions which at their moment of success are now ending in vastly different circumstances and on a note of tragedy. Just as seamen are in a position to break their historic bonds, they have found their industry sinking beneath them as British shipping has slipped from a central to a peripheral place within the economy. Today seamen reflect the very transience of British industrial society. "Other once great industries have had their share of the headlines but no-one has seemed to notice the disappearance of ships and seamen get bitter about the silence. When I first went away in 1955 shipping was bathing in a post-war boom. The world's ports were

full of red ensigns. Imperial dependencies upon which the industry had grown and prospered were still strong despite actual and imminent transfers of sovereignty. Yet seamen were bitter even then."⁴⁹ If in 1970 they tried to join formally with other groups of workers, it was more than a resurrection of a historic dream⁵⁰ but rather an increased sense of bitterness and awareness of change all around them. This thesis attempts to record their struggle.

Footnotes to Introduction

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2. S. Hill, The Dockers, Heinemann, London, 1976, p. 131.
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4. K. Middlemass, Politics in Industrial Society, Deutsch, London, 1979, p. 160.
And from a different perspective, W. Kendall, The Revolutionary Movement in Britain 1900-1921, London, 1969.
5. C. Goodrich, The Frontier of Control. It is illustrative that the author was writing this seminal work at the very point where control was to be taken away from the workplace.
6. J. Hinton, The First Shop Stewards Movement, Chapter 2, The Craft Tradition, Allen and Unwin, London, 1973, p. 56.
7. R. Hyman, Foreword to 1975 Edition of Frontier of Control, Pluto Press, 1975, p. VII.
8. R.J. Holton, British Syndicalism 1900-1914 Myths and Realities, Pluto Press, 1976.
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9. H. Gallagher, Memoirs, quoted in E. Hobsbawm, Revolutionaries, Quartet, London, 1977, p. 14.
10. Middlemass, op.cit., pp. 140-141.
11. From Civil Servants such as G. Askwith and the private secretary to Lloyd George, Thomas Jones, there came a reworking of Joseph Chamberlain's old dictum that, "The working class needs the Empire". Ibid., p. 130.
12. Quoted in M. Jacques, "The Consequences of the General Strike" in J. Skelly, Ed., The General Strike, Lawrence and Wishart, 1976, p. 386.
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14. International Seamans Gazette, June 4th 1892, T.U.C. Library.

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18. K. Marx, The German Ideology, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1965, p. 60.
19. J. Femia, "Hegemony and Consciousness in the Thought of Antonio Gramsci", Political Studies, Vol. XXIII, 1, 1972, p. 29.
20. E.P. Thompson makes this point that concepts and economic laws have no reality "except as approximation" and quotes Engels in his letters to Schmidt. "Did Feudalism Ever Correspond to Its Concept?", The Poverty of Theory, Merlin, London, 1978, p. 254.
21. D. Wiek, "The Negativity of Anarchism", Interrogations: International Review of Anarchist Research, New York, 1975, p. 151.
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J. Habermass, Legitimation Crisis stresses both positive and negative elements of power, N.L.B., 1976.
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30. Phrases used in turn by Mayhew, Booth, Masterman and Reynolds to describe "the undermass". E.P. Thompson and E. Yeo, The Unknown Mayhew, London, 1971. C. Booth, Life and Labour Second Series, Vol. 5, 1903. C. Masterman, The Condition of England, London, 1911. S. Reynolds, Seems So, London, 1913.
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32. K. Marx, The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, London, 1926, p. 55.
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34. Ibid., p. 221.
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42. Middlemass, op.cit., p. 214.
43. Ibid., p. 429.
44. This was the theme expressed by the National Seamans Reform Movement in 1960. The Fo'c'sle, February 1961.
45. Middlemass, op.cit., p. 379.
46. The Times, June 21 1966.
47. W. Hogarth, General Secretary N.U.S., The Seamen, December 1966, p. 183.
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H. Scanlon, "Workers Control and the Threat of the International Combines", Trade Union Register, 1970, pp. 45-52.
P. Ferris, The New Militants: Crisis in the Trade Unions, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1972.
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49. T. Lane, "The Ferrymen", unpublished MSS, University of Liverpool, January 1984, p. 7.
50. The dream had always had at its centre, the one big union waterside. "In Bristol - the home base of the modern Transport and General - the quayside men and ship loaders were its heart, in Harwich, the Railwaymen, in Grimsby the outside General Union of Gasworkers and the seamen who also started the movement in Glasgow and Liverpool." Hobsbawm, op.cit., p. 205.

CHAPTER ONE

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE UNION

"Before the 1914-1918 War the Shipping Federation was as immoderate as The National Seaman and Firemans Union. Indeed there was no other employers Association quite as Aggressive and Unscrupulous as the Shipping Federation.' Yet both the Federation and the Union underwent a fundamental change in the decade 1910-1920."¹

It is this decade that concerns us here particularly in the transformation of the Union, a phenomenon in which the above commentator suggested afterwards, "each pursued a moderate policy towards the other; both thenceforth reserved their aggressiveness for those who threatened the new found harmony."² The purpose of this chapter is to examine the stages of that transformation, from the opening of the decade with the flourishing of the syndicalist movement which was as much responsible for the establishing of the seamen's Union as a nationally recognised force; to its close in 1920 with the National Sailors and Firemans Union following an isolated and lonely path in close harmony with the Shipowners.

Yet there was no easy path from aggression to acquiescence on the part of the shipowners alone. As their historian L.H. Powell reminds us, after 1911 the seamen's union was only recognized; it meant that union men did not have to take the Shipping Federation ticket. "Control of supply the union certainly did not have."³ In this

transition of the shipowners interests Professor Hobsbawn has noted that, "While Big Shippers such as Holts in Liverpool might be keenly aware of the inconvenience of dockside anarchy, which a regularisation of industrial might mitigate, the hostility of shippers to seaman's organization which was closely tied to waterside organization made then initially into a powerful anti-union force." Afterwards they were to fight to protect "the interests" of the union:⁴ why this change? Somewhere between 1911-1920 the answer lies in the relationship of shipowners to the state. What is more if shipowners could agree with the state in certain important areas regarding the agencies of that organisation to make certain changes that coincided with their interests; then it was also the state that could provide the gel in the newly found harmony of interests between Union and Federation.

A related problem concerns the interpretation of the General Strike in Liverpool in 1911 by those who sailed on the ships and those who were within the upper echelons of the union. That there was a difference there could be little doubt; of the top half dozen officials only one had actually been to sea as a "rating" and that was the General President, Havelock Wilson. As the decade progressed it was only his acolytes that were enabled to hold influential offices. Whilst 1911 was regarded as a momentary explosion by this leadership, for large sections of the membership it was a decisive date for the overcoming of sectionalism on the waterfront. For decades afterwards, 1911 was both to be as quickly forgotten as it was determined to be remembered in the frontiers of control that determined seamen's relationships

within the union and on the waterfront in general. The question of control is a central feature running throughout this essay in the determining of relationships not only between seamen and the waterfront but between the Seamen's Union, the Shipping Federation and the different agencies of the State.

If the seamen were to pay a heavy cost as part of their isolation after 1920 then the union had decisively turned its back on the influences that had helped form it into a nationally recognised body amidst the hopes that the waterfront could be organised into one great body. As such by 1920 it had returned to a myopic isolationism that one observer, tracing the seaman's lineage could state of the hangover from the previous century, "Few saw such sweeping technological changes in so short a time. And fewer still experienced a situation where social relationships on board remained so embedded in the nineteenth century."⁵ Evidence suggests that Havelock Wilson the founder and President saw acquiescence with the shipowners as the only way the Union could continue its existence.

Virtue was made of this necessity as well as some definite ideological choices as to what the position of seamen should be. By 1920 a measure of this correspondence could be seen not only with the formation of the National Maritime Board but of its constitution which stated that there should be besides the aim of "securing closer co-operation" between all sides of the industry, between Shipowner, Union and state, a further cooperation that would ensure "the maintenance of maritime supremacy of the British Empire".⁶

After this date, the Union was probably more vociferous than the Shipping Federation in the condemning of any dissent as being tantamount to treason. Treason took two particular but interrelated forms both of them concerned with control. The first was that if seamen were to become involved with other labour movement interests they were automatically selling short the foundations of their own particular industry, the second was that if seamen joined in Labour movements that, by the nature of the times had international implications they were acting as threats to the British Empire.⁷ Within this decade, no industry came to be so cocooned industrially and ideologically "from above" as the shipping industry.

On a wider note was the divorce of the seamen from other organisations of the labour movement particularly from the waterside which in its two phases of unrest and explosion of 1889 and 1911 had not only contributed to the national recognition of the Seamen's Union but had gone on to form the great general Unions of the early 1920s. The seamen were in contrast to this general trend and were to remain in isolation until the late 1960s, indeed Wilson was to maintain after the transformation that "the Union is a grand stayer lads but our path is a lonely one".⁸

Henry Pelling may have asserted that the increased homogenisation of the working class took place between 1885-1920 but as other commentators have noted this process took place at many different levels.⁹ The entrance of the "volcanic masses" onto the industrial stage came not through merely the persuasion of radical Labour aristocrats but

through the persistence of a particular culture of the undermass themselves. Historically Liverpool was a major "locale"; the site of the 1911 stoppage, the place where the major Liner companies recognised the union, and the place where all sections of the waterfront had first come together; it also contained substantial, volcanic elements for which the "one great union" was more than just a dream.¹⁰

However, when Charles Booth spoke of the Seaman's and Docker's Communities of London, son and brother to Liverpool shipowners, he himself also intoned the similar existence of all the major waterfronts for whose inhabitants, "Communism was a necessity of their lives ... but economically they are worthless and morally worse than worthless for they drag others who live among them down to their own level."¹¹ The seamen's union perceived itself as bringing order to what they termed anarchy and in terms of moral salvation Havelock Wilson himself as "General President" with his lieutenants, "Father" Hopkins, and "Captain" Tupper took similar assumed titles to that other General of the Salvation Army.¹²

Thus one of the ironies that existed between 1910-1920 was that to achieve national recognition these leaders of the Seamen's Union had to endure the wave of syndicalist action that swept the waterfronts. With the achievement of a national Union and with further moves towards an isolation of seamen there grew up an animosity between the local and the National that was of particular acrimony in Liverpool.

This chapter discusses the problem between the local and the national, a problem not overcome until the

late 1950s. This problem did not merely reflect "goal displacement" that suggests that as unions grow larger and more complex, their bureaucracies "automatically" become disassociated from the locality but because Liverpool, Southampton and London had real sources of power at rank and file level. Indeed up until the latter 1920s there was enduring tension between membership and leadership in the legitimacy of the latter's existence.¹³ Furthermore it was not until the latter 1950s when all sections of dissent finally came together that a national alternative within the actual union structure came into being to campaign for more democratic organisation and responsibility and this in turn was facilitated by Liverpool not being the source of dissent but by being joined by other clusters of ports notably on the East coast, not normally noted for their militancy.

Let us take a traditional view of Liverpool as expressed by one historian; a city whose existence was totally based on shipping, of whose male labour force 50% worked in and around the port, producing such conditions as to make one former Lord Mayor, yet another in a long line of shipowners, comment that in 1920, "now as never before we are living with the consequences of our past".¹⁴ And to make Alan Clinton add, "This was a working class moulded by the toughness of the predominant occupations pursued on the waterside, fed by waves of Irish immigrants who often brought their own special problems; prone to spontaneous violence and revolt, often in the vanguard of new labour theories and organisations and usually at odds both with

National leaders of the movement and with any form of settled agreement with employers."¹⁵

Yet it was from within this "whirling world in which men's instincts were coarse, their greed naked and disguised, their bitterness against life, their attitude of mocking hostility towards everything on earth and of a carelessness towards themselves",¹⁵ that produced 1911 and in the words of Tom Mann, loaned to the Seamen's Union by the European dominated International Transport Workers Union, record that, "never in my experience did so many workers in such varied occupations show such thorough solidarity as on the occasion in Liverpool in 1911".¹⁷ From that time onward "the nature" of Liverpool was constantly bemoaned by a succession of Seamen's Union leaders most notably between 1920 and 1955.

In 1910 however Havelock Wilson had to turn to the Liverpool seamen for their support in striking for recognition of a National Union. What had been originally designed by five European countries to organise seamen on National and International lines fused in the great syndicalist explosion of unrest in Liverpool. One year beforehand a National Transport Workers Federation had been formed and as its Secretary Robert Williams noted about the proposed strike, "for anyone who has followed the fortunes of this union it was a gambler's last chance".¹⁸ The Federation would not recognise the union except locally, the statements issued by them that not more than two hundred seamen would respond to the strike call would not have appeared misplaced. As their historian informs us, with

185,000 seamen on their books and offices in every port, they were more than a match for the union".¹⁹

Yet one year later after securing the support of seamen shipping between Liverpool and the Eastern Seaboard of the United States, where Havelock Wilson had visited them in Philadelphia, Baltimore and New York and where incidentally some 10,000 desertions took place each year, the National Union was a recognised fact. The "gambler's last chance" had paid off although it seems Wilson was as surprised as the likes of The Economist and the Shipping Federation.

The decisive feature of 1911 however was that the seamen's struggle was an interrelated one amongst all transport workers and not confined to themselves alone. That this should reflect national and even international aspirations could be seen in the way that experienced organisers and Syndicalists like Tom Mann and Manny Shinwell should be seconded to the seamen's movement. That they embraced an overall political perspective further added to the dimensions of the strike and the seaman's place among other transport workers.

How sectionalism was overcome could be seen in these quotes taken from the Liverpool Daily Post and the measure of influence in a newspaper not given over to radical opinion. "Now mingling with the cloth caps of the dockers and rough clothing of the firemen were smartly dressed young fellows wearing the very latest in straw felt and up to date refinement in collars and ties."²⁰ "Hitherto stewards had been inclined to draw a certain social

distinction between themselves and the men at work on the deck and in the port. This condition of things has however been revolutionised in twenty four hours and for the first time in the history of the port yesterday saw all hands throwing sectionalism to the winds. It was a remarkable even a historic event in Trade Union Progress." Just when it had seemed that seamen had won their own decisive demands, the dockers stopped work. What had originally been a dispute in which all sections of the workforce were invited to join now had a rolling ball effect that was to convulse Liverpool over the summer of 1911. When the entire crew of the Empress of Britain went on strike in support of the dockers' demands and brought out all seamen from the North End docks one steward commented, "I admit we have got what we want, we have no grievance with the company but there is a question of honour at stake."²¹ A similar phenomenon extended through the normally divisive links between Dockers and Carters, Carters and Railwaymen. Such was the force of the events that by the end of the summer, unionisation had increased from 25,000 to over 90,000²² and even the distribution of food was beginning to be handled by the strike committee as a primary indication of what an industrial parliament might look like in one city.

It was this feature of developments that brought the state to intervene in the dispute. In this way another dimension of 1911 was raised that was to have particular relevance to the seamen. It was not a question of why unity was broken in later years and the seamen left

in isolation - possibly that unity was only an illusion anyway as the legacy of racism and religion continued to operate amongst workers in Liverpool - but under what conditions do seamen, a marginalised body through the conditions of their work, not only fight to have their conditions recognised but lend themselves to policies that are of wider significance to the labour movement. This has to be considered not only with reference to the increased homogenisation of the working class between 1885-1920 but with the fragmentation that took place at an industrial level after these years and indeed until the aftermath of the second war. The point is worth raising in relation to the choices leaders are able to make with regards to the membership in the stratification of the union, and their relationship to different aspects of the state machinery.²³

Perhaps it is too fanciful to suggest, as does one analyst, that the state leaves its imprint on labour organisations at decisive moments of their formation.²⁴ Because of the nature of the shipping world, Havelock Wilson had campaigned as Liberal MP for government help to facilitate relations between the Shipping Federation and the Union. Now the union was strong enough. Yet when the Government perceived the mass strike on the waterfront as revolution and sent in extra police, troops and warships he was careful to delineate exactly what the scope of the seamen's organisation might be. As his lieutenant observed of him in 1911, "he strove to obtain an agreement". After 1911 Wilson used his position to facilitate state action

to steer consensus within the industry irrespective if this rejected wider aims and refusals on the part of the waterside working class.

The perceptions of the state at a time of crisis have always played an important role in relation to the development of seamen. If in 1911 it thought Revolution was in the air then the war of 1914-1918 brought the necessity of consensus. Wilson was happy to oblige. The state was to be instrumental in all that he had campaigned for as early as 1894; "the time will come when the employers will realise that it is in their own best interests to work in harmony with our union".²⁵

When the battle of 1911 had been won, the union recognised and the membership risen beyond all proportion it was instructive to witness the union leadership increasingly castigating the likes of the "outsiders" Shinwell and Mann for their ideas on waterfront organisation and their all embracing political and industrial ideas. Increasingly in its place came the stratification of the seamen, the process of isolation away from other groups on the waterside and justified by their "conditions of work". This was the case in 1912 when Wilson pulled the seamen out of a general waterside strike in London organised by the National Transport Workers Federation. This effectively meant the end of the strike, because of the nature of the wharf trade in London, and antagonistic relations ensued between those who wanted a policy for all transport workers and a leadership intent on keeping the seamen within their own boundaries.

Now the seamen were by themselves, the ship-owners gave a further rise in wages in 1912 and tacitly agreed over the standardisation of wages at some later date. Wage standardisation had always been a principle of the union irrespective of the difference between different sections in relation to the organisation of the waterside.²⁶

Prior to standardisation of wages, payment on the waterfront could take many forms; for seamen this was often related to the different nature of cargoes. Between ports was another factor as the differences in the timber trade between Liverpool and London; colliers from South Wales and Tyneside carrying coal to Europe and Latin America. The Jute and Ore works of Teeside and Tayside even paid different rates between one small port and another, Middlesborough and the Hartlepoons, carrying a similar cargo to the same Basque ports.

Times of the year also influenced the freight rate and correspondingly, wages. Even such critics as the Labour Research Department noted the differences towards freight before and after the war and its effects on seamen's lives. "Generally speaking shipowners realised it was essential to successful business to adjust their rates according to the volume of traffic, reducing them when trade was slack." In this way rates differed as much as 21s 9d to 12 6d for a ton of coal from South Wales to the River Plate, or between 30s 6d and 10s 6d for the shipping of grain from the same area back to Liverpool.²⁷ Different ports operated a form of sliding scale of wages. Now

the principle of wage standardisation had been conceded by the shipowners in return for responsible and stratified trade unionism. It was part of a process that the war completed.

In this context the principle of standardisation had another advantage for the shipowners in that its main use could enable them to present a unified front, and to fix lock-out rates. Nevertheless the union thought the major gain was theirs; this principle followed 1911 as much as the concessions made by the Shipowners that year when it could be stated from a businesslike position, the prospect of strong, stratified and individual ports unions was not unacceptable to their point of view.²⁸ As the Shipowners' interests overlapped they could attempt a rationalisation of their workforces in relation to the nature of the casual trades dominating the ports. In this way they could vitiate the attendant impositions that a strong local workforce could enforce. It was part of the centralisation process with its consequent advantages and disadvantages for the unskilled labour movement. The matter was one of degree however; centralisation for seamen effectively meant the end of strong local action; for dockers it was quite the reverse. The matter reflects not merely the dispersal of seamen but the nature of casual employment and the degree of intervention in the environment of the industry that had been shaped and framed by the state.

Rationalisation, Casualism and Organisation must be carefully balanced however in the degrees of control

that could shape and frame the seaman's existence. On the contrary for dockers, the practice of casualism was much more specific. It meant attending "the call" on one of the hundreds of "stands" both morning and afternoon. A half day's work to three or four days' work often depended on not only for which company you worked, but with which gang and what their position was in relation to bargaining power at the quayside; this was aside from specific skills and could often lead to what Maxim Gorki termed "workers dynasties".²⁹ The 1911 strike had organised dockers in the North Docks at Liverpool for the first time on a mass scale yet the localism persisted within this umbrella of union organisation. The union had to come to terms with the phenomenon as the dockers were chary of attempts to decasualise if this meant taking away certain of their local bargaining powers. These features survived both world wars, when especially after 1940-45 the practice gave more security, and persisted well into the 1960s.³⁰

For the seaman, Casualism was a vastly different phenomenon. It meant that after every trip had terminated the man was "free" if he had "signed off" ships articles. This feature in itself demonstrates the nature of the industry; more disciplined than any factory proletariat whilst at sea yet "free" when his ship reached the home ports.³¹ It was in terms of constriction away from home that the seamen's lives must be judged subjected not only to the power of the shipowners and their lieutenants on board, the Masters and Chief Engineers, but to the rules of shipping laws formulated far from the waterside and

framed in relation to the older necessities of mercantile and Imperial interests.

This was reflected in a system of payment that did not allow seamen to send more than half their wages home; that "the ship" and the Master with his "lawful commands" had to keep half until the ship reached home. If the seaman deserted, then he lost this money which the Master was allowed to keep. Later "deserters" wages went to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, symbolising the role of state in the seaman's life,³² whilst the little pile of "sovereigns" created the conditions for "Jack roistering ashore" or if a paragon of virtue returning only with enough to pay off the accumulated debts and "interests" of moneylenders with which his wife had to keep the home while he was away.³³

No sooner home than he was away again, if lucky, this was the casualism to which the seaman was exposed. Eleanor Rathbone might have noted that amongst dockers, "Men on whom the practice of work have been designed to suit the employers will often practice it to suit themselves."³⁴ Amongst seamen it produced the "anarchic culture" of desertion; of revolts to obtain better conditions of which 1911 was the most notable. The seamen's actions however were always subject to the affairs of the state. The shipping laws utilised to frame and guide their existence played little part in a docker's life. As one commentator noted, "the law merely provided an environment in which despotism could flourish. Its prevalence in degree was determined largely by the pressure of

competition at all levels within the industry. Particularly was the pressure experienced by Masters and Chief Engineers as agents of the shipowners".³⁵

1911 proved to be a watershed in these relationships. After that year and particularly between the years up to 1920 the union and the shipowners aided by the state came together to modify this despotism.

If Professor Hobsbawn maintains that it was the Shipping Federation that imposed a national perspective upon the seamen's union, despite a tendency towards localism,³⁶ we can in turn add that the linking or absence of seamen's relationships with other sections of the labour movement has much to do with the position the state takes in influencing the union and shipowners. This was as much true of post 1911 as it was of 1920 when all sides of the industry came to form the National Maritime Board and when all dissent within the union had effectively been checked.

In effect it was the war that gave an added impetus to the framing of this arena. Wilson made known his plans for labour relations in the Shipping Industry and the Shipowners saw the advantages of "regulation" by the shipping Controller. It was here that the Union and the Federation performed their fundamental changes even though the path had been charted since 1911 and was not to be formally synchronised in peace until 1920.³⁷

If "The outbreak of the 1914-1918 providentially aborted a potentially explosive situation in Britain ... and a working class militancy threatened to escape the constraints of a faltering and reactionary trade union leadership, then the long term effect of the war was to

increase the weight and strength of the Working Class Organisations."³⁸ These were to be increasingly brought within a conception of a post Imperial State however where the new boundaries were to be drawn and seamen were to provide an "example" for the coming decade caught as they were between industrialism and that still dominant world of invisible earnings and City Finance, which so characterised British society.

Another reason why the Shipping Federation's concern was channelled elsewhere was that in time of war, the state of the Union posed the least of their problems, of much more importance was to secure the maximum amount of profit out of the wartime proceedings. With the publication of rates for requisitioned shipping, Company chairmen were practically sitting on the steps of the Ministry to petition for their ships to be chartered.³⁹ Rates were originally fixed in March 1915 and were subsequently increased in response to pressure the Shipowners and their organisation could maintain. What had been de facto a state-shipowner arrangement was not in fact regulated formally until a Ministry of Shipping in 1916 and not before 1917 that all shipping was subject to "Blue Book" rates in an attempt to regulate the enormous profits of the owners.⁴⁰

Little wonder then that when four ships crews refused to sign articles in Liverpool that same year the Shipping Federation actually welcomed the Government stepping in to bring both sides of the industry together. Here was the early unofficial formation of the National

Maritime Board which played such a feature of control between 1920-1970. If the sea going Paddy O'Mara⁴⁴ was to state that the docks were working day and night in Liverpool and that men slept on benches to work overtime around the clock then at the other end of the spectrum shipowners were delighted with the "progress" being made in labour relations within the industry. The Shipping Controller spoke for Ministry, Government and State in defence of the new rates which Shipowners had in turn amended, "The margin of profit which the new rates contain is not more than can be considered reasonable having regard to the conditions under which the mercantile marine is necessarily being employed at the present time."⁴²

If 1913 had been a year of unprecedented prosperity for British Shipping then the war years in terms of dividends and bloated share capital exceeded it considerably. Only temporarily in 1914 did the rise in share capital check in its growth from 11% to 17% a year. Alongside this went a "watering" of shares, whereby a company would issue bonus blocks in order to pay out more of a dividend. As share capital rose from sixteen million to thirty eight million during these years the Cunard Company increased its ordinary share capital by 20% in 1915/16 and by a 100% in 1919. Others showed a similar rise.⁴³ Houlder Line followed Cunard with a 100% rise in share capital in 1918 as did Cairn Line and a number of other companies including Furness Withy. Barry Line and T. & J. Harrison's followed close behind. Perhaps the most startling example of all however was the Leyland Dominion line which in 1917 issued

bonus shares of 700%. Besides this the President of the Board of Trade Sir Walter Runciman was doing very well out of the war with his shipping Fleet and the buying and selling of ships at inflated prices.⁴⁴ Perhaps it is not altogether surprising that the Shipping Companies had other matters on their minds than labour during these years. What had historically been a shipowner's traditional gripe regarding the attitudes of labour was now reduced to scarce a comment.

For its own part the Union saw the war as an opportunity to extract further agreements with the shipowner. Further statements by the shipping controller "that high profits were the necessity of providing for contingencies of the future" found Havelock Wilson not only in agreement but determined to extract further agreements from the shipowners' state of well-being. Apart from his continuing Jingoism and a belief in the supremacy of the British Empire he was determined to come to an agreement about the way in which Indian, Chinese, West Indian and African seamen were utilised by British Shipowners for lower pay.

Originally the union had been progressive about exploited foreign labour. Wilson had helped found the International Transport Workers Union in order to try and improve foreign seamen's wages so that shipowners would not be able to exploit the different rates. This was mainly the case with European and especially Scandinavian seamen. Over the years however they became more organised and even berated Wilson for his growing Parochialism and dissatisfaction for the body he had assisted in bringing into being.⁴⁵

Wilson's mind was on other categories however. As Britain's Imperial trade turned East and the "category" of "Lascar" seamen had risen from 17,000 to 38,000 employed on British ships between the years 1890-1910, numbers which the state had directly facilitated with the passing of the Indian Merchant Shipping Bill and under which Lascar seamen could officially be paid a fraction of the normal rate; then Wilson's changed perspectives where to obtain a purely "white and British" agreement with the shipowners.⁴⁶ Any hope of wider change or even to suggest that seamen occupied a wider position outside of solely British shipping was firmly denounced.

Just as the leadership of the union eschewed the policies of Tom Mann nationally so they did do internationally. Wilson even presented as a victory the clearing of Scandinavian seamen from old British sailing ships during the war. And whilst Lascar seamen continued to grow in numbers, a rise of 18% to 27% between 1910-1921, Wilson could still hail as a victory the joint talks with Shipowners relating to this "Problem".⁴⁷ Here was the delineating of a white seaman's union and the recognition of an institutionalised racism.

To be fair, perhaps the problem was too great and the power of the shipowners too widespread for anything substantial to be done about the practice of wage cutting by the use of foreign labour.⁴⁸ Yet something had been done about European and Scandinavian labour. Thousands of recruits from the other side of the world, a world starving and sunk in poverty especially around the main seagoing

areas of Bombay and Calcutta, were of another magnitude. Perhaps Wilson in being so wholeheartedly in support of the Empire could appeal to shipowners towards their responsibility towards white British seafarers much in the way Sir Oswald Mosely was to exhort British Industrialists some decade later with the words that, "any Chinaman can turn a screwdriver".⁴⁹

The legacy of Imperialism steeped the Seamen's leadership and held it tightly within the new corporatism. Even today the newspapers of the Centre Right give some indication of that dominance, "It is but one of thousands of testimonials to one of modern man's most remarkable political feats, whereby a nation of 50 million people came to rule over a quarter of the globe, India's 400 million included and then, within the space of a single generation prudently handed back its subjects their freedom with the minimum of fuss. Is there anything to be ashamed of in that?"⁵⁰

Within the union itself the questions of race had been raised even in the moment of victory in 1911. Pat Murphy, a militant at Cardiff during that year alleged that Captain Tupper agitated a mob to sack the Chinese laundries in the town even when the strike had been wholeheartedly supported by the Chinese and Arabs and that this afterwards left a degree of hostility and bitterness.⁵¹ In Shields and Liverpool where the Arab and Black communities had a history of more than 200 years within the city, riots occurred in the aftermath of war and the onset of depression. The Liverpool mob chased a black fireman to his death at the

waterfront. Even with the numbers of Lascar seamen rising, Havelock Wilson did little to alleviate this tension with his talk of a white seafarers' union and of separate agreements with the shipowners concerning the problem.⁵²

One commentator observed that during the war, "at close quarters the shipowners found that Wilson was on the same ideological wavelength. So far as the Germans were concerned Wilson was a more ardent Jingo than Chauvin himself. Then he subsequently denounced the Bolshevik revolution and supported the British Intervention in the civil war that followed."⁵³ This combined with his denunciations of Labour and Trade Union leaders who supported the Stockholm Peace Conference of 1917 and his ardent support in all Imperial matters concerning Empire all led Shipowners to conclude that he was safer with them by far.⁵⁴ This rapprochement, crystallised since 1911, was not achieved without a certain amount of opposition both within and outside the union yet the war itself and the scale of employment, when company superintendants had to turn to union officers for assistance in order to keep ships manned, put paid to any lasting dissent.⁵⁵ It was only after 1920 with the formation of the NMB as a security within a declining Imperial nation and the onset of depression that the true dimensions of the change were realised. As such the Union could play a much more direct role in control of the seaman's life than it could ever hope to with the dockers. Not only did the union have the highest ratio of officials to members in the Trade Union Movement - an average of 1:250

within 74 Branches and 8 Districts⁵⁶ - not only did they actively discourage active lay members from any radical intentions but they could actually dispatch on long trips or consign to the dole any incipient troublemakers, through their associations with the shipowners. Even in the absence of their active intervention there was always the possibility of any group of seamen, meeting together to exchange ideas and to become active in the life of the port, being shipped out for long periods of time.⁵⁷

Contrast this with Wilson's great fear that real trouble and dissent to Union policy could ensue within the coaster trades and amongst the crews of the large liners of the Atlantic; shipping that was at once regular, direct and on short sea routes of which there were many in Liverpool. It is not surprising that over the years the greatest amount of dissenters came from these channels. Contrast this to the five years that one rebel spent in completing two deep sea trips before he went on the colliers and rose to become leader of the unofficial Seamen's Reform Movement. And this was as late as the 1950s. In the earlier years long term shipping on Tramps was commonplace. Statements from the wives and girlfriends of long time Liverpool militants show how they helped in unofficial organisation simply because of the upset caused by two or three men being suddenly shipped out.⁵⁸ It makes the comments of Ben Bright on the 1920s all the more plausible; "The fact is, seamen are very difficult to organise. A man goes to a factory and he's working with the same people as yesterday and chances are they will still be there next week. But the

ship might be paid off here and the crew dispersed into a dozen different ports so it is a difficult job to organize them."⁵⁹

Their isolation need not have been so complete however had the union had a more malleable attitude to other groups of workers. The history of the past decade had run counter to that process, instead stratification had taken place within a context of general unionism to make the waterside once again a graveyard of isolation to the official union movement. Noelle Whiteside has commented that "the principles behind general organisation did not reflect affiliations and loyalties at grass roots level but were developed as one of the many tactical alternatives designed to wring concessions from employers."⁶⁰ Dockers had a certain strength in their localities and gang practices to mediate agreements between Dock Companies, Shipowners and Union. Seamen could not travel the same path.

Instead certain principles were fashioned for them in tablets of stone. It caused the communist Harry Gosling of the National Transport Workers Federation to comment that the union was now standing for the very things that it had originally sought to abolish.⁶¹ Above them strings were being drawn together to protect the substantial interests of the shipping and commerce industries oiled and embrocated by the state in a new era of a dying Imperialism where the interests of the City were still paramount. It is within this context that the large Shipowners in Liverpool convinced by the Holts, the agreements of Elder Dempsters and Cunard and joined by T. & J. Harrison's,

Pacific Steam Navigation Company and later the Berry and Dominion lines saw the advantages between 1911-1920 of a stable and stratified Trade Union for Seamen. Under their careful influence the symbiosis between Employer and Seamen's Union came into existence.⁶² Reflections of state inducement showed in the way that they as a substantial shipowning interest, The Liverpool Steamship Owners Association, came to join in the National Maritime Board in 1920. In this way, seamen were ensconced in a battery of controls that flowed between different state agencies, the employer and the union.

In this process of stratification the exigencies of state was not of a singular and unified body acting merely on behalf of a similarly unified Ruling Class but a state wanting a certain rationalisation to an industry. As Lloyd George with Pensions and Churchill with troops had shown, it was a series of negotiations required from 1911 to 1920 which were needed to take a maritime state through a world of lost markets and new conditions in the aftermath of war. The state as educator in which seamen found themselves in an enclosed and congealed world which reflected the agreement between shipowners and Union in "securing closer cooperation between all bodies in the maintenance of supremacy of the British Empire".⁶³ The peculiarities of a British state in which a historian has added that "the state level is so deeply entrenched in the social order itself, state and civil society so inter-twined in the peculiar exercise of the British Constitution that a merely 'political break' entails a considerable social revolution".⁶⁴ If 1911 had shown the potential

for industrial unity then 1920 was a recognition of a stratified isolation as the ruling classes of Britain attempted to negotiate the new conditions; importantly they had "men of calibre" beside them from the working class movement of the great unskilled who teemed and toiled in the Empire ports.

At this point of crystallisation, the voice of the constitution could sound like a bell, "Continuity has been the dominant characteristic in the development of English government. Its institutions, though unprotected by the fundamental or organic laws which safeguard the rigid constitutions of most other states, ... have been regulated in their working by principles which can be regarded as constant."⁶⁵ For the leadership of the union this was to be the White Seafarers' salvation. Lascar and Arab, Chinese and Blacks were viewed as part of the Empire's labour force but within a different category. They were to be the shipping Industry's seventh man.

Syndicalism and all its volatile fervour was but one industrial break that could not overpower the dominant bloc; that it was ultimately the Liberal Party that also went to the wall after 1918 lost, because its identity was finally so much weaker than the forces that had garnered the Imperial traditions. "It revealed the continued ascendancy of the city and its corporate interests" as they attempted to negotiate the new conditions.⁶⁶

Locked within the mechanisms of the shipping world the union had embraced the philosophy of Charles Booth's writing on the waterfront and of the masses that resided

there, "that only on their submission to discipline lies any hope of organized success" and combined it with that curious mixture of Liberal-Imperialist sentiment. It was far removed from the paths of development that Tom Mann had thought might arise from the great depths of solidarity in 1911.

On the other hand it will require a historian, numbers of them, to deal with this "other" Empire labour force that has sailed from British Ships in their thousands and all the while, paraded, exploited and chastised; either lauded by shipowners for their "malleability" or feared and loathed by white seafarers in the thought of lost jobs and undercut wages. As part of this process of turning into a Corporatist Imperialist force the National Sailors and Firemen's Union also began to strain away from and eventually break its relations with the International Transport Workers Federation. It was a measure of its success in national terms. Those that had been "loaned" to the union to organise with wider industrial and political objectives were now long gone. In many ways it reflected the cocoon that had been created for British seamen by the mixture of ideological and industrial negotiation taken place on their behalf in the transformation years of 1911-1920 which involved the three dominant agencies of the shipping world at a time when the City of London was ceasing to become the financial centre of a wider world,⁶⁷ when the City of London was to lose its overall dominance as the world's Banker but was arranging nevertheless to protect its still massive interests.

Seamen, their organisation and their very being, became metaphors in the smooth running of an economy and the linkage between Empire, Post Imperialism and the Corporate State.

Strengthened out of the mood of Syndicalism the National Union had departed in Corporatism; this was not the only mutation within the labour movement as employers became more "Liberal"; the classic case was post 1848, but because of the close involvement of shipowners with agencies of the state and the seamen's leaders eager to sustain that relationship, the incorporation of the seamen within the aegis of this triad made their case all the more acute.

Brought to the fore within the union's hierarchy were those who supported only Wilson and were dependent for their careers upon him - not until the late 1960s did the Executive Committee acquire the power to veto appointments made by the General Secretary. As one historian commented, "Wilson had quite rightly been accused of undemocratic behaviour before 1914 but the union was still able to command the loyalty of a majority of seamen and of Trade Union militants."⁶⁸ We have suggested that this allegiance was wearing thin some time before 1914. Nevertheless by 1920 the transformation had taken place. This was confirmed at the Genoa Conference of 1920 when the NSFU refused to consider a position of anything less than a seventy hour week for stewards and would not recognise the eight hour day for deckhands. In contrast to the rest of the European and Scandinavian movement they argued that to press for less

hours would result "in thousands of our members ... thrown out of work".⁶⁹ This was the traditional arguments raised by Shipowners that "Freight was the mother of wages", the transformation was complete.

This rationalisation only had to be taken a stage further for the moral argument to become complete; that any localised action was not only "backward" and disloyal but had a danger of being "contaminated" by other dissentient groups of workers. In a city like Liverpool where over 20% of the workforce had no fixed workplace⁷⁰ and in London where 12% operated under similar conditions in the port areas of Stepney, Poplar and Bow, the dangers of seamen being tainted with casualism were obvious.⁷¹ At an international level, groupings of local workers could lead only to Communism. The perceived job of the union was to save seamen from their moral squalor as much as it was to dissociate them from the bulk of the labour movement. To validate this conception they were not only to agree with Joseph Chamberlain's assertion that, "the working class needs the Empire" but to take wholesale that part mythological sequence that A.L. Lloyd has described "Many of the later chronicles of Jack ashore, at the mercy of the Liverpool landladies or the doxies of the Ratcliffe highway ... have helped perpetuate the stereotype of old time sailing ship men as a hairy chested brawler, only fit to haul on a tarry rope, living like a pig among straw in the foc's'le and roistering ashore like thunder having nothing but the clap."⁷² Aside from the moral arguments that the union wished to adorn itself with; to other agencies its successful

establishment was perceived as a vehicle for bringing "the volcanic masses" under control.

In this way a post Imperial ideology was formed just at the moment when the unskilled working class was becoming more homogeneous and for one brief moment threatened to open a caesura in this matrix of relationships above them; that it succeeded could be echoed in this quote concerning the condition of seamen: "Virtually all of the various select committees, Royal Commissions and Committees of Enquiry dealing with the mercantile marine in the latter part of the C19 found shipowners parading before them deploring the character and habits of seamen. By 1920 the thunder had diminished to a whimper."⁷³ It was not that other sections of workers did not succumb to this process but it was within the seamen's movement that it was at its most complete where the leaders consigned social relationships within a particular image.

The autobiographical accounts of the leading figures in the union give ample evidence to the way in which seamen were to be brought into "social decency"; the phrase belonged to "Captain" Tupper but the sentiments were shared in various publications by "President" Wilson, "Captain" Cathery and "Father" Hopkins.⁷⁴ Sentiments redolent of philanthropy and authoritarianism where only their version of a "true" trade unionism could at the one time save the seamen from moral torpor and defend the Empire from Communism.⁷⁵ A vision shaken by that particular conjuncture of events that thrust the seamen to the forefront of the syndicalist unrest in 1911 and confirmed

within the world of traditional dominance and lost markets after the boom of the first world war.

During the years of transformation the Whitley Councils of joint negotiation in industry had taken some of the steam from wartime radicalism; the seamen were to play a role even more important; lauded like that "other" Empire force they were to be objects of the relationship between union, shipowner and state. Such a position of stratification undoubtedly aided the financial position of the union whose accounts tripled in membership contributions from £111,000 in 1918 to over £320,000 by 1921.⁷⁶ For seamen however the new negotiating procedures told their own story. The relationship of Seamen's Union and Shipping Federation was to be placed in the vanguard of "consent" at any moments of crisis particularly during the coming decade when trouble occurred on the industrial front and where the state had certain interests to maintain. In reality this relationship was to last a good deal longer and was not finally challenged until the 1960s.

Contrary to what Sydney and Beatrice Webb postulated with the publication of their classic study of Trade Unionism, "that any history of Trade Unionism that breaks off at the beginning of 1920 halts, not at the end of an epoch but - we may almost say - at the opening of a new chapter",⁷⁷ it became clearer in retrospect that 1920 was indeed the end of an era. This was true of the whole labour movement and brings into focus the dimly perceived relationship that seamen share with other groups of workers not only on the waterside but with all forms of transport.

Yet if 1920 was the end of an era it was within the Seamen's Union that the transformation was most complete.

This coalescing of forces above the seamen formed the dominant tendencies of the shipping world. On the other hand it must not be assumed that control was accepted unilaterally or passively. Seamen were never mere ghosts in the machine, phantoms at the opera. How they fought in often heroic lonely and individual battles, by utilising methods of that culture that had served in earlier times, by deserting ships, by "running on the beach",⁷⁸ by becoming that image that others had of them, as malingerers and casuals, by refusing "social decency" if it came only from above, forms an equally important history in these relationships of control. Again this is only half the equation for another dimension concerns those others that acted collectively both within and outside the union to make it change and who suffered the consequent discrimination and the force of its power in these desperate years.

If the historian of the Shipping Federation could conclude on the fact that after more than twenty years of aggression between Union and Federation, that "in retrospect there should seem to the uninformed no reason why what was accomplished in 1920 should not have been brought about in 1890" what the important missing ingredient amounted to was the smoothing of the path by the state and the willingness of the union leadership to conform with a certain image and stratification. This became more and more acceptable to the large shipowners.⁷⁹

A letter sent to the Chairman of Cunard, Sir

Thomas Royden by the President of the Union, Havelock Wilson sums up the magnitude of that change. That it was sent in the early months of 1926 further compounds the irony. He wrote that, "Twelve years ago the workmen of this country were shepherded along the wrong road. Tom Mann was more responsible for this than anyone else. I know Mann exceedingly well because I have been associated with him for over thirty six years. He is an excellent 'mob orator' but when you get down to bedrock you find that he is empty and useless in constructive work."⁸⁰ Nowhere could there have been a more decisive rejection of all that 1911 stood for in the organisation of all the transport unskilled and the possibilities of "the one big union".

Before 1911 Union organisation and success were fairly easily related to trade fluctuations; after 1920 this was no longer the case. Power had effectively been negotiated between the dominant bodies of the shipping world which now included the union, "and victimisation was the order of the day for those who had the temerity to protest too loudly".⁸¹

Power had effectively been negotiated between the dominant bodies of the shipping world, by no means equally but which now nevertheless included the Union; the effectiveness of the seamen's organisation itself was in effect the classic incorporation of that organisation within the wider nexus of the shipping world and all its attendant relationships, which in a Maritime State like Britain came to mean so much. That 1920 was a crucial time in the history of that State and of its intertwining

with the dominant bodies of civil society complicated further the tight boundaries in which seamen came to find themselves enclosed. The history of their acquiescence and resistance over the following half century until 1970 bore the feature of being indented by all these relationships.

Footnotes to Chapter One

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CHAPTER TWOA HARMONY OF DOMINANCE 1920 - 1943

In 1920, Antonio Gramsci wrote on the mass labour revolts in Italy that, "The Union bureaucrat conceives industrial legality as a permanent state of affairs. He too often defends it from the same viewpoint of the proprietor. He does not perceive the workers act of rebellion, he perceives only the physical act which may in itself and for itself be trivial."¹ As his own thought came to develop however in the wake of defeats for the workers movement across Europe, he himself perceived that domination and consent took place at not merely a coercive level but included within the general embrace of culture and economics the redolence of power within every facet of state and Civil Society. For the seamen in the post 1920 period until the second world war and beyond, the goal of an organised yet disciplined workforce assumed the proportions of a moral crusade; this came at a time when large sections of the labour movement were questioning values that had been established through King and Country and War and when the City of London was still the world's banker.

Above the seamen, the different institutions that had a "say" in their salvation appeared to harmonise. This corresponded at a number of levels; seamen had been stratified and isolated industrially whilst also being made the representatives of the new industrial relations in Britain in the post 1920 period; in short the projection of a dominant

vision that regarded shipping as the metaphor for the Empire after the golden days of Imperialism had passed. For the shaken, but still dominant forces of British Society, where by far the most wealthy and large middle class was based on Commerce and the City of London rather than in Industry they too had made alliances. Rubinstein noted that, "Together with the landed elite these contested for the benefits of wealth, status and Power and evolved separate means of social control. These separate elites, themselves merged, by a gradual process, into a single elite, finally formed in the period 1918 - 1925."² This was accentuated by the mediations of the State in the post-war shipping and shipowners' world.

Below, yet within this hierarchical order, a philosophy was carried further by the leadership of the Seamen's Union, convinced of their role within British Society and the Empire; a claim of "improvability" for the waterside working and unskilled classes, irrespective of the social forces that had increasingly homogenised the working class by 1920.³ Havelock Wilson, a Liberal MP for many years, combined this vision with the concomitant notion of labour discipline within the totality of the structure; in a curious way this echoed the National Leadership politics of Lloyd George in the coalition governments between 1918-22. The National Industrial conferences were the creation of a masterly stroke which sought Trade Unions to talk rather than act but more importantly to restore to prominence the moderate leaders in dialogue with the dominant forces in British Society; a result that strengthened the National framework

and the post Imperial State. This returns us to the territory of choice within the dominant culture. Havelock Wilson may have been power mad, paranoid and demented - a condition no doubt enforced by the Shipping Federation in the years of Antagonism - yet he was convinced that once his Union had been nationally accepted the only way forward lay within the general embrace of the shipowners. It formed part of the wider construction of British Society after 1920; for seamen - and for what this chapter attempts to illustrate - it became part of a wider harmony of dominance.

He wrote just before his death and at a time when the seamans isolationism was being challenged that "Our experience is that we have always tried to teach the seamen to stand on their own legs. We have had experience of the crimp, the shark ... we prefer to continue our present path even if it is a lonely one."⁴ These quotes convey between them the industrial reality and the moralising improbability that State, Shipowner and Union took towards the seafarers existence. What this chapter will attempt to establish is the coalescence of these forces dedicated to industrial and moral harmony in which any trace of dissent was sanctioned out of the relationships and the complete supremacy of the union over all those who sailed below deck. This was confirmed in the early years of the war; whilst exceeding its own high levels of isolation from the labour movement the NSFU became the National Union of Seamen in the same year of the General Strike.

As if in confirmation of the thesis stated in the

first chapter that the seamen became nationally recognised as part of a mass waterside movement and then retreated into isolationism and Jingoism on the part of their leaderships policies; in the General Strike they were the sole abstainers in what the leadership termed "an internationalist and Communist conspiracy". It was the leadership's method of securing their organisation for all those below deck as well as maintaining the good faith of the shipowners as the economy turned from the short post 1918 boom into depression and Britain lost over 10% of her shipping trade.⁵

In 1920 the NSFU did not have the sole right to represent all classes of seamen. The cooks and stewards union formed between 1905/1909 were becoming a powerful body. One of the features of 1911 was the unheard of militancy expressed by this group; they formed the bulk of seamen on the liner trade, one of the main reasons why the mass strike had been centred in Liverpool. As the NSFU became more autocratic and especially after the conference in Genoa when they had refused a motion for shorter hours for all seamen under the pretext that it would lead to more unemployment, the Cooks and Stewards Union had kept their distance.

Cooks and Stewards were originally represented at the National Maritime Board. However when in the spring of 1921 a series of wage cuts were "negotiated" between the NSFU and the shipowners, the Cooks and Stewards would have no part of them and came out on strike. Havelock Wilson thought their tactics useless in the depression and "in the organisation of strike breaking the shipowners were not alone, they enjoyed the active support of the Sailors and Firemans

Union which laboured mightily to keep the ships manned."⁶
At this time 17.4% of insured seamen were unemployed and Wilson thought that all the gains of the last decade could be let slip because of one senseless move; the power of the shipping Federation was never as great as in a depression; the 1890s had taught him that.⁷

As time went on however defeat for the Cooks and Stewards became inevitable. They broke away from the National Maritime Board, their main Liverpool base was smashed and they vowed before extinction, never to work with the dominant Sailors and Firemans Union.⁸

The legacy of the Cooks and Stewards defeat was to leave a great many disaffected seamen in the catering departments. The NSFU tried to recruit them without any degree of success never managing more than between 15/20% of those previously organised and this despite organising special conferences and Wilson himself concluding meetings by stating "I have been 40 years on the job and my colleagues have been at it thirty years, twenty years and so on. We are not novices we are journeymen. We are the real McCoys if I may say so. If it is amalgamation the Cooks and Stewards are wanting, I submit we are the people to deal with."⁹

A small section of cooks entered the NSFU and it was this body that took up the catering seat at the National Maritime Board. It was not until the second war that the state facilitated an all union shop for cooks and stewards under the jurisdiction of the N.U.S.

In openly breaking the strike of another maritime

Union however the NUSF continued its suppression internally towards any form of opposition. This was the logic of isolation.

Vigilance Groups sprang up in the major ports during the War. Designed originally to safeguard "war bonuses" and other marginal gains that hostilities brought, they rapidly focused attention on the leaderships monolithic path in contrast to the often disparate aims of the membership. As such they became focal points for every form of radicalism, including extreme racism, in their opposition to the leadership of the Union.¹⁰ Their very name signified the deep levels of distrust that had widened between the years 1911 - 1920. Those that stayed within them became the forebears of the Communist Party's Maritime Minority Movement.¹¹

In 1921 they posed such a threat in Liverpool that Wilson organised a campaign against them led by Charles McVey, himself to be sacked for going against union policy in 1926. In 1921 they were demanding that ballot forms reach all seamen before any action could be taken towards the wage cut; which stewards had refused. In reality no ballot forms were ever given out.

Fortunately for Wilson and the union leadership the Vigilance committees were often composed of radically different tendencies and he could appeal above their heads to what the union was trying to achieve. The CID report of an unemployed meeting of seamen in Liverpool in 1921 gives some illustration to this point: "A Mr Morgan made reference to the employment of cheap alien labour by the

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capitalist classes and that the principal cause of unemployment of workers British workers in this country was because of such labour being employed. He called for one white Seafarers Union." Johnny Flood a communist was called upon to speak and commenced, 'fellow workers I want to tell you that I am still out for the same principle no matter what race colour or creed. My slogan is still "the world for the workers". The last speaker was T. McQuiggan who continued that "this rotten Government will have to pass an aliens act to send all these Niggers Chinese and Arabs back to their own countries. If these aliens who are manning British ships today were all sent back, well you yourselves could not man the British ships and the owners would be running around after you."¹² On the issue of foreign labour Wilson's jingoism had been somewhat assuaged by promises from the Shipping Federation that this labour would no longer be so preponderant on British ships after the war. Wilson had declared this a victory but it was a pyrrhic one for British Seamen and its logic still led to wage cuts.

Indian Chinese and African labour had all risen since the war. It was in the employment of "lascar" seamen however that the rise was greatest with numbers rising from 17% to 28%.¹³

The Vigilance Committees still posed enough threat for a campaign to be waged upon them however, especially as some were advocating the birth of one great transport Union which the union had so carefully drawn the seamen away from. The member elected to the EC from Liverpool

and the eight delegates to the AGM were all expelled in 1921 supposedly for being out of benefit with the union. Unemployed seamen who had sent their cards to London to receive the unemployment stamp had their cards returned empty.¹⁴ Dissenters could therefore be termed out of benefit and not bona fide seamen. Throughout the worst of the depression there was always a healthy regard for the upkeep of finance. Later it was to be translated into votes. As Wilson wrote to the chairman of Cunard on his activities of that year. "The number of Trade Union leaders dismissed from their posts during the last ten years on account of their moderate views is surprising and doubtless many people have wondered how I have managed to retain my position. The secret lies in our Constitution. Six years ago in Liverpool and other ports I discovered an organisation called the vigilance committee. We parried that move in a very drastic manner ... we changed the qualification for voting. During the first five years membership a man has one vote, at the end of twenty five years he has five votes because he has a larger interest in the funds."¹⁵ Concern with funds and moral welfare were all part of the leadership's concern for keeping seamen isolated.

Throughout its history the Union had been concerned with the amount of income that was collected from the membership. Again the experience of the late 19th century played an influence when branches had autonomy and merely spent the residue of their revenue on outings and banners. Now the centralisation process was complete any attempts by other bodies to encourage the seamen to join them were

always treated with contempt as "wanting to lay hands on the seaman's money".¹⁶ This always had a particular resonance given the history of sharks, crimps and profiteers in the industry; yet to amalgamate on an industrial basis was given the same degree of contempt. At the conclusion to his speech to the cooks and stewards Wilson was to state that if they joined his NSFU they would be joining an organisation with revenue of £320,000. That was why "The Union is a grand stayer lads."¹⁷

By the same token however, striking for useless causes led to loss and waste. Like the Moral Salvationism the rational was supplied from elsewhere. Thus just as the NSFU had argued in 1920 that a regulation of hours would lead to loss of jobs and that if Cooks and Stewards did not accept wage cuts they would suffer far worse in 1921; the seamans isolationism from the labour movement showed itself in the collapse of the triple alliance later in that year. Wilson refused to allow sailors to black the coal ships bringing imported coal from the Continent. Of this action he stated that "International Transport workers bring the continental coal to the ships. International Transport Workers Federation members load the ships and yet they ask us not to sail the ships."¹⁸ Not to do so he reasoned would lead to more of his members being out of work. Besides which it would jeopardise relations with the ship-owners and in that the labour movement could be damned if it did not recognise the climate of the times.

What was of importance here was that Wilson chose

to return nearly a decade in time and blame Bevin and Williams for the break up of the National Transport Workers Federation because they had not consulted the seamen properly before calling a strike in 1912. Now he was blaming in the same breath the International Transport Workers. The rationale for the seamen's action, that lonely crusade for industrial peace through authoritarianism was translated by outside speakers as they talked to conferences organised by the Union. In the aftermath of 1921 and "Black Friday" a Lancashire miner was brought to speak to the remnants of the cooks and stewards union. He stated that when "the Sankey Commission had agreed to the seven hour day for miners over 60 millions tons of export coal were lost. Unemployment went up as a result. Then came the disastrous 1921 strike."¹⁹ The moral that was constantly being pointed out was that in these times both sides of the industry had to work together. Alternatively any other action merely weakened the empire, the white working class and served as a Communist conspiracy. Here lay the heart of moral Salvationism. Had not Booth himself said of the waterside districts and their inhabitants "Communism is a necessity of their lives because economically they are worthless and morally worse than worthless for they drag others who live among them down to their own level."²⁰ In the space of a decade the Seamen's leadership had broken its national/international links. This was not just a question of shipping turning National within the embryo of the Empire and reflecting a trend of Internationalism into Nationalism concurrent among most European nations; but of a leadership consciously breaking their national and international

links as a commitment to the strains of the above process.

While Wilson was pursuing his isolationist path with shipowners and the number of unemployed seamen reached nearly 20%; while the nascent communist party and its section of the Red International of Labour Unions was trying to come to terms with the Syndicalists and while control was temporarily lost sight of at the workplace for the wider vision of transforming society; those sections of seamen done down by Union, disaffected elements of Deckhands in Glasgow and Southampton, Cooks and Stewards in Liverpool, members of the National Transport Workers Federation in London came together in 1922 to form the Amalgamated Marine Workers Union. It was to be "the one big union" the syndicalists last shot to grow again and ultimately to take in all sections of waterside workers. In short it would resurrect again all the dreams of 1911 and be against the collaborationist, isolated and authoritarian path taken by the union since that time.²¹

Its birth coincided with the death of the National Transport Workers Federation, and the growth of the Transport and General Workers but more importantly the formation, between Shipping Federation and Seamen's Union, of an agreement about the joint control over the supply of labour (1922). What was in effect a closed shop between these bodies led to the issuing of the PC5 card and a further counteraction towards seamen joining with other groups of workers on the waterside. Syndicalists within the T&G had hoped the AMWU would recruit sufficient seamen to become recognised and then would join with the wider union.²²

Communists, originally in the Vigilance committees rejected proposals to form the new union; racists like T. McQuiggan had gone away to form another section of catering staff in Liverpool that never had much "more than a shadowy existence" and Bevin at the docks was in the process of consolidating the Transport and General Workers Union.²³

Most of the leading non communists thus opted out of the NSFU's structures or tried to whilst the communists stayed inside. There followed over the next five years two different sectors of militancy that was not to be overcome for the next thirty years. It suggests that the traditions from Syndicalism to Communism was not as successfully overcome on the waterside as some historians have imagined.²⁴ Furthermore it was from this time that the leadership of the NSFU came to use and interlink the labels of Breakaway; Casual and Communist in common denigration towards any opposition.

Of more importance was the relationship with the shipowners. After the formation of the new union and its declared aims, shipowners and Havelock Wilson came together to formulate the joint control of the supply of labour and thus effectively set up the first closed shop in the history of British Trade Unionism. With the issue of the Ports Consultation Card PC5 as a necessary document from the two bodies any new organisation was bound to have minimal influence. As Ben Bright wrote in "Shellback" "The old British Seaman's Union was really a little outfit and was largely the work of Emmanuel Shinwell. Later Ernest Bevin started a seaman's branch of the Transport and General

Workers. In between they set up an organisation, the Amalgamated Marine Workers Union, but it really didn't take on. It was the PC5 that put an end to all the splinter organisations and gave the National Seamen's Union complete control. The PC5 - the Port Consultation Card No 5 - meant you couldn't get a ship unless you were a dues paying member of the NSFU. That's where they got their power."²⁵

On the other hand for those militants who were close to the communist party their path was severely curtailed within the union. This had stemmed from 1920 when Wilson had changed the constitution and was preparing for the sole control of the union. The formation of the AMWU brought union and shipowners closer together to combine against this threat by jointly controlling the supply of labour. From within the union, members of the Vigilance Committees "had sent their books to the executive requesting that unemployment stamps be put on them". They were returned unmarked and the executive stated of the Liverpool men "These were not Bona Fide seamen." 'Not Bona Fide seamen' was to be a characteristic of seamen holding dissident views and "those seeking control of this union could be sure of no countenance by the President and his executive."²⁶

Any form of challenge was quickly stamped upon due to the contingent relationship the Union needed to maintain with shipowners and State; dissident action "would merely jeopardise relations with the shipowners who would use the depression as a means of contracting out of any agreement the NUS had negotiated." Virtue was made of

this necessity and it was here that the Seamen's isolation stood aloft. The NSFU's annual report in 1922 claims that in relation to any dissidency "the Employers support for the National Union in a situation of rising unemployment assured that H. Wilson won the battle".²⁷

It was a measure of Wilson's control of the Union that he managed to relate both strands of opposition into plots against the national Union and its liaison with the Shipowner on the one hand and see this as an international communist conspiracy on the other. It was clear to him that his Union together with the Shipowners were in the vanguard of the defence of the Empire. Any attempt to break away or to change from within was a threat to both. Hence the fury with which the Union fought against the Syndicalist Jim Larkin when he formed the all embracing Irish Transport and General Workers Union and compelled the shipping industry to recognise the place of Irish seamen within it;²⁸ Dublin dockers striking in support in a manner of action taken a decade earlier. This was the dual threat to Union and to Empire given the condition of Ireland in 1920 and the matter was not settled until another decade had passed.²⁹

In Britain Wilson faced minor problems concerning his relationship with the shipowners. At a meeting with the North East Coast Secretaries in 1922 the General President asked an official from Blyth "Do you see anything in the circular which will prove to be an obstacle in developing the interests of the union and getting more men to pay and join up?" This circular concerned the nature of

the joint Union/Shipowner labour supply. The official replied that "a lot of fellows hate the sight of the shipping Federation and they say they would not be found lying dead in the company ... It is the oldest class of men who stir up the trouble. They suggest that having fought the Federation they are now being driven back to them."³⁰

For Havelock Wilson this sentiment showed all of the old animosity that he had tried to lay to rest in the decade before 1920. That year with the formulation of the new National Maritime Board was to provide a new modern relationship with the other side. He took the official to one side and said "Now Mr Johnston do you not find that most of these old grouzers have either not got union books or that they are a long way back in arrears."³¹ Mr Johnston agreed. Again any dissent could not be seen coming from "Genuine Seamen". This was a phenomenon that persisted for the next four decades.³²

With the closed shop for seamen where Union and Federation could enforce it, Liverpool with its large Liner Companies and separate Liverpool Steam Owners Association, became something of an anachronism. It joined with some of the smaller ports - where owner/union power was less prevalent and links with other workers stronger - in being a port where it was not automatically necessary to have a PC5 in order to obtain a berth.³³ As such it remained a "problem" up to the second war when the state controlled pooling system made everything operative and all ownership became part of the General Council of British Shipping.

In many respects the right wing nature of the Seamen's Union was merely a reflection of the dominant interests that controlled the industry in the way that casualism on the docks reflected the dominant mode of labour supply imposed again by the employers. Whereas the latter had certain fundamental weaknesses there was always the dockers' strength in casualism represented in the gang system and the locality of the waterside. For seamen isolation reinforced their weakness. The union leadership acted out of choice. Given the nature of their scattered workforce this was reinforced in 1922 with the joint control of the supply of labour. It was a feature of this period that unskilled mobile groups of workers had tended to amalgamate in the great unions of the unskilled. This was the end feature of the "New Unionism".³⁴ For the seamen however their isolation was complete.

George Garrett caricatured the figure that ship-owners induced, that the state legislated for and the Union tried to control; Joseph Conrad's Donkin, a sea lawyer, a casual dissenter who, "Looked as if he had been cuffed, kicked, rolled in the mud; he looked as if he had been scratched, spat upon, pelted with unmentionable filth and he smiled with a sense of security at the faces around him ... he had knocked about for a fortnight ashore in the native quarter (Bombay); cadging for drinks, starving, sleeping on rubbish heaps. This clean white fore-castle was his refuge, where he could be lazy and curse the food he ate. The sympathetic and deserving creature that knows all about his rights but knows nothing of courage, endurance,

of the unexpressed faith and unspoken loyalty that knits together a ship's company."³⁵ Garrett who said of Donkin that as time passed the same image of authority and discipline was passed in shipboard relationships from shipowners to the Union. No dissent other than formulated by the Union could therefore be genuine. This was a legacy that future generations of seamen had to come to terms with. Alternately, a central element in the union's concern for the moral salvation of seamen was its non-correspondence with the angry individual whose behaviour was manifest with, "the angry despair of those who have nothing".

Bevin's appeals to ordinary seamen to take part in a great riverside and marine transport organisation had been fended off by the leadership "the men responsible for the control of the affairs of the British Seamen's Union could not see this proposal in the same light as Bevin".³⁶ As seamen were successfully outside all port structures the "moral crusade" could continue. The industrial front was secure with shipowners: acceptance of the scale of wage cuts had been negotiated in 1922 and 1923; even the employment of greater numbers of "lascar" seamen whose numbers had risen from a quarter to a third of the total number of seamen went without question by the union leadership as long as the control of the joint supply and control of labour was maintained with British seafarers often responsible for having to pay their union dues at the office of the shipping Federation.

The almost feudal social relationships continued. The malcontents with this situation were "revolutionaries

and communists intent on disrupting the business of the British Empire"³⁷ and its foremost agency, the shipping Industry. Even the AMWU formed in 1922 as an alternative to the autocratic and domineering Union could only seem to organise amongst the cooks and stewards or in the small railway and coal ports where links were stronger with the local labour movement. Yet so concerned was Wilson with these coastal seafarers of whom only 40% were in the union throughout the 1920s and with Liner crews, that he spoke to an NMB meeting some years later and stated that all these factors were "a danger to the union and to shipowners".³⁸ This was the internal and the external threat. As if to corroborate this thesis the shipowners' journal, Fairplay argued the need for permanent committees from all sides of the shipping Industry, Owner, State and Union "so as to render us all as far as possible self supporting within the Empire and best able to meet that competition with which exchange aided activities of other nations is threatening us."³⁹

It was this internal and external couplet of destruction that explains the attitude of the leadership of the seamen's union in the years of 1925 and 1926 and in the same way as they had extricated their members from the labour movement now they were seen themselves as pursuing a policy of isolation adrift from general Trade Unionism and more in line with all sides of the industry working together for a common goal. To a certain extent the years of 1920 and 1921 were to provide adequate testimony to the events of 1925/1926 and the attitudes of the seamen's

leadership especially in 1921 when the whole notion of solidarity was questioned; shorter hours at that time meant more unemployment according to the leadership and the shipowners did not beg to differ.

1925 brought rebellion both within and outside the union. This brought leadership and shipowner even closer together and what is more fused them as the leading examples of the times. Pay cuts had not been resisted in 1922 and 1923, indeed only nine officials out of the Union's 170 had dared question them.⁴⁰ By 1925 another demand for cuts had arisen. Havelock Wilson spelled out his strategy to the rest of the negotiating officials; to walk straight into the National Maritime Board and offer the Shipowners an immediate £1 in the monthly rate of pay as a reduction. This would take "the wind out of their sails". It certainly did.⁴¹ Fairplay commented in early July, "When you get down to brass tacks such as longer hours or lower pay you are usually met with an uncompromising negative on the part of the men. Happily this is not the case all around for at a meeting of the National Maritime Board it is noted after a short and amicable meeting it was unanimously agreed to take off the advance of wages which was given by the shipowners last year. In the National Maritime Board they have a piece of machinery that does not function in one direction only. And it is to the credit of Havelock Wilson and other Seamen's representatives."⁴²

Below this superstructure of agreement however there was no such accord. Seamen took action both within and outside the NSFU in 1925. From within, the Minority

Movement asked seamen to strike wherever they could. Outside the union the AMWU, having its own internal problems, used the cutting of wages as an issue around which it could unite again. - So tight was it being squeezed by the NSFU that at its annual conference in 1925 its President was accused of being "Wilson's Traitor" and Ben Mollan, another official, stated that the union was doing little good "Liverpool would have nothing to do with the Union, AMWU and he was convinced you could never organise there in a month of Sundays. If you examine your consciences you know we can never succeed as a union." - Despite this the union did manage a campaign in 1925.⁴³ However so much were the NSFU in control of seamen's affairs that only in Liverpool and Glasgow was there any strike action taken. Strikers did not come out in other ports simply because they knew the Union would work to break the strike.

A novel feature was raised in 1925 concerning the way seamen would sign on ships in the home ports and collectively desert in foreign ports in support of strike action. "Backing Out" had a long tradition amongst seafarers but it was for the most part confined to individual expression. In 1925 mass walk offs were taking place for specific aims, the restoration of wages. This occurred most notably in the "white Dominions" where the strikes were given much support by local waterside unions and in some cases even local governments.⁴⁴ What 1925 expressed most clearly and the expressions of solidarity by other unions echoed was the fact of how little chance there was of

seamen demonstrating their dissatisfaction in the home ports.⁴⁵ Here was the politicised act of jumping ship to bring attention to the case. This act was seized on by the AMWU who canvassed national support amongst seamen. For a time both the syndicalist AMWU and the communists and sympathisers within the NSFU managed to work together.⁴⁶ Difficulties arose however in the manner in which the battle was being fought. The AMWU was accused of being too extreme and the central committee of the rebellious NSFU members accused it of merely trying to "poach" seamen for the alternative union.⁴⁷ Here lay the two strands of the dissenting tradition to the NSFU, a dual tradition that was to continue isolated and fragmented up to 1960. In 1925 however the strike continued at home and abroad for three bitter months. Havelock Wilson again was in the USA hoping to persuade seamen not to take action whilst in the home ports Captain Tupper was breaking each/any attempt to continue the action. One historian commented that it was "Not surprising that the rank and file encouraged by the AMWU and the communists rebelled. That revolt was not more frequent or widespread when it did take place is attributable to the necessity of being in favour of the union to get a berth."⁴⁸

In the aftermath of the strike the NSFU again altered its constitution. Militant seamen were censured and expelled from the union, others' cards were withheld. Propaganda against industrial militancy could conveniently be labelled 'communist' in 1925 and be fairly sure to have a receptive audience as the Labour party Conference held in

Liverpool had demonstrated.⁴⁹ The union conveniently labelled dissidents within the union together with those outside, and thus the spectre of "breakaway" became such a potent weapon in the make up of the leadership. When the AMWU tried indeed to run the strike this provided Wilson with much useful propaganda which he used to good effect both inside and outside the union.⁵⁰

At the Annual General Meeting of 1925 - composed of more officials than lay seagoers - the provision for weekly branch meetings was abolished to one in which "30 Bona Fide members could call for a meeting every month, should they so wish".⁵¹ Of course if they did not wish, there would then be no obligations on the part of officials for providing such facilities. As the war within the union was completed, attention was turned toward the destruction of any other organisation. The infiltration of the AMWU by Wilson's agents continued and officials of that Organisation were offered money to come over to the NSFU. All the explosions of discontent that erupted at the AMWU's June conference came to the surface again and, carefully fostered, were to lead to its eventual disintegration.⁵²

The "rationale" meanwhile that "in the 1920s meant the top priority of the union's President was harmony with the shipowners"⁵³ bubbled over again into disagreement with the wider labour movement. As in 1920 and in 1921 it concerned payment and hours of work and whether all this would not lead to foreigners having better chances to do the Empire down. The perfidy with which the Shipping Industry greeted the news that the government had agreed to

subsidies for the mining industry in response to the threat of a mass strike should hours be lengthened or wages cut, was tempered by the fact that it was all the work of communists at the "Red Friday" July Conference of the TUC. Why not take as an example their own industry; as the strike in 1925 was collapsing Havelock Wilson's book My Stormy Voyage through Life was published.⁵⁴ The reviewer in one shipping journal saw the wider message for the world of Industry; "so long as there are men with statesmanlike instincts to control the forces of labour, so long as their sole purpose is to win for those they represent rights within the constitution, Trade Unionism will be a stabilising force ... If however the revolutionaries get control nothing but ruin can result. It is that which is menacing us today. And those who read Mr Wilson's book with thoughtful understanding will find in it more than one hint of how to meet the threat."⁵⁵

Shipowners and the shipping Industry were well aware of Wilson's prognosis between the internal threats to the Union and the external threats to the Empire in which Shipping would suffer most, damaging all their lives. The Government's retreat in 1925, at the same time as the Union stood up to be counted, seemed to confirm this. Sir Robert Horne wrote in Fairplay that, "It may only be a coincidence but it is a fact that the symptoms of social unrest have become much more noticeable since the government took such unhappy action in the coal dispute and made the labour extremists a free gift. On the other hand even though the action of some seamen and firemen was maybe

the rather direct consequence of government weakness it is bred of something far deeper. It is not so much a question of agreement between employer and employed as one of discipline and decency within Trade Union ranks and in that regard the recent strike may prove to be a blessing in disguise, for if Mr Havelock Wilson whose attitude has been impeccable throughout can keep his hold on the bulk of his men and if other labour leaders can do so too the forces of Constitutionalism and Empire will be immensely strengthened."⁵⁶

The seamen, as in 1921, were regarded as the standard bearers in the strengthening of the Owner/Union/State and Empire symbiosis and as providing the "sound rationale" upon which industry should function. The state was invoked to protect all. As in some Hegelian manner of the dominance of spirit holding together the ties of Empire and all forces being dependent upon that relationship. Strange words and ever the last resort of shipowners who in "normal times" continually inveighed against the State. Again the pattern was to continue through to the 1960s. Sir Robert wrote again in late September 1925: "The seamen's strikes are the first fruit of the Government's poltroonery. They paid blackmail and gave the communists both here and abroad their best opportunity ... but what is to happen in May - 1926 when the subsidies were to run out - we have been threatened and I consider that it is the duty of all patriotic citizens to take up the track of preserving the life of the State. I hope the Government will give a lead."⁵⁷ As indeed the Seamen's Union had given a lead in

their fights with the malcontents/communists.

The seamen's isolation from the general Labour Movement was recognised and lauded by shipowners. The battle was not merely between employers and employees, "to-day it is in reality a fight between the communists and all transport workers on the one side and the Seamans Union and the shipowners on the other."⁵⁸ Here was adequate testimony that it was in the best interests of the industry that H. Wilson had led the seamen into isolation. Syndicalists could call for the formation of the one big union but it was only to be a cry in the dark. With Wilson the founder and General President the NSFU had effectively smashed any form of opposition to its being the undisputed authority with employers and State. It had effectively quelled any form of organised dissidence and of still more importance successfully extricated seamen from other groups of workers in the ports. Not only was it becoming the only rational structure for labour as the Shipping Companies themselves rationalised but its ideology persisted in that of a "moral crusade" based on sound finance and defence of the Empire. No Salvation Army Master could have encapsulated such a dream with better purpose, and held it apparently without contradiction between "the interests of labour" and the wider forces that viewed seamen and the Seamen's Union as the lubricants of commercial interests in a post-imperial society, where the use of Empire was designed to hold every institution in place.⁵⁹

In the climate of the 1920s this was ultimately more the case than the separation into different parts

offered by Professor Hobsbawn that "sea and land transport met at the port but the bulk of their problems in labour relations lay for the most part elsewhere and their conditions of functioning were different. This is why such obvious strategic alliances as those between Seamen and Dockers never lasted long and the occasional dream of national and even international transport solidarity were never of more than momentary importance."⁶⁰ After the experiences of 1920, 1921 and 1925 it seems pedantic to outline the whole episode of the Seamen's Union during the general strike of 1926: the same philosophy prevailed, there was the printing and the publishing of *The Red Hand*; the *Communist Offensive Against the British Empire* and that to support such action as mass strikes would be "to fling the seamen back into disorganisation and helplessness from which they were raised by Havelock Wilson".⁶¹

This Empire and "moral" crusade had reached such a pitch that leading secretaries of the union were sacked for obeying the TUC's call in Liverpool and London and even though these men, Charles MacVey in particular, had been the scourge of Vigilance Committees in Liverpool in 1920 and 1921, they were accused of being communists and sacked for "unconstitutional behaviour in an attempt to wreck the union".⁶² They had not balloted the membership but instead instructed them to obey the TUC call for a general strike; and in Liverpool there was a massive response.⁶³ The leadership's immediate action was to sack forty of the leading officials in the two ports. This constituted around 20-25% of the total number of officials within the union at these two major ports. It serves as an

illustration of Wilson's power that at the Annual General Meeting that followed the General Strike, the 31 lay delegates were all arranged to come from the smaller ports. The 51 voting officials at the meeting - 25% of the total union officers - all unanimously backed Wilson's action against "the communists".⁶⁴

Even when this left seamen without a place on the city's council of action the opposition outside the union could make little headway. The AMWU were totally disregarded when they claimed a place for seamen on the council. This followed threats of legal action by the NSFU. Correspondence between the Council of Action and the AMWU shows clearly that even if the leadership of the Seamen's Union had ignored the strike call nowhere was there to be tolerated a rival organisation and of course there had been the action taken by the local secretaries. The process of stratification was complete.⁶⁵ It was some months after the general strike, with Havelock Wilson to the forefront in advocating industrial harmony, that the NSFU changed its name to the National Union of Seamen.⁶⁶ As the journals of both the seamen and shipowners demonstrated, the NUS was to be no ordinary industrial union, rather a voice of sanity in the mediations of similar interests within the wider social firmament of the Empire.

The statement below typifies the relationship of politics and trade unionism within the leadership and the role played in determining certain frameworks for working agreements with owners and the seamen and the shipowners and the State in the aftermath of the General Strike.

Mr Cauty the General Manager of the White Star Shipping Company commented that with the Prime Minister having ably voiced the need for industrial peace: "a movement is already on foot to give practical effect to this idea under the lead of Havelock Wilson, President of the Seamen's Union. Mr Wilson is being backed by many influential men representing both employers and employed. Such efforts encourage the belief that this difficulty is but a passing phase and that as youth grows to adolescence, so will difficulties inseparable from the growth of nations disappear and the more staple opinions of the majority make themselves felt."⁶⁷

As we stated at the beginning of this chapter these sentiments could have echoed the growth of the seamen's union into its new and all embracing title as the National Union of Seamen. Alone it was left to pursue its lonely crusade; pausing only as a banner leader held aloft for other ranks of labour to follow. The links with the vestiges of 19C liberal Imperialism amongst the miners were again demonstrated in these immediate years after the Mond Turner talks of 1927.⁶⁸ This was the independent support of company unionism in the Nottinghamshire coalfield. The rationale of 1920/21 was against brought to the surface; if miners produced more and earned less there would be more employment for them; better trade for Britain more ships to carry that trade around the Empire.⁶⁹ The rage with which the Labour movement turned upon H. Wilson made him seem all the more assured of his correctness; besides "we have always tried to teach the seamen to stand on their own legs ... we have had our experience of the crimp and the

shark. We prefer to continue our present path even if it is a lonely one." To do this they inculcated the whole union with their philosophy.⁷⁰

If the theme of the forerunning pages has been the continued isolation of the seamen's union from the labour movement on the one hand and their acceptance of wider social forces appertaining to the shipping industry on the other, then the contradictions within this position were often felt most keenly in Liverpool: in the relationship between Liverpool as a port and the national leadership. This contradiction had been Liverpool's role in the formation of the union itself. Increasingly as time went on Liverpool was portrayed as a volatile untrustworthy port not in the least composed of solid responsible subjects of Empire. As late as the 1960s General Secretaries, following in Wilson's footsteps, were "Philosophically resigned to the fact that Liverpool is full of dissidents" and that, "Liverpool is no stranger to these phoney reform movements ... they were active in the 1920s".⁷¹ What 1920 witnessed however was the dawning of a new era in this relationship of control.

When Bevin had been pressed into finally establishing a seamen's section of the Transport and General in opposition to the NUS, The Seaman, the monthly journal of the union, in their traditional defence argued that Bevin wanted to create an all embracing organisation irrespective of seamen; that the men he employed to organise the seamen's section were "Loyal Jim Henson" and "Rotunda McVey" who were the major officials sacked after the General Strike,

who had "disobeyed the orders of this union and took part in that strike which action had put thousands of Liverpool seamen on the stones".⁷²

"True Seamen" would have little to do with this all embracing internationalist plot. As for seamen being part of a wider grouping of labour, well, Jim Henson was characterised as one who with similar philosophy would win British Seamen little gain. It had been from this "peril" that the Union had drawn away. Henson with the Union's heavy hand of irony upon him "had demonstrated his loyalty to the seamen of this country by leaving his office of Assistant General Secretary of this Union at the time of the General Strike when the service of every loyal official was required for the preservation of this Union". Previous acts of Henson's duplicity were given prominent feature including the Genoa Conference of 1920 when he talked of the "seafarer as a cog in an international machine. Certain conditions would have to be fulfilled before all could benefit." This had betrayed his internationalist intentions.⁷³ By implication another article in The Seaman of 1929 mentioned the widening of seamen's demands as being synonymous with the Minority Movement, renegade Trade Unionism and Communism. George Hardy, British Seaman and Soviet Spy and the "movement" from the foreign ports in 1925 were all quoted. An American observer held that the Moscow destructionists hated President Wilson because of his loyalty to the Empire and that this hatred extended to his loyal membership as well. Wilson himself spoke of the danger of any widening of the seaman's

channels into the national and international arena,
"Seamen will see through this trap as easily as I do.
What it means is that nothing can be done at an independent
National level; whereas with the NUS and the Shipping
Federation's cooperation British Shipping and seamen will
prosper."⁷⁴

Bevin's action in creating a seaman's section of
the Transport Workers in the post General Strike era was
purely to bring the Seamen's leadership into line for their
support of encouraging "company unionism" amongst the
miners in a manner which reflected their own policies.
It had little vision of "the one big union" that had been
expressed earlier in the decade.⁷⁵ On the other hand the
welfare and salvation of seamen was linked irretrievably
to the knowledge and good financial sense of Wilson and
the Union executives. Edmund Cathery wrote at his retire-
ment after 40 years of service with the union, "with the
good will and friendly feeling of the shipowners and our-
selves and with loyalty of both officials and members to
the 'Skipper' - as Wilson was euphemistically known - the
welfare of Seamen is in good hands."⁷⁶ With regards to
Bevin's action the Journal of Commerce and Shipping Tele-
graph wrote of the T&G action that "It is certainly not
true Trade Unionism to endeavour to cripple a union which
has the proud record of having done more for its members
than any other in the country today."⁷⁷ There was no
doubt of its grasping the "realities" of the situation.
Spencer's Union in Nottinghamshire was based on the premise
of hard working miners providing more coal, taking no

industrial action and this in turn would provide jobs, more export of coal, more work for seamen. If success could be achieved in Nottinghamshire then the next place was South Wales where the links between coal and Empire were even stronger. Joseph Chamberlain had been the first to state that the Working Class depends upon the Empire. Wilson's burden was to make other labour leaders see sense.

Again that fear of change with which the leadership always looked back, darkened the horizon and Bevin's action.⁷⁸ It was the same reasoning with which Britain returned to the Gold Standard in 1925 irrespective of the changed conditions in world Imperialism. As such it showed still that dominance in British society by the City of London. Irrespective of the reasons why the Transport Union was taking action against the seamen's leadership the whole edifice of paranoid duplicity was again brought to the fore such as that of communism signified to "seamen within the Empire"; "letters" to The Seaman read "they only want to grab the seaman's money like so many of the land sharks have done so often. I say to our fellow seamen don't let them do it." Such letters were classically in the philosophy and vernacular of H. Wilson.⁷⁹

The founder of the Seamen's Union died in that same year of 1929. Like Cathery his involvement and leadership had spanned more than 40 years. His death was a great tragedy for his disciples yet his policies and carefully wrought constitution, "to keep out of trouble" remained with the leadership for the next forty years. One of the

first acts his successor had to take was to initiate peace with the leader of the Transport Union by promising no more support for bogus Unions.⁸⁰ On the other hand there could be absolutely no interference with the seamen's autonomy. Bevin was delighted to agree. It forced him out from under the pressure of those within his own union who also wanted the fusion of river, sea and dock workers;⁸¹ and it was with the stratification of their separate work forces that seamen and dockers had to meet the 1930s.

After the consolidation of the Seamen's Union into one of recognised isolation and with its consequent establishment as a force in the triad between shipowner and state it should come as little surprise to note that anything taken in defiance of its commands were correspondingly brief, local and scattered. Individual sentiments were to be the same. This was even more the case in the 1930s and in the Port cities, where the advent of agreement brought a strike within coastal shipping in 1933. "On the whole seamans conditions are deplorable. Yes and the NUS ... will see they remain so. Perhaps seamen don't earn their wages? Don't get too near them if you query that. It is certainly obvious they earn their wages, plus 75% but they do not get it. Now this is the point. Where does it go? To the shipowners, brokers, directors, shareholders and their agents. Then after them and last, but not least, the men's leaders, the Unions take a bit out. Not only do the unions take and rob the sailor but agree with the bosses on every item, as to worsening the conditions of seamen ..."⁸² In many ways the development of the Union

reflected that of shipping as it became more centralised and the wave of amalgamations that took place in the early 1920s was consolidated again in the 1930s in the restructuring of British Capital. Shipowners had many different tributaries in their sources of funding, the union was dependent solely upon the revenue of its members; harnessed within the post-Imperial state this contradiction could be contained. Some four decades later however with the break up of that coalition it obliged the Seamen's Union to make other choices.

It was in this context that Sir Alfred Read of Coast Lines wanted to "rationalise" all local agreements into a national one; Coast Lines up until this date had been a host of different coastal companies. This new central agreement pleased the union "as it made our job easier on behalf of the men",⁸³ which was true enough as it had been the Union's report that no more than 40% were members of the union on the coasters and Liners in Liverpool and these "constituted a threat to both Union and shipowners".⁸⁴ Havelock Wilson had stated this in 1925 and now it was his right hand man, his Industrial Organiser Captain Tupper who was stating that a National Agreement was better than a purely local one and seafarers in Glasgow and Liverpool would have to abide by it.

The Journal of Commerce stated that "Past experience of the Seamen's Union does not suggest that it would endeavour to foist upon a section of its members an agreement which it did not consider fair and just ... under

such circumstances we endorse the union view that the agreement is a fair one and in the best interests of the members".⁸⁵ This did not prevent strike action taking place because seamen in the Irish and Scots ports beside Liverpool were to lose time off, were to have less crew and there was also to be a consolidated wage, which effectively cut their wages. The Annual General Meeting of the union quickly condemned the strikers and gave their support to the new agreement in an attempt to defuse any further action.⁸⁶ The new General Secretary - the ancillary post of President had been abolished as a mark of respect at Wilson's death - Robert Spence, said that he "did not wish to pose as a prophet and at the risk of being styled a shipowners' advocate he felt it his duty to point out that the majority of shipowners were in a very parlous position despite reductions in the wages of seamen".⁸⁷

This was at a time when an AB's wages were marginally higher than those of Scandinavian seamen although the difference between them had narrowed since the time before the war when British Seamen earned almost double. In fact the peak rate of wages had been £14 a month; it had dropped to £9 by 1923 and ten years later it had fallen to just over £8. The wages of British Seamen, indisputably the largest workforce in the world, had fallen behind in comparison with those countries - Denmark and France - who were cited as fools by the Union for agreeing to the 48 hour week in 1920, even though these countries had as much a percentage of their fleet laid up.⁸⁸

The blame for falling wages was laid at another

door and a report quoted the Daily Express and its edition in the April of the same year as the strike; "400 coloured men, not even members of the British Empire are receiving dole in Liverpool. A floating population of Lascars, Chinese and Belgian West Africans numbering nearly 5,000 lives in the Dock Area. More than 200 Greek seamen are employed in the coastal trade in ships from this port alone."⁸⁹ A report of the committee on manning brought before the Union in the same year of 1933 found that Legislative Reform should be passed to stop owners discriminating against British Seamen by employing foreign labour at cheaper rates. The report mentioned one Liverpool Company trading in the Far East that had in the past three years, 1930 - 1933, discharged over 700 ratings and replaced them with Chinamen. Of this company's fleet of seventy vessels only two now sailed with an all white crew; accordingly "your committee recommend that the Union approach the TUC and Parliamentary Labour Party with a view towards promoting a bill in Parliament which will eliminate those classes of labour from British Ships".⁹⁰

Discrimination was the order of the day whether against ships or crews of the British Empire. Of course the logic of the Seamen's Union meant that it could not take this case to the National Maritime Board because that body's central philosophical clause was to "maintain the supremacy of British Shipping and the British Empire". The Committee found that "it would be futile to approach the NMB on this subject because of the position of a certain class of ship-owner". What else could be expected? Equally futile

would be to ask for the State's intervention because of the way in which the guiding framework of the NMB had to function. Thus whilst Britain still had one third of the world's tonnage, in Liverpool almost 40% of her seamen and dockers were without work at this time.⁹¹ However there were no "Vigilance Committees" nor splinter groups that had challenged the union in the 1920s. And the union could afford its own discrimination against the strikers in the coastal trades.

Yet not only did the stoppage of 1933 signify the sole battle of that decade between Seamen and Union, it showed all the weaknesses that the Union was labouring under with the added employment of foreign cheaper labour; in short, it magnified the wider network of relationships that the Seamen's Union and the Seamen had to labour within. A manning sub-committee had argued that it was useless to approach the National Maritime Board on this matter, "in view of an attitude adopted by a certain class of shipowner which have been consistently against reforms".⁹² It was a paradox that precisely this reason was used by the Union in securing against any dissent by the seamen themselves. Strike action in the port of Liverpool was regarded as being regressive and merely localised, such had the terms of reference changed from the pre-war days.

Localised dissent stood in the way of the tendency to make wider agreements. At one level this characterised much of what was happening in the Trade Unions since the 1920s as organisations moved from local bases onto a wider national structure and became part of the three great

General Unions;⁹³ at another level however the reality for seamen was very different, they were isolated within a wider framework of relationships that spanned the ship-owners and the State besides the Union. If shipping was a carrier of industry it nevertheless remained a child of commerce. Seamen were stranded, caught alone and more exposed to the cost cutting exercises as shipowners contemplated the decline of the staple heavy industries and with State inducements and industrial mergers the City of London contemplated the restructuring of British capital.⁹⁴

If the securing of wider agreements was often at the loss of local control then it was a problem that exploded across the waterfront in the 1950s and held important messages for seamen into the 1960s yet unlike other unions the NUS was not merely dealing with an industrial employer. That employer walked in clothes decorated by the Empire, garnered in the City, shaded by the State and embraced within the firmament of a Maritime Board constitution which placed the supremacy of British Shipping as the foremost goal within the global nexus of that domain. For the Union, to cosset itself within the embrace of those wider relationships in the hope that social decency and Moral Salvation would emanate from the engine rooms and decks of British Ships bearing the red ensign, no dissent, nor "angry despair of those who have nothing" could be allowed to distort the vision.⁹⁵

It is instructive therefore to see how the Union perceived the situation of strike action taken by these coastal crews. Captain Tupper's words are worth recalling,

he was "quite satisfied that the majority were satisfied with the new arrangement and that the intimidation and casual men infected with the bad influence of the southern Irish ports was alone responsible for the trouble".⁹⁶

How the union was fused with both shipping owner and agencies of state could be seen in the following quote. "I was on the Mersey 48 hours before the date of the new agreement and learned that men were already jumping their ships. They had broken agreements, articles and the law. The mail boats had to be got away and we joined hands with the shipping Federation to keep our agreement and got them away manned by loyal union members. I was in charge, shipping company officers and union officials taking my orders and finally casting off at my command. There were pickets around the docks but we got the ships away."⁹⁷

Nowhere is there a clearer statement of the opposition to the union being based on communists and casuals clinging dearly to their own local customs. It was the classic case of the local versus the national perspective but with the union trying to kill two birds with one stone. The problem went deeper for had not the union itself been consolidated by the local struggle in Liverpool. Tupper summed up the changes of context "In 1911 I strove to obtain an agreement. In 1933 I strove to keep an agreement."⁹⁸

Tupper's strictures on the moral casualism and communism of his opponents could have been taken directly from the words of Booth. 1933 was to prove the same "In fighting against this progress our enemies in this last

fight proclaimed their own aims and purpose, that trade unionism and communism may never agree as their aims are exactly the opposite. Communists want to drag all down to the lowest while trade unionism strives to give all the opportunity to rise to the level of the highest." Since 1920 when the union was effective in trying for a closed shop agreement this period was characterised "by a progress towards appreciation by the shipowners of the worth and value of seamen; progress towards a social decency".⁹⁹

It made little difference that the strike was not motivated by Communists in Liverpool, or that its original impetus had come from a sense of injustice in the way agreements had been reached between shipowner and Union and in the case of the Irish Seamen a double sense of grievance. Liverpool Dockers actually struck until there was a promise of a formation of an Irish Seamen's Union.¹⁰⁰ That this was far from Communism there could be little doubt. Yet for the isolated Liverpool coaster men there was a salutary point to be remembered when eight years before Wilson had pointed to their low level of union membership and saw in this both "a threat to the shipowner and the union".¹⁰¹ Control was the most important aspect to the Union: any opposition became hopelessly entwined in the most diametrically opposed philosophy to that of the union and that was Communism. And yet Communism itself was but a metaphor for the break up of the Empire and the role of shipping within a post-Imperial Economy. Its vilification signified the extent to which the Seamen's Union was caught within the dominant institutions that were attempting to

negotiate and maintain power within that economy.

Coast Lines had swallowed up a host of smaller firms on the Mersey and by the mid thirties owned nearly 350,000 tons of shipping. An indication of the worth of the property was supplied when J. Monks died in 1935; he left £84,000, his firm recently amalgamated with Coast Lines. This was a small amount to the Furnis Withy Company that had profits averaging £370,000 a year in the years 1934 - 1937. The death of Sir John Ellerman also gives some indication of the wealth and amalgamation process. From the turn of the century to the middle 1930s Ellerman acquired the Leyland and Morgan Lines, the City Line, the Westcott and Laurence and the Bucknell Line. In 1933 at the time of his death his personal fortune stood at over fifty million.¹⁰²

The Canadian Pacific company had acquired the Allen Line and Elder Dempsters had been swallowed up by the Royal Mail group. Just as shipowners benefited disproportionately from the National Insurance Fund with the casualism of the industry so also did they escape from paying benefits to other staffs once companies had been merged or taken over. "As older members of the company tried to sue for their superannuation benefits they were told that the fund was initiated for the benefit of employees of the Elder Dempster Co and subsidiary companies but in recent years a great change had taken place and the Elder Dempster Co was now part of the Royal Mail Group" which of course had its own prerogatives involving superannuation payments.¹⁰³ It was thus in the 1930s with the supply of British Shipping

exceeding 60 million tons and a demand for less than half that figure that the major firms continued to amalgamate. In Liverpool, shipowners' property amounted to 20% of total British tonnage and the larger firms of Cunard, Furness Withy and Ocean Steamships made inroads into the smaller lines. Before the Great War twelve out of the eighteen largest companies were from Liverpool. By 1920 twenty nine local firms owned three hundred ships. By the middle of the 1930s seventeen companies owned these ships.¹⁰⁴ The number of fleets extending beyond 80 ships had doubled in this period as smaller companies were forced into merger; and not only smaller companies but the giant White Star Line taken over by Cunard in 1934 which was referred to the Monopolies Commission. The notable aspect of this merger was that state subsidies would only be paid to Cunard to complete the Queen Mary after it had amalgamated and "rationalised" the White Star Line within its own corporate structure.

On the other hand the position of the industry was bleak compared with the money that had been pumped out by the companies to shareholders and the buying up of ships at grossly inflated prices that had led to the initial wave of amalgamations a decade earlier. Even the President of the Board of Trade was caught in this process in the selling of his ships, although his affairs came out on the right side. At that time 60% of the share capital of 18 companies, some 14.5 million pounds, had consisted of "watered" shares, meaning extra dividend to pay out to shareholders. The average rate of dividend had therefore

doubled and more the official rate of 9.1% given by the Economist in these post-war years. This had intermeshed with the first great rush of amalgamations which had led to the Cunard and P&O taking over twelve shipping companies between them.¹⁰⁵ Yet in the 1930s with nearly 20% of the fleet laid up - more in the case of tramp shipping (22.7) - and with the volume of British Trade 10% less than it was in 1913, the profits of an earlier decade were mere wistful calculations in the mind of shareholders.¹⁰⁶

Of comparable magnitude was the loss of markets suffered since the war. A committee inquiring into Tramp Shipping found that, "unless world trade can be restored the prospects of shipping is desperate". A further special committee concluded in 1933 that, "a policy of discrimination is needed towards those who will not respect the Freedom of the seas". In a curious way, though pleas for discrimination - either in manpower, intervention or subsidy - came from all quarters, it was precisely the function of the National Maritime Board to progress despite all these apparent contradictions. Through certain restrictive practices even the State had come away from "free trade" and besides imposing certain "tariffs" had encouraged cartels not least among them from the Shipping Industry in this period.¹⁰⁷

It brings to the fore questions of the state; not merely in terms of government intervention but as the holders of a legislative framework that dominated seamen's lives in many different areas.¹⁰⁸ During the major stoppage in 1925 the Liverpool Express amongst others had

questioned the role of the state in the seamen's existence; "whenever they have been asked to ameliorate by legislation the general conditions of life of Merchant Seamen, Ministers of the Crown have contended that many of the reforms would involve 'Class Legislation' and that no British Government can or will create a precedent by conferring legislative privileges on any section of the community." The Express then posed its own rhetorical question, "Then how comes it that some landfolk get holidays secured to them by act of Parliament while seamen are at the mercy of shipowners. How come livestock on shore may not be kept one hundred yards from a dwelling place while on board they live next to the crews quarters. And wage earners on shore can enforce at law payment of wages due to them every week while shipowners can legally withhold payment of seamans wages for a year or more ... why prolong the indictments when it is all to be found on the statute book. The Act of Parliament that governs the conditions of the seamens life - The Merchant Navy Shipping Act - is a historical monument of the worst form of class legislation."¹⁰⁹ And yet it was upon the foundations of this Act that all bodies had come together with the industry to form the National Maritime Board in 1920. The 1894 Act, refashioned between 1906 and 1920, only came to be fundamentally changed some fifty years later after mass action by the Seamen had prompted the state into commissioning enquiries within the Industry.

The constitution of the NMB called for the supremacy of the British Empire and British Shipping.¹¹⁰

It made no mention of the primacy of the white working class. How this paradox was often manoeuvred by the Union was to bring in the spectre of Communism that threatened at the same time not only the unification of all labour but also the break-up of the British Empire. Communism was thus equated not only with dissent but "objectively" the worst scenario for white British seamen. These echoes were to carry well beyond the inter-war period.

Any all embracing philosophy would not be tolerated. Tupper's sense of "social decency" however conformed well with the Union's idea of Salvation.¹¹¹ After the dispute of 1933 had been broken and talk of the irregularity of meetings and lack of direct representation had been washed away, the Union could continue with its path of "steady reform". What did it matter that Militant Seamans Group based in Liverpool should produce a pamphlet dealing with the events of 1911, of the ideas "Havelock Wilson and his lieutenant Tupper would enter into with the shipowners" and of the call of "the elementary rights of Trade Unionism to hold regular Branch Meetings at least once a month".¹¹² Of equal unimportance was Tom Mann's later comments that it was the organised solidarity across the waterfront that won the day with all sections joining together; that seamen and dockers could work together when unemployed on demonstrations; against evictions, fighting Public Assistance Committees or against the iniquities of the Means Test. All this was mere troublemaking. Seamen should not be allowed to join with other groups of workers; their interests lay elsewhere within the social firmament

of the Empire.¹¹³

Robert Spence and Ernest Bevin, their own houses in order and on amicable terms with one another after the hatred of the 1920s, turned more to the reform of conditions at sea. In 1936 at a time of British re-armament they won a notable international victory at the ILO conference in which shipowners accepted a number of proposals which became known as the "Seaman's Charter".¹¹⁴ These proposals included the three watch system, new proposals on manning, increases in sickness insurance and holidays with pay for at least some seamen.¹¹⁵ With regards to the latter it brought seamen into the category of certain shore workers; though it must be stressed that not all seamen benefited from this.

In the same way seamen historically had been excluded from a number of other benefits.¹¹⁶ With another war on the horizon it might be uncharitable to suggest that shipowners saw the need to grant certain concessions; yet in reality it was only with the prospect of war that British industry would expect a certain boost. It prompted Nairn to comment that, "and yet in spite of such significant glimpses of an alternative path of development, the effect of spasmodic, 're-industrialisation' was to restore the underlying State trajectory ... Internationalisation resumed its course under conditions somewhat different but hardly less tempting and propitious for the ruling class."¹¹⁷

Some two years after the reforms were supposed to be put into practice a commentator noted "that Great Britain is behind countries like Australia in adopting an

International Standard of hours".¹¹⁸ Here were shades of the Genoa Conference in 1920 when Havelock Wilson accused the opposition of "putting seamen on the stones" because of their proposals for shorter hours, of hindering in the reconstruction of a post-Imperial state. The publication by the International Transport Workers Federation of levels of hours, wages and amount of shipping laid up in 1933 had thrown doubts on these propositions. It was in the later 1930s that the position of the Scandinavian and Northern European seamen reversed the trends before 1914 and started to climb beyond the British seamen in terms of wages and conditions.¹¹⁹

At this great meeting of the ILO in 1936 there was only one Union of Seamen however; no dissent, and a formal stratification of control within the union. No surprise then that Robert Spence should declare that the agreements "represented major advances for British Seamen".¹²⁰ The truth however lay somewhere between these latter sentiments and those of its polar opposite which affirmed that "the real transformation was brought about by the shipowners' use of the trade union as an instrument of social control. It is extremely hard to see - and with the best will in the world - what benefits seamen got from Union membership in the inter-war years."¹²¹ "The Union was inviolate, the Union was everywhere" to paraphrase a statement made of another time.¹²² A quarter of a century had passed since the Liverpool united action had secured recognition of all the waterfront unions and in its place the 1920 agreements paved the way to a "new" future.

Within this sense of its being inviolate we can witness other fragments of social stratification within the shipping industry; a report from the officers' Federation gives some indication of other aspects of organisation. The difference between the 1920s and 1937 was pronounced, "During the period under review Shipping has been superficially prosperous. All ships are in commission. Tramp shipping Companies have returned to pay dividends. On passenger liners it is the same. Shipping has previously experienced periods of greater prosperity than that enjoyed in the period under review - 1918/1920 - never before however have officers conditions of service improved with such speed as today. Never before has the Federation been so strongly organised. The two facts are not unrelated."¹²³ What was pronounced in the report was the idea that organisation could pay on the upper deck and could still merge quite easily with the accepted roles of stratification on board ship.

If Bevin had helped in the reorganisation of the officers' federation at the time of severe acrimony towards the National Union of Seamen then others had their own ideas of what "officers" organisation should constitute, "as I show the Masters and officers are not in a position to strike, neither does the use of the strike weapon appeal to them as Loyalists and Imperialists. The advantages of representation on the National Maritime Board is very debatable when one takes into consideration the undoubted loss of prestige the service has suffered."¹²⁴ There had been a change in the rationale of the shipping industry as

the different agencies of control had to adjust to changed conditions in a search for consensus; it had resulted in increased stratification of seamen of which process officers were now receiving the benefits. While sentiments such as, "In signing on again we were told that regulations required us to be furnished with an identity card bearing a photograph and we were to be photographed forthwith. We were then told to take our places on a bench alongside a group of Buck Niggers Arabs and Dagos,"¹²⁵ might not be so strident, the idea of Empire, the shipping industry, consensus and stratification were all themes that persisted.¹²⁶ As such it became the dominant metaphor for the Seamen's Union caught in a system of wider relationships.

Labour discipline and control continued to provide the different fragments of the shipping Industry with a unifying thread, a feature made pressing since the classic insecurity of that industry in the aftermath of the first war. This returns us to the triad of forces that dominated the seamen's lives and how control was mediated through these bodies. In the continued ability for a seaman "to sign off" after his ship reached the home ports, a deputation of shipowners appealed to a proposed State commission that they felt this was one of the more serious impediments to stability within the industry. In 1938 their report stated that, "of 85 voyages undertaken no less than 23% of the seamen preferred not to commit themselves for another trip" and concluded, "it is these seamen who contribute the elements of casualness and instability which is socially and economically undesirable and presents an

insuperable obstacle to any rational organisation."¹²⁷

Yet it was the owners' lieutenants, the Masters, that were bemoaning the fact that there were 2,000 fewer British ships than existed before the first war. Rational organisation had not proved a problem then on either ship or dock. The principle had always been the "elasticity" of labour and it had served the owners well. At a time of national emergency when the labour force applied such conditions to their own existence, there was predictably an outcry. It was another feature in the aspiration for control in an industry that all too readily supplied a corporate hegemony for the guidance of others.

Was it with tongue in cheek that the masters could report in 1939 that "The Merchant Navy is no longer an industry which is vital in war only. It is vital to this country and the Empire at all times. It is not enough that the Prime Minister should consider that the setting up of a ministry of shipping would not secure the prosperity of shipping. If a Ministry of Shipping did no more than prevent a decline of British Shipping and maintained the pressure to ensure that British Ships got their 'Fair share' of trade it would be enough."¹²⁸ Great Britain's share of world tonnage had dropped from 44% to 28% between the years 1914 - 1938¹²⁹ and yet little had changed in the mode of labour supply for Britain's greatness; what had decisively changed was her position in world markets and the bringing in of the union as an instrument of control within the other agencies that had to negotiate the threat of change.

For its own part the Union felt itself safer within the intermeshing relationships of the shipping world - safer in its legitimacy and from the actions of local and "irresponsible elements". This phenomenon had passed. This was in stark contrast to what had once been the dream of local, united action providing a spark from which all the port and Transport workers would unite. In 1924 the communist Worker had criticised merely sectional action but concluded that, "unless the lessons of the past three years have been forgotten, the coming year should herald the demand for a fusion of Railwaymen Seamen and Dockers into one big Transport Union."¹³⁰ From 1920 onwards however this was never likely to be the case.

The intervening decade and a half had witnessed the union's consolidation, celebrated in the ILO conference of 1936 in which certain concessions were made by ship-owners. As the rationalisation of Capital became more pronounced during these years and shipping, like the economy, once international now turned National within the embryo of the Empire, there was the increased necessity to have one mediating body of "representation" to meet that of owner and state. It prompted one observer to quote "The inter-war NUS reflected the still dominant position of Britain in the Shipping world and her desperate attitude to maintain it. The Union's attitude was Chauvinistic in its attitude to other nations and deeply suspicious of all manifestations of militancy at home ... but it was shrewd and knowledgeable on the intricacies and archaisms of the shipping world."¹³¹

The union then, "maintained in difficult circumstances of almost constant economic recession the framework of an organisation". In order to do this it had to fuse its needs into that of a greater order; the order of Corporatism and stratification in post 1920 Britain. By 1939 it would agree with the report made by an ILO officer, a Professor at Oxford, that "The improvement of conditions at sea has always lagged behind progress on shore. Sailors are naturally conservative people and being out of sight are usually out of the legislator's mind. Ships went to sea leaky and undermanned. When they disappeared there was no-one to tell the tale and when they limped home to port their survival was taken as sufficient proof that all was well."¹³² Any amelioration needed the constant cooperation of the shipowner and the sanctioning by the state. Such an unbroken horizon could not be "impaired" by the activities of "a few malcontents".

After the initial threats of labour movements and loss of markets, the increasing rationalisation of the shipping industry had proceeded, in line with the organisations of the triad during the inter-war period. It was neither state nor union that could write in 1939, "The last twenty years have been years of steady consolidation and as we have seen, the establishment of a joint governing body under the auspices of the government which has reached a degree of authority and confidence unrivalled in any industry."¹³³ That shipowners could write this illustrated the degree of confidence with which

they could view their "opposite numbers" at the National Maritime Board. In this way we can witness the degree to which the seaman's organisation had become a mechanism of control within its own sphere of operation. In reality there was little choice for seamen except sporadic unrest. Yet the bitterness with which that dissent was voiced led the Government of South Africa, where thousands of seamen had jumped ship rather than accept the new round of pay cuts, to express a desire for an official enquiry in Great Britain, "into the existing machinery for the representation of seamen on the National Maritime Board".¹³⁴ Because of the historical negotiations that had brought these triad of structures to coalesce above the seamen it acted as a further restraint upon their capacity for wider allegiance, "sea and land transport met at the port but the bulk of their problems in labour relations lay for the most part elsewhere and their conditions of functioning were different. This is why such obvious strategic alliances as those between seaman and Docker never lasted long and the occasional dreams of National or even International Transport solidarity were never of more than momentary importance."¹³⁵

It took another two years and the exigencies of another world war before the trends established in 1920 were to reach completion. Not only had the major shipping fleets "rationalised" themselves into larger combines but the state played a further role in this accumulative development with its Report on Shipping in 1940. In return for the promise of much greater insurance payments

given to Shipping Companies for stock depreciated and lost through war, the shipowners would form in liaison with the state the General Council of British Shipping. The British Chamber of Shipping, The Liverpool Steamship Owners Association and The Shipping Federation were all to run from this one office.¹³⁶ One of the Council's first tasks was to bring the whole Liner section under this central organisation. Liverpool was to have one office within this network. No longer would the port exist within its own autonomous structure; where attempts by Union and Shipping Federation had sought to bring it within a centralised structure years before.¹³⁷ As an offshoot of this policy, the cooks and stewards aboard the Liners were brought into the union.

Recalling Shipowners' fears of instability and casualness in the industry; of sections of seamen existing outside the official union structure and the rest signing on and signing off ships as they pleased adding further inefficiency to the demands of war, the Government's role was immense in the formation of the "pooling system" established in 1941 across all the waterfront to direct seamen and dockers to where they were needed most and away from specific companies. The Union commented on the Government's organisational role at its conference on the termination of war. "Prior to 1942 the organisation of liner catering personnel had never really been seriously tackled. Thousands had been outside the movement since 1921."¹³⁸ What was left unsaid was the union's help in the break up

of any other organisation for seafarers and their increasing rapprochement with the other dominant agencies of the shipping world as well as their isolation from the wider labour movement; now it seemed as if the state's role was complete, every category of seafarer was within the ranks of the union and between that body and the ship-owners there was always, "respect and understanding".¹³⁹

If the war brought to a culmination these developments, just as an earlier war had convinced ship-owners of the union's utility, how different then the sentiments of the young George Garrett, where away from Liverpool of the hunger strikes and the Vigilance Committee's, "half blinded with sweat, trembling at the knees in cold ashes and water you struggle to give the fires the necessary attention. You talk with your mate who wants to know, 'what the hell are the union doing about it' and an explanation of the awful iniquities of the PC5 form brings forth a stream of oaths that would make Havelock Wilson quake with fear if he were ever to hear them. Only in the establishing of the Industrial Commonwealth of a union all across the waterside would the real value be recognised of the men who go down to the sea in ships."¹⁴⁰

Garrett was of the same frame of mind on the eve of another war. Active in the formation of the Militant Seamen in Liverpool in the middle 1930s, he concluded, in a review essay of Conrad's Nigger of the Narcissus on the way the author vilifies anyone who questions the authority of any of those dominant agencies that had grown up around the seamen and found their personal expression in Masters

and Chief Engineers: "In the dark Donkin throws a belaying pin. For this Archie kicks him and threatens to tell. So does Belfast. Whether they do is not stated, but the Captain without hesitation picks Donkin as the culprit. And again Donkin makes a bit of a fight of it in the face of the Captains dominance and the silence of the other seamen ... Yes Donkin was Conrad's scape-goat. The villain of the piece. Perhaps at some time in his career Donkin had told Conrad where to get off. And Conrad probably wrote The Nigger of the Narcissus to let a reading public know exactly what he thought about the Donkins of this world." And so Garrett concludes, "Some day the Donkins might write the story of the sea. Let us hope it will be to a better world than which ship-owners can still send out heavily insured coffin ships and their helpless crews."¹⁴¹

How different these sentiments and the takeover of the "salvation" of the seamen; it was neither shipowner nor union that produced these sentiments as late as 1943, yet echoed within them was that same philosophy from above that the salvationists reserved for the doxies, pimps and pariahs that had "traditionally" preyed upon the seamen. It was the State that announced in a paper concerning seamen's welfare, that "In most Port areas ... especially by the dockside there are cafes and public houses of a low type which can only be regarded as traps for the unwary seafarer. In these he may meet women of undesirable character and may be induced to spend part of his wages on drink and entertainment of a harmful kind. It is in

the interests of the seamen and the community that he should be encouraged to keep away from this type of resort."¹⁴² For the seamen it was not only a measure of their isolation, their distance from decision making and indeed conditions on shore, but of the manner in which their welfare, behaviour and margins of existence were audited from above.¹⁴³

As we opened this chapter with a quote by Gramsci it serves that we may close it. Gramsci may have observed in 1920 that "the union bureaucrat conceives of Industrial legality as a permanent state of affairs" yet as he came to perceive later, the above statement merely outlines the scope of the problem.¹⁴⁴ When dealing with the economics and perceived cultures of specific industries, the mediations of the dominant powers and the negotiation of that power scanned the face of many terrains; it was quite clearly not only the union that framed the choices. That the seamen's union made virtues from this necessity echoed not only a quest for "moral salvation" but also for the stratification of the seamen into one particular type of body;¹⁴⁵ that they succeeded so completely echoed not only the seamen's isolation but the successful drawing together of wider forces in a declining Maritime power. Shipping fused at so many different levels that one commentator observed that "nowhere is the state level so deeply entrenched in the social order itself (where) state and civil society are so intertwined".¹⁴⁶

This chapter was an attempt to illustrate the continued corporate powers that governed the seaman's existence;¹⁴⁷ yet it is also to insist, as originally stated in the conclusion of the previous chapter, that

seamen were more than merely passive victims. Their rebellions however took many forms, fragmented avenues down which sections of the membership wandered, culling either from older traditions or coming to terms with the new.¹⁴⁸ It is within the survival of forms that often framed the seamen's discontent that we survey not only the different types of dissent but always within the context of the wider social firmament. With time and organisation, relationships within the union and between¹⁴⁹ the seamen themselves have their own autonomy, but nevertheless still find themselves enclosed within that wider social world.

It was only in time of war that the state actively intervened in the reorganisation of industry. It echoed a wider note within the social firmament of Britain where the dominant feature was the close intertwining of the state and civil society and the absence of the State from Industrial direction; City and Commerce were much closer to this hub of power. When the appropriations of peacetime were begun in yet another dented world of lost Imperial markets, fortunately the fractured economies of the warring nations still granted enough space for Britain to assume a maritime greatness.

With this dominance in mind, it prompted one commentator to conclude his dissertation that, "Perhaps it has been the tragedy of the British economy that at least until the late 1960s, it was never in severe enough danger to permit a thorough revision of the traditional policy, tried and found wanting since the 1920s."¹⁵⁰

Within these dominant shadows of the past, far from the waterside and the Shipping Lanes, there came to be formulated the conditions of existence of the Liverpool and British Seamen; metaphors and representatives of an Empire Culture. Seamen's dissent - and acquiescence - within this wider embrace, forms the subject of discussion of the following chapter. This concentrates on the period between 1933 and 1955 and overlaps Chapters Two and Four in order to present how different modes of dissent played themselves out against a wider canvas of seamen's action between 1920 and 1970. In this juncture, what was probably the zenith of relationships between the shipowners, the Seamen's Union and the State in the 1930s to the 1950s, the chapter attempts to deal with the way seamen negotiated that power held within the archaisms of the shipping world and its relationships within the wider society.

Footnotes to Chapter 2

1. A. Gramsci, Soviets in Italy, reprinted Institute for Workers Control, Nottingham, 1969, p. 17.
2. D. Rubinstein: "Wealth, Elites and the Class Structure of Modern Britain", Past and Present, No. 76, September 1977, p. 99.
3. The moral dimensions to this "problem" are best explored by G. Stedman Jones, Outcast London, 2nd Edition, Harmondsworth, 1976, Ch. 1.
4. The Seaman, January 1929, TUC Library.
5. S. Pollard, The Development of the British Economy 1914-1967, London, 1969, Chapter 2.
6. E. Tupper, op.cit., pp. 259-260.
7. J.H. Wilson, My Stormy Voyage Through Life, Co-op Printing Press, London, 1925, Ch. 3.
8. Letter from J. Cotter to Liverpool Trades Council, May 14, 1921, Picton Library, Liverpool.
9. Minutes of Proceedings of Special Conference, October 19, 1921, NSFU, St Georges Hall, London SE1, TUC Library.
10. CID Special Branch Report, 12th September 1921, re Merseyside Seamen Vigilance Committee, PRO Ref. HO 45 11032/423878/H967918.
11. B. Moggridge, "Militancy and Inter-Union Rivalries", International Review of Social History, 6, 1961, p. 399.
12. CID Special Branch Report, op.cit., p. 2.
13. B. Moggridge, "Labour Relations and Labour Costs" in S.G. Sturme, British Shipping and World Competition, London, 1962, p. 296.
14. F.J. Lindop, "A History of Seamans Trade Unionism to 1929", unpublished London M.Phil., 1971, p. 193.
15. Letter from J. Havelock Wilson to Sir Thomas Royden, J.D. Walsh, Liverpool Labour Relations 1891-1932, Liverpool M.A., 1971, p. 378.
16. NSFU Annual Report, 1923, Maritime House.
17. Minutes of Proceedings, October 19, 1921, op.cit., p. 3, NSFU.

18. NSFU Annual Report, 1921, p. 167.
19. Report of Special Conference: Minutes of Proceedings, St Georges Hall, October 19, 1921, pp. 68-69.
20. C. Booth, Life and Labour in London, 1st Series, No. 3, Poverty, London, 1902, p. 87.
21. B. Moggridge, "Militancy and Inter-Union Rivalries", op.cit., p. 406.
22. R. Williams, Annual Conference NTWF 1922, pp. 261-263.
23. F.J. Lindop, op.cit., p. 194.
24. J. Hinton, The First Shop Stewards Movement, London, Allen & Unwin, 1973.
 J. Hinton and R. Hyman, Trade Unions and Revolution, The Industrial Politics of the Early British Communist Party, Pluto Press, 1975, Chapter 2.
 E.J. Hobsbawm and N. Chomsky, Marxism and Anarchism, Occasional Pamphlet, Radical History, New York, 1976.
 H. Pelling, The British Communist Party, London, Adam and Charles Black, reissued, 1975.
25. B. Bright, Shellback, History Workshop Occasional Pamphlet, 1976, p. 28.
26. NSFU Annual Reports, 1922, p. 21.
27. Ibid., p. 19.
28. Journal of Commerce, 22nd February 1922.
29. Regarding the same process of stratification an interesting feature of the Irish development took place with the forces of state and the Union. When the Irish seamen made moves to go alone they were given great support in this by Fianna Foil - amid De Valera's Irishness policy post 1932 - and the ministry of Sean Lemass. In contrast to what Larkin had stated, the Seamens Union (Ireland) was established and rapidly degenerated into a form of authoritarian Corporatism in excess even of its British counterpart. Contrast this to when between 1920-1922 Dublin dockers constantly took action to have the seamen included within Larkins organisation of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union. The illustration is worth recording in relation to the similar process that took place in Britain.
30. Minutes from Meeting of North-east Coast Secretaries, Blyth 1922, Document leaked from National Sailors and Firemans Union and published by the newly formed Amalgamated Marine Workers Union in October 1922, and again in 1925.

31. Ibid.
32. R. Bean, "Liverpool shipping employers and the anti-communist activities of J.M. Hughes", Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History, No. 34, 1977, pp. 24-26.
33. The AMWU tried to make capital from this, by continuing to assert that Liverpool should be the centre for its activities. Stormy meetings often resulted from the fact that Liverpool officials of the union were felt to have been "bought out" by Wilsons NSFU.
Amalgamated Marine Workers Union AGM, June 10, 1925, Gower Street, London, TUC Library.
34. E.J. Hobsbawm, "General Labour Unions in Britain", Labouring Men, Weidenfield & Nicholson, 1964, Chapter 10.
35. G. Garrett, "The Nigger of the Narcissus", The Adelphi, D.J. Murray, London, 1936, p. 167.
36. National Sailors and Firemans Union, Annual Report, 1923, p. 52; and reprinted in The Seaman, January 5, 1929.
37. NSFU, The Red Hand: The Communist Defensive Against the British Empire, London, 1925, p. 2.
38. National Maritime Board, Minutes, 3rd July 1925.
39. Fairplay: A Journal for Consideration of Financial Shipping and Commercial Subjects, July 16, 1925, p. 135.
40. Quoted in Lindop, op.cit., p. 198.
41. NMB Minutes record that the President of the Shipping Federation, "Sir Shadforth Watts was delighted", 3rd July 1925.
42. Fairplay, July 9, 1925, p. 178.
43. AMWU Annual General Meeting, June 9, 1925, London.
44. The actions of local and provincial governments in support of the striking seamen was of particular importance in South Africa, the Cape, and Australia Queensland.
The Times, August 26 - September 1, 1925.
45. A deputation of seamen, "delegates from overseas informed the meeting that their union officials were forsaking them daily and that Australia was the only possible sympathetic outlet for their grievances". This was echoed in other colonial

ports besides the seaboard of the USA.
The Times, August 27th, 1925.

46. B. Moggridge, op.cit., p. 401.
47. To some extent this was a repeat of circumstances in 1920 - 1921, when Vigilance Committees thought the Syndicalists too extreme and when Communists in the NSFU refused to join the proposed formation of the AMWU in 1921. "Thesis on the United Front: Beyond Anarcho-reformism", March - April editions of The Worker, 1922, TUC Library, RILU.
48. B. Moggridge, "Labour Relations and Labour Costs" in G. Sturmev, ed., British Shipping and World Competition, London, 1962, p. 292.
49. This was especially the case when Labour having lost the 1924 General Election amidst fears of Communist infiltration, Zinoviev's alleged letter and the speeches by Morrison and Clynes to conference distancing Labour away from anything tainted by Communism.
Liverpool Daily Courier, September 16, 1925.
50. Wilson's "Telegram from Quebec" associated Jim Larkin and Manny Shinwell working in cohesion with the Communist minority movement; "pleased to note that Shinwell is in his right position with the Reds. Labour party and Trade Unions should have attention called to this". The Times, September 2, 1925.
51. Lindop notes that "after the crucial decision of 1921, the seamen's democratic constitution was amended time and again in order to protect the leadership that could no longer command the loyalty of seamen". "Seamen's Trade Unionism to 1929", p. 215.
52. By 1925 members of the AMWU were saying to Joe Cotter their President, "get the hell out of the Chair you are not fit to be among decent men", on account of liaisons between himself and the NSFU. AMWU AGM, June 1925, TUC Library.
53. B. Moggridge, op.cit., p. 293.
54. H. Wilson, My Stormy Voyage Through Life, originally intended as the 1st volume of a 2 volume autobiography.
55. Fairplay, August 20, 1925, p. 411.
56. Ibid., September 3, 1925.
57. Ibid., September 10, 1925, p. 563.
58. Ibid., p. 565.

59. TUC Annual Report 1925, pp. 417-421, TUC Library.
60. Hobsbawm, op.cit., p. 222.
61. The Red Hand, The Communist Offensive Against the British Empire, NSFU, 1925 and reissued 1926.
62. Lindop, op.cit., p. 305.
63. D.E. Baines, R. Bean, "The General Strike on Merseyside" in J. Harris, ed., Liverpool and Merseyside. Essays in the Economic and Social History of the Port, Liverpool, 1969.
64. Lindop, op.cit., p. 207.
65. Even Liverpools Council of Action would not tolerate an AMWU delegate to represent seamen, during the General Strike.
Correspondence between AMWU and Council of Action, April - May 1926, Trade Council Reports, Liverpool Central Libraries (Picton).
66. 1894 had witnessed Wilson trying to make the union more centralised, 1920 had established the matter in principle; 1926 was the point in fact where the leadership felt confident in stating that they were the only union for all seamen. The opposition outside the union, the AMWU survived the General Strike by just twelve months. One of the numerous court actions pursued by Wilson against it finally took hold. This was to deny the validity of the amalgamation between all dissenting groups in 1921/22 and evidence was produced by a couple of the leading elements in the union who were now being paid by the NUS. Separation of the different funds within the union would have been impossible after five years of existence therefore all the funds were "frozen" and kept at companies house where they still remain. The one big union was killed by an administrative stroke of the pen. The ideas that forged it; that all port, river and sea workers should be forged together in solidarity was similarly consigned to the memory.
67. L.B. Cauty, Shipping Manager Cunard Company, Liverpool Daily Post, Review, October 27, 1926.
68. Both Sir Alfred Mond and Havelock Wilson had spelled out their joint fears of Communism, the dangers to the economy and the role of Empire in 1925.
The Times, 18th August and 24th August 1925.
69. Fairplay, 24th September 1925 suggested that apart from Wilson "Labours sense of duty to the State and the Empire is so crippled by class consciousness that

it suffers from none of the qualms which the average law abiding citizen would feel."

70. The Seaman, January 5, 1929. This might have been Wilson's epitaph for he died some weeks later.
71. Thomas Yates, AGM, NUS, 1960, p. 48. This was to be Yates last address before retirement.
72. The Seaman, February 7, 1929.
73. Ibid., April 15, 1929. That argued that the NMB as an institutionalised body would not stand for the Transport and General Workers action in making a maritime section for sea-going members of that union.
74. The Seaman, January 5, 1929.
75. Lindop, op.cit., p. 208.
76. E. Cathery, General Secretary on the eve of his retirement.
The Seaman, January 5, 1929.
77. Journal of Commerce, January 3, 1929.
78. F. Lindop, "Unofficial Trade Union Militancy in the 1920s", Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History, No. 38, 1979, p. 26.
79. The writer of the letter included in brackets after his name, "an old member of the NUS and not a shore worker" as if to indicate that all "troubles" began from relationships between seamen and other groups of workers.
The Seaman, February 7, 1929.
80. The Times, July 2 and July 8, 1929.
81. Lindop, op.cit., p. 208.
82. A Liverpool seaman: "Robbing his Tummy to pay for this and that", Daily Worker, 21 April 1931.
83. E. Tupper, op.cit., p. 284.
84. NMB Minutes, July 3, 1925.
85. Journal of Commerce, July 5, 1933.
86. AGM NUS; St Georges Hall SE1, July 3, 1933.
87. Journal of Commerce, July 4, 1933.
88. Comparative Table of Wages, ITWF, June 1, 1933, TUC Library.

89. Daily Express, April 16, 1933.
90. AGM NUS, 1933.
91. D. Caradog-Jones, Social Survey of Merseyside, Liverpool University Press (3 vols), Vol. 1, p. 89, 1934.
92. AGM NUS 1933.
93. E.J. Hobsbawm, Labouring Men, op.cit., Chapter 10.
94. Merseyside in Crisis (ed.), M. Nightingale, Manchester, 1980, especially Chapter Six, pp. 95-112.
95. Caradog-Jones noted in contrast the way in which the shipping industry particularly benefited from the national Unemployed Insurance Fund, with the large numbers of seamen casually employed on short runs. Social Survey of Merseyside, op.cit., pp. 90-92.
96. E. Tupper, Seamans Torch, op.cit., p. 295.
97. Ibid., p. 296.
98. Ibid., p. 298.
99. Ibid., p. 299.
100. This was besides sympathy action with Liverpool and Glasgow seamen.
Liverpool Post and Mercury, July 5, 1933.
101. NMB Minutes, July 3, 1925.
In the face of strike action by NSFU members but more particularly by the Amalgamated Marine Workers Union.
102. Report of the Liverpool Steamship Owners Association, Liverpool Post, July 14 - July 17, 1933.
103. Ibid.
104. Ibid., July 15, 1933.
L.H. Powell, A History of the Liverpool Steam Ship Owners. One Hundred Years On. 1858-1958, Liverpool Chamber of Commerce, 1958.
105. Labour Research Department, An Analysis of the Shipping Industry, London, 1923, Chapter 4, pp. 25-37.
106. Report of Special Committee on Tramp Shipping, 23 November 1933, TUC Library.
107. Shipowners could still conclude in their report to the World Economic Conference in 1933 that, "It is of the utmost importance that the equilibrium between

supply and demand, which had been disturbed by measures taken by the state to assist shipping should be re-established."

Liverpool Daily Post, June 30, 1933.

108. C. Dixon, "Sailors and Contracts: the British Experience", unpublished MSS, History Workshop Journal, 9, 1980, p. 12.
109. W.H. Coombs, quote from Liverpool Courier and Express in The Nations Key Men, London, 1925, pp. 95-96.
110. Coombs' book has as its secondary title The Keystone of the Empire as "the captains and officers of Britains merchant ships" are the cornerstone of that domain.
111. The very title of the book, Seamans Torch, indicates the lighting of the path for others to follow. Tupper, who Moggridge described as a "bankrupt company promoter turned detective" saw his own salvation as part of leading a seamans crusade to "decency".
Moggridge, op.cit., p. 401 n.
112. Quoted in The Seamans Charter, ed. F. Campion, No. 23, Liverpool, 1980.
113. This became the province of a leadership sure of its destiny provided they encountered no opposition. Official histories of the seamen, from the serialised Pictorial Weekly of 1930 to The Story of the Sea Men, J. Borlase, NUS, 1964, all have this curiously uncluttered vision of how the seamen should behave.
114. Circular 1463, "Report of Shipping Advisory Committee on deck manning and foreign going cargo ships", The Seaman, July 26, 1936.
115. H. Butler, The Work of the ILO, Oxford, 1939, p. 212.
116. C. Dixon, op.cit., p. 14.
117. T. Nairn, The Break Up of Britain, Verso (ed.), 1981, p. 384.
118. Butler, op.cit., p. 137.
119. Comparative Table of Wages, ITWF, 1933, TUC Library.
120. AGM 47 NUS, Chairmans comments.
121. Tony Lane, "Work Discipline and Liverpool Seamen", 1850 - 1920, unpublished MSS, University of Liverpool, December 1979, p. 28.

122. H. Hikens, "The Liverpool General Transport Strike", Transactions Lancs and Cheshire Historical Association, September 1961, p. 195.
123. Annual Report of the Merchant Navy Officers Federation, December 1937, p. 17. TUC Library.
124. W.H. Coombs, op.cit., p. 135.
125. Ibid., p. 117.
126. Documents on British Policy Overseas, Series 1, Vol. 1, HMSO, 1984.
R. Gott comments, "Britains plans - or rather their absence for the post-war world is certainly a major theme of this volume. A more intriguing and elusive one is the failure of Britain, and its mandarins, to come to terms with its own relative decline."
The Guardian, February 28, 1984.
127. R.H. Thornton, British Shipping, CUP, 1939, p. 222.
128. Annual Report of Masters and Mates Service Association, May 1939, p. 13. TUC Library.
129. Ibid., p. 14.
130. G. Hardy, "The Transport Workers Fight", All Power. Official Organ of the Red International, January 1924, p. 3.
131. J. de Coursey Ireland, "Shipping and Seamen", Dublin, 1979, p. 6.
132. Butler, op.cit., p. 142.
133. Thornton, op.cit., p. 224.
134. Coombs, The Nations Key Men, especially Chapter 6, "The Shipowners and their Best Friends", op.cit., pp. 40-55.
135. Hobsbawm, op.cit., p. 222.
136. Report on British Shipping, HMSO, 1940.
137. Powell, op.cit., p. 156.
138. Thomas Yates, Assistant General Secretary, AGM NUS, 1945, p. 67. TUC Library.
139. "Respect and understanding" characterised the duties of a maritime trade union within the wider social firmament of shipping. It ran like a chain through successive General Secretaries from the 1920s to the early 1960s.

140. All Power: Organ of the Red International of Labour Unions, April 1923.
141. The Adelphi, ed. J. Murray, London, 1936.
142. J. Woddis comments, "The advances made by the union can only be understood if we appreciate the enormous setbacks seamen suffered in the first fifteen years after the First World War". Under the Red Duster, London, 1939 (1947), p. 82.
143. Seamans Welfare in the Ports, HMSO, 1943, p. 20.
144. A. Gramsci, The Prison Notebooks, eds. Q. Hoare and G. Nowell-Smith, Lawrence and Wishart, 1971, pp. 155-157.
145. To such effect that once the rift had been healed between Bevin and Robert Spence after the death of Havelock Wilson, Bevin became a "formidable" ally of the leadership of the NUS.
A. Bullock, The Life and Times of Ernest Bevin, Heinemann, 1960, pp. 576-579.
146. T. Nairn, op.cit., p. 45.
147. C. Dixon deals succinctly with the way in which seamen were corporatised into a quasi-military legalistic structure. "Sailors and Contracts: The British Experience".
148. Just as "the classes that observed, investigated and recorded" changed their perception of "the problem".
C.F.G. Masterman, The Condition of England, London, 1909, p. 112.
149. J. Woddis, op.cit., p. 96.
150. S. Pollard, The Development of the British Economy 1914 - 1967, E. Arnold, London, 1973, p. 484.

CHAPTER THREETHE LEVELS OF DISSENT, 1933 - 1955

In the Shipping Industry, it has always been the Shipowners and the State that materially have drawn the parameters of the seaman's existence. When the Union was struggling to become recognised it had a series of choices to make about relationships with these two bodies on the one hand and the relationship with its members on the other; members that had actually given the institution its strength since 1911. The second chapter of this dissertation laid emphasis on the moral dimensions that were given to these relationships; dimensions closely intertwined within the fabric of an Imperial society in which the supremacy of Shipping within the Empire was to remain a central convenience for the rationale of Capital. The straining of that framework and particularly relationships between the Union itself with that of the Shipowner and the State was not to come until more than a decade after the second world war. It provides the theme for Chapter Four. The object of this chapter is to situate itself between these two periods and is designed to overlap the earlier and later periods. Its aim is to characterise the dissent of seamen to the agreement made between Shipowner and Union; not in some coherent unified manner but in a fragmented incomplete way that reflected differences in the structure of the industry between men working on the Coasting Trade, on deep sea cargo boats and lastly aboard the passenger Liners. Their

rebellion came in once-a-decade flashpoints across the 1930s to the 1950s. In contrast, the harmony between the dominant institutions of the industry seemed complete.

Gramsci may have noted that to understand, "the consent given by the masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant social group" one had to realise, "consent historically caused by the prestige accruing to the dominant group because of its prestige in the world of production".¹ In the world of casual labour, with so many points of reference and the seamen an isolated totality, these sentiments are often difficult to negotiate. Opposition becomes clearest in relation to the institution that is closest to actual working practices. When Union or State arrive to confirm or frame new consensuses there occur the flashpoints that illustrate the passage of certain developments. As it was in the making of the Union, Liverpool was central to this dissent. This chapter will attempt to highlight the stoppages that took place there in 1933, 1947, 1955 as illustration not only of the seamen's fragmentation but of the manner in which different modes of dissent came to be fused in the fights for democracy and change. It was to turn on its head the comments of the National Organiser of the NUS when in the aftermath of the 1955 strike he could state that, "Communications have never posed a problem in this Union".²

One commentator could argue that "patterns of behaviour are better understood in their own historical contexts rather than historical aberrations or residues".³

What we want to argue in this chapter is that there was a certain retention of past values in changed circumstances on the part of the leadership and that this applied equally to sections of the membership. It is a phenomenon which has made the characterisation of the couplet 'Authoritarian leadership / casual labour' such an unwieldy one to analyse in reference to them both during this period. It is also the reason why the dissent of seamen was fragmented into those who believed in working through the organs of the union to those who believed in having as little to do with the union as possible and using their strength in the local quayside bargaining tradition. The viewpoint of the central union to both perspectives was the one printed in the Pictorial Weekly of 1930. Entitled, The Union That Couldn't Be Killed its major assertion was that historically, "discontented members were encouraged to form rival unions and soon half a dozen seamen's unions were fighting the original. Although the shipowners attacked the NSFU, these rival unions found themselves receiving support".⁴

Even after the consolidation of the Owner/Union relationship after 1930, the union still perceived any dissent as a threat to its own identity and legitimacy. Monolithic from above, the Union could watch with a certain equanimity - even though its soul bled on occasion - the thrashing and squabbling of dissenters with different ideas and concepts to one another; materially this had been the expression in the 1925 strike between supporters of the minority movement and the syndicalist AMWU. As

we suggested in Chapter Two, "the transition from Syndicalist to Communist ideas was not as clear on the waterfront as historians have often thought it to be." If we add the flickering though not yet dead flame of Irish Nationalism in Liverpool during the time of the British Government's blockade of the Irish Free State then we have another dimension of dissent to consider.

Locked within a role of protectors of the Empire and shipping as the oil to metaphorically keep the wheels turning of that nexus, the Union made little distinction between the syndicalist James Larkin and the Communist Pat Walsh⁵ yet fierce differences existed, so much so that Larkin would not work with the communists in Ireland in 1930s.⁶

With Syndicalism there also came a strand of Nationalism and this was evident in the stoppage on the coasters in Liverpool in 1933. For the Union it was a question "of men tainted by the bad influence of the Southern Irish ports"⁷ and yet they had little conceptual difficulty in relating it to the work of communists.

The different strands of dissent could be seen clearly between 1933 - 1955. By the same token not everything could be characterised as merely being within the syndicalist or the communist camp. Yet the only dispute that involved deep sea-going cargo ship deckhands on a mass scale was in 1947; a dispute that could be characterised as industrial was firmly controlled by the communists. The disputes of 1933 and 1955 came from the coaster men and involved local trade agreements and in 1955 stewards

aboard the liners who in many ways were finding their way within the Union only having been recruited into the NUS since the war. Again however to split different departments and different forms of shipping into separate and distinct political groupings with specific allegiances would be mistaken. In short what this chapter seeks to do is to illustrate the different degrees and methods of resistance taken by seamen after the transformation of the union into an almost company structure.

If on the surface seamen appeared loyal - in that very few general acts of mutiny occurred in this period - it must be seen within a context of overall power of the shipowners and the union as junior partner. Subversion through indiscipline is desperately hard to prove as studies of more general phenomena have shown, "yet anyone reading accounts of ships and shipping must note the enormous desertion figures" and what they have stood for. This can be referred to as a form of seafaring Ludism for it had certain correlations with earlier times and "the whole gamut of rick burning, poaching and cattle maiming that was part of the rural underworld and attitudes that only emerged briefly from ordinary everyday rituals of deferential behaviour".⁸ Perhaps of more importance was that a near de facto closed shop for seamen was operating within these same circumstances.

Yet the reason we are positing the different strands of the seamen's dissent is that until they were overcome in the period after the middle 1950s - the consistent theme of non-representation that linked them -

ceasing to be antagonistic, little could be done to challenge the undoubted hegemony of the official Union.

Backing out of ships, as has been suggested, could often span the divide between formal trade unionism and personal freedom; it was often done in 1925 to show dissent to the unions policies, to embarrass it from abroad. Some historians have suggested that it would be too grand to call it a "movement" but it was "evidently an accepted fact of everyday life to the point where it became a part of the seafarers' collective experience and memory". On the other hand so far as shipowners were concerned "desertion, despite their complaints, may well have worked to their advantage. The deserters were likely to be the more energetic and adventurous seamen; the sort of man who might otherwise have been in the van of trade unionism".⁹

On the one hand were those who wanted to stay and fight within the union, an increasingly monolithic body, and those others whose heritage had been the cooks and stewards union, and the AMWU that had its main base amongst the coastermen who wanted little to do with the NUS.

"Of course they got away with it. Up until the 1920s there was only thirty or forty per cent of British Seamen who were organised. The fact is, seamen are very difficult to organise. A man goes to a factory and he is still with the same people as yesterday and the chances are that they will still be there next week. But a ship might be paid off here and the crew dispersed into a dozen different ports. So it is a difficult job to organise them.

It was the PC5 that put an end to all the splinter organisations and gave the NUS complete control".¹⁰

This process did not pass without conflict. Between personal freedoms and forms of power exercised by the union there was a considerable divide. Billy Donaghie going to sea on the coasters in the 1920s was told by his father to join a friendly society, "and steer well clear of the Union". That his father was a staunch Orangeman from Liverpool's south end merely adds to the paradox.¹¹

As an expression of helplessness a feature of the decade was the increased number of men jumping their ships, returning to the days when the Union was half existence and in recognition of their own scarcity value. Now in the 1930s not all of them were possessed, "by that angry despair" but rather realised all too well the confines of their position and resolved to do something about it themselves. As seafarers they were open to this form of personal calculation.

With the authoritarian structures of the Union above them and the possibility of "backing out" of ships away from home, it is perhaps not surprising that a dedicated corpus of the membership did not consistently push for reforms within the Union. Equally unsurprising within the context of the 1930s that we find the dispute between seamen and Union taking place within the coasting trade, amongst men closer to home and the myriad bargaining structures of the waterside.

The collective action by the coastermen took

place in Liverpool and Glasgow in 1933 when more than a thousand stopped work on the coast line traders. This demonstration concerned the degree of control which the men could exercise in relation to the amount of hours worked. The Union had agreed to new arrangements and tried to break the stoppage; this went from General Secretary through to "local" official. Robert Spence, General Secretary since Wilson's death in 1929, proved himself a true inheritor; "My union has made a new and comprehensive agreement with the Coastal Shipping Companies taking the place of three or four old agreements. This strike is unofficial and we are standing by the agreement;"¹² at the local level an official mouthed the union's policy of agreement by action, "if any other seamen employed on the Irish cross channel steamers feel impelled to desert their ships, the union will fill their places from the ranks of the unemployed who are waiting for the chance to work".¹³ It was this tactic that had provoked seamen in 1925 to stage their strike in a series of walk offs in foreign ports.

Of wider importance however was the way the port of Dublin closed ranks over the dispute and in turn came to figure in the formation of the Irish Seamen's Union which involved the transferring of hundreds of NUS members. The NUS played down the dispute claiming it to be those elements tainted with the bad influence of the Southern Irish ports; claiming communistic and anti-empire forces were stirring up trouble. Anti-Empire was anti-union. The dispute was cleared on the Irish side by the direct

intervention of the Minister for Industrial Affairs, Sean Lemass.¹⁴ In the wake of the Republicanism that had come with De Valera's victory in 1932 the Irish members were allowed to transfer out of the union and to clear the path for a new agreement.

The dockers resumed work after a week after an agreement was reached that they should not handle cargo consigned to the Irish Free State ports; however "some 4-500 Liverpool seamen are still standing out and at a meeting one week after the initial stoppage they passed a resolution calling upon the National Union of Seamen to close their office and not use it as an office for blackleg recruiting".¹⁵ For the union the new agreement "simply means an adjustment of certain overtime rates and conditions of service".¹⁶ For the seamen however it meant certain vestiges of control were to be taken away without any discussion.

Lack of control and representation were to be the only consistent themes that involved seamen with differing attitudes towards the union. This was notwithstanding the words of their General Secretary that, the 1933 "agreement confers on the crews concerned special payments and conditions far in excess of those obtaining on any other class of coasting vessel under the National Maritime Board Agreements". Local agreement had been buried for a wider national one, one that had taken into consideration the restructuring of capital on coast lines. Robert Spence was to comment - "without being an advocate for the shipowners" - of the very parlous nature of many shipowners in

the industry.¹⁷

And the July 5th edition of the Journal of Commerce commented in a Futile Strike: "past experience of the seaman's union does not suggest that it would endeavour to foist upon a section of its members an agreement which it did not consider fair and just. Under such circumstances we endorse the union view."¹⁸ After three weeks the striking seamen were blocked into submission.

There then followed an episode which confirmed all the worst fears of the union - Havelock Wilson had commented in 1925 on the low level of union membership in the coasters and liners in Liverpool "they will wreck this union" he commented - men had approached the employers and had insisted "they would go to sea but not as members of the NUS".¹⁹ There then arose all the old fears of "breakways" for which the 1920s had been so fraught. The Union was in a much safer position in relation to the triad however and utilised this development to the best of its advantage. Captain Tupper further blurred the distinction between different levels of dissent. "The Communists then approached Sir Alfred - Alfred Reed the owner of Coast Lines - declaring they would go to sea under the new agreement but not as members of the NUS. This was the thin end of the wedge to split open the seaman's union. They were told that Captain Tupper - the union's National Organiser - was in full control of Coast Lines recruitment and that if the men wanted to come back they came back through him. Through my efforts with the ship-owners most men got their jobs back but the extremists had

to be punished."²⁰ As in 1921 and 1925 the immediate aftermath of 1933 saw increased levels of disorder and individual action taken on the part of the coasting men.

On the Burns boats which sailed from Glasgow and Liverpool to the Southern Irish ports there were loggings and fierce fines in the aftermath of the stoppage. One man who refused to turn to was fined a week's wages. On the Lairdsbrook and the Lairdslock there were cases of men refusing orders and of deputations of crew to visit the Captain. All met with charges of indiscipline and disorder. One Captain even turned into the Isle of Man and had the crew put ashore. The crews of the Lady Leinster and the Ulster Monarch also had their share of fines and loggings and on two trips issued ten DRs or Declines to Report stamp in discharge books which were as good as blacking in the unemployment strewn 1930s.²¹

But to a certain extent men on the coasting trade were more linked with the general activities of their communities and evidence suggests they obtained work more easily in Liverpool port than did deep sea men. Possibly for this reason they were more willing to rebel against the union's policies in that they had more of a link between sea and shore and joined in on the docks almost out of family connection, "Because of commodity diversity employment conditions based on casualism and technological backwardness gave rise to sectional and localist traditions; on the docks gang systems supported a tradition of collective action independent of union organisation; these traditions survived alongside and

in competition with National Unionism."²² Hanham gives details of the amount of interchange between ship and shore. One social scientist of the time gave the numbers of men exchanging ship for shore work as more than 3000 a year in Liverpool in the early 1930s. Most of these men worked on coasters and could interchange easily with the work on the dock.²³ It was within this tradition that Havelock Wilson was shown to be so concerned with their membership in 1925.

Yet it does also suggest that the 1933 stoppage was fought on purely local and sectional terrain and that the Union was scared that this could have developed and spread at the same time as they were making far wider and more comprehensive agreements with the shipowners. This was Wilson's fear.

Working within the union was often more hard a task to achieve reform. Complaints were distilled into the officials own philosophy, thus at the 45th AGM in 1934 George Canning a district officer stated in his report that "During the past year the major issue before the sailors and firemans panel (NMB) has been the revision of the Irish Cross Channel Trades Agreement and the general question of manning."²⁴ This was precisely what the strike of 1933 had been about; because "precipitous action" had been taken by the coastermen however they had to be chastened and the "extremists" punished. Only one set of machinery was available to seamen and that was "from above" as indeed was the joint control of the supply of labour. Professor Hobsbawn's comment that "workers would

prefer a corrupt and racketeering union to no union at all" has a certain validity for those who wanted to work within the union for change but the role of the state in the regulation of discipline; the distinction of criminal law as opposed to the civil when applied to seamen made no distinction between what levels of dissent different actions might corroborate.²⁵ Everything was from above.

For the deep sea men theirs was a situation in which discipline could be enforced more rigidly. A high labour turnover and a company unionism created conditions where dissident action could be stamped on. There is adequate testimony however to suggest that deep sea men did rebel throughout the 1930s; and took collective action alongside the thousands of individual acts of indiscipline in defiance of Shipowner and Union and had to pay the price "imposed by law" and the State. One such account is listed below of men employed on the White Star Line. "At 7 AM on July 6th the Ionic, due to sail, was lying side by side of the Mahia. The bosun of the Mahia had had a quarrel with his crew and a man committed suicide. An enquiry was held and the bosun was held free from all blame. The Bosun resigned and the Captain of the Ionic agreed to carry him to England as a passenger. When this became known, William Evens informed the officers that speaking on behalf of the defendants, that they would leave five or six men to keep up steam but that the others would leave the vessel if the bosun was to sail. The Captain had to call the police to take the Bosun of the Mahia off the ship and not until then could he sail. The men knew they

would be in a difficult position with other seamen if they brought home the boatswain. They sent a deputation of the Captain to say that if he was put ashore they would go to sea but if he was not they would not work. The whole of the 25 men bore excellent characters."²⁶

Some indication of the measure of severity accorded to this act was supplied by the magistrate Mr Wyatt Paine when he stated that, "Disobedience went to the root of all possible things at sea and if an offence of this sort were passed over then that would be the end of all discipline."²⁷ Twenty four firemen and sailors were sent to prison for three weeks hard labour whilst William Evans - the ringleader - was sentenced to nine months hard labour.

It was on matters of representation however that those who wished to change things were most frustrated. This was echoed in 1936; the same year as the ILO agreements on the changing watch system and various other advances, when at conference a member from Glasgow rose to state that, "We in Scotland think that there are not enough meetings held by the National Organiser to explain matters to the membership ... sometimes we have only one meeting a year." The organiser for the Scottish ports who was later to become the wartime General Secretary stated the Union's procedure, a procedure hastily adopted around 1920 and concretely established by 1925, "all he has to do is the same as any other member ... that is to come and ask for a meeting. If we think there is anything of importance to

tell the members we will call a meeting."²⁸

Instead of the right of regular meetings the rules had been changed so that now thirty bona fide members had to "ask" for a meeting before the District Secretary would "grant" one. Charles Jarman continued, "We are always willing to call a meeting if there is anything to talk about". When the Scottish member rose again, Jarman postulated, "I did not interrupt you. I have heard quite a lot from you at this meeting and other meetings. I have heard you have held plenty of meetings on board ships and they were not meetings to the benefit of this union ... How can you expect men to come to meetings when you go on board ships decrying the work of this union. (Hear Hear)."²⁹

There was much of this contradictory manner of thought that on the one hand made it much more difficult for Communists and other to work within the framework of the union whilst giving fuel to those others, forced through the joint labour supply system of Union and Federation but who would otherwise have little to do with the union and regarded it with contempt. They had their own mode of action and this by and large was confined to desertion. More collective stoppages such as that which took place in Liverpool in 1933 were equally exposed and isolated by the union precisely because of the coaster men's ambivalence. The problem as ever was one of an industry based on casual employment, regimented by State and Owner whereby the hierarchical machinery of the union sought to maintain a balance "from above" whilst below them there appeared a

vision of the "volcanic masses" either sunk in apathy or within a frenzy of revolt. Classically a system imposed from above, Casualism became welded to its own conditions and appropriate reactions.³⁰ All this added to the problems of those who wished to work for change "from below" within the union.

It is not to suggest that the different tendencies of dissent amongst seamen, between those who constantly sought to work within the union for change and others that would not go near the union office if they could help it, could not result in friendship. Attitudes from one to the other depended on the time.

The relationship of two seamen "artists" is worth noting. George Garrett, an active communist, and Jim Phelan much more in the anarchist/syndicalist tradition, brought forth the comment that "Phelan and Garrett certainly knew each other and met from time to time between voyages to have a drink and talk about books, writing and politics. In his autobiography The Name's Phelan Jim Phelan recalled such meetings, 'One of the most enlivening experiences of those days was that I met Joe Jarrett in the interval of his sea going. He too had become a big broad shouldered fellow and was very certain of himself. We behaved like two schoolboys when we met. To my surprise he thought and spoke of himself as a writer although nine tenths of his time was spent in the stokeholds. Some of his stories were published and one or two long poems - we drank the money down Bootle Dock Road.'³¹ Yet it was George Garrett who was active within the union and set up in the middle

1930s the Militant Seaman's Group in attempting to work for change within that organisation, whilst Phelan's first thought was if the ship was no good you got out. Released from Prison for Irish Republican activities, Phelan's later experiences as a tramp bore vindication to his tradition whilst Garrett in 1936 was having republished an account of 1911 in Liverpool by Tom Mann.³² Garrett was to maintain the philosophy of working from within from the days of the Vigilance Committees to his death in Liverpool in 1966, the year in which that philosophy flowered, with the first official and most drawn out stoppage since the events of 1911.

On the other hand, by the late 1930s, animosity towards those who would not fight for change could have been seen on occasion by those others whose mission was solely to work within the union. George Garrett wanted great changes regarding the monopoly of power "but only within the framework of our union". Attitudes to those "outside" could often be as bitter as to those "above". We have seen earlier the historical precedents in this from the period 1920 - 1925 when after great sympathy the heirs of the vigilance committees rose against the syndicalists in the strike of 1925. Similarly was their denunciation of the casuals, those who would not fight for change within the union, who merely jumped their ship if they wanted to protest; while equally denouncing those people who "have been as long as twenty years at sea and are still talking about that shore job next trip".³³

Had the union been correct in its treatment of

casuals? With the consolidation of its power and the notable advances gained at the ILO conference of 1936, the shipowners' promise of the restoration of the wage cuts sustained in the early 1930s; was this not evidence that to change could only mean working from within? What could not be disguised however was that the industry was still casual and that "casuals" in their manner of taking action were classed as communists. This was the paradox of being labelled alongside those whose resentment took the form of the "furtive act of the individual". It was from such action that the communists wished to be disassociated yet the label stuck like glue from a union leadership whose power it was to make little distinction between the differing levels of dissent.

"A deckhand on the ship Ortega was at Liverpool Police Court sent to prison for 28 days for failing to join his ship. Another Deckhand A. Kissock charged with the same offence was fined but elected to go to prison. The Judge passing sentence said that they work in company."³⁴ What we are referring to here is the depiction of casual attitudes towards work and conditions from a membership whose collective tradition often ran alongside and in opposition to the National Organisation,³⁵ who would not work for change within the union. Casualism had regained its place amongst those whose brief earlier heritage had been syndicalism. Its deconstruction had led to a profound cynicism amongst those who saw little point in working for change.³⁶

Among those who tried to fight consistently for

change within the Union, their accusations towards the "apathetic" fell partially upon the coastermen but particularly the Cooks and Stewards, thousands of whom were not in the Union even though the NUS negotiated for them through the catering board of the NMB. Here a question asserts itself. Was the cooks' position based on apathy or disenchantment towards the NUS whose leadership had helped break the latter's union in 1921 and the later Amalgamated Marine Workers Union in 1927? The answer was a mixture of both with the emphasis directed towards the apathetic. For every radical that defied the Union as a matter of principle there were hundreds for whom that classic waterside statement, "of finding your own little corner" was more important.³⁷ This led to even further rifts between those trying to work for change within the Union.

We must not forget that the liner trade was still busy in the "hungry thirties". Indeed in one week of 1934 the record number of passengers was carried between the USA and Liverpool - more than 4,000 - on the White Star Liners *Lorentic*, *Doric* and *Britannic* just before that company became part of the Cunard merger.³⁸ Studies of the city also show Cooks and Stewards were not to be found in such great numbers as other seamen in the inner city waterside wards and David Caradog Jones found in 1932 that only 0.1% were below the poverty line whilst the figure was 13% for sailors and even higher for firemen and stokers.³⁹ Whilst there were great differences within this stratum between desperation and status and contingent

upon the regularity of work, Cooks and Stewards were to remain outside the union until brought in "from above" by the triad of State and Union and not seriously opposed by owners in the wartime years. The Communist Jack Woddis wrote on the eve of that war to reflect the differences between the strands of dissent, "Many stewards who work on the big liners work on shore in summer and only go to sea for a few months in winter. All these men, the quitters, casuals and those always intending to go on the beach are naturally not over-interested in improving conditions by fighting within the union."⁴⁰

The weight of desertions however from all sections of the merchant fleet - the bulk of them from cargo boats where isolation was even more profound - gave the clue to which forms of dissent were engaged with on the part of those dissatisfied with conditions. At the same time after re-armament there came increased alarm on the part of ship-owners on the "casualism" of the work force where nearly a quarter of ABs would not sign on a ship for more than one trip.⁴¹ Many others did not wait even that long in this most casual of industries on shore and most redolent of authoritarian structures aboard.

On ships sailing from Spain to Singapore, from the Azores to the Americas, Liverpool seamen were recorded throughout the cord books as taking their own forms of action against controls meted out to them from above. Desertions and fighting upset the Harrison Line in 1935 especially when their ships were in the Americas. One can recall the amount of seamen adrift and on the beach as

commented upon by Paddy O'Mara immediately prior to the Great War.⁴² The Union had been established but in its practices there was no great reason for the seamen to behave differently than they had done before. In some ways they had even more cause to rebel. ~~One~~ author commented "It is extremely hard to see - and with the best will in the world - what actual benefits seamen derived from union membership in the inter war years".⁴³

In the years between 1934 - 1936 trouble occurred on such Liverpool ships as the Bronte in the Amazon, on the Phidias, the Palmella; the Orbita where the crew sat for two days drinking and singing on the quay. The Macandrews boats Pinto and Pachecha listed similar "crimes" and the republican activity of certain seamen after France's rebellion;⁴⁴ Jack Coward it was believed took copies of the "Communist Manifesto" to Spain on these ships.⁴⁵ The newspapers carried little of the phenomena except the court cases; yet they were there every time the magistrate sat; "Disobedience went to the root of all possible trouble at sea".⁴⁶

This is not to state that the thousands of seamen subject to under-employment through this decade were all either possessed of an individual casual militancy that had its origins in syndicalism or on the other hand prepared to work militantly within the structure of the union. These were merely the two poles around which the bulk of seamen revolved. On the contrary, what the conditions of this period did bring was in return for job security an increasing affinity with the union, this increased with the restructuring

of Shipping Capital, companies amalgamated and became more used to dealing with the union as a centralised agency, thus bringing with them more card carrying members which in the nature of the joint Supply system kept a stable membership. "Company contract men" became synonymous with the image of the stable responsible man beloved by the union and unlike the syndicalists/casuals/communists that had tarred seamen with such an image.⁴⁷

In this they were not unlike those 19th century philanthropists who viewed the working masses as a rabble to be "educated" into the mores of a certain society. Militancy at either collective or individualised level was viewed by the union as "the angry despair of those who have nothing".⁴⁸

Yet even within the different strands of militancy there were the constant appearances of an overlapping of interests. As Hobsbawm has suggested, "the heirs of the anti-organisation rebels were to be the defenders of the super organisations, what else could be expected".⁴⁹ Methods of opposition changed with the times. Yet the testimony of militants who sailed from Liverpool jumped ship in the States and wandered for months on end are legion. They were firmly part of a certain tradition that saw justice being taken into one's own hands, part of an individualised militancy, yet also legion are the amount of seamen with precisely this background in the inter-war period who came to work as Communists and labour supporters within the structures of the union. The stories of Bill Donaghie, Frank Campion, Bill Keal, Jack Lynch and Paddy Docherty have enough in common about them to suggest a

pattern of militancy that was born from a mixture of frustration and adventure before it later became channelled into the structure of opposition within the union.⁵⁰

If we multiply the other elements a hundred and indeed a thousand fold we have some idea of the statement that "as far as shipowners were concerned, desertion, despite their complaints, may well have worked to their advantage. The deserters were more likely to be the more energetic and adventurous seamen. The sort of men who might otherwise have been in the van of Trade Unionism."⁵¹

But that is only one aspect of their position in time. Often residual aspects of their rebellion remained and were channelled in totally different ways within the Union; this especially as the controllers of that tight hierarchy were unchanging in their denunciations of any aspect of revolt irrespective of the changing decades. It is in this overlapping of position that we can talk about past attitudes in changed circumstances yet nowhere was there talk of the formation of the one big transport Union that had once been such a dream.

In the desperate years of the 1930s the overall aggregate of militancy became what it had been before the advent of the Union; the prerogative of the locality, the quayside and "the beach". Central to this had been the marginalisation of the seamen from the wider Labour movement. Coastal crews with their closer geographical links had been firmly dealt with in the stoppages of 1933. For those on the deep sea their isolation was even more complete; their actions in protest, part of the same

coin. What was more, any dissent of a more collective nature was always vigorously channelled into the trough of "Breakaway Trade Unionsim".⁵² That this phenomenon was condemned as being both casual and "communist" inspired merely added to the paradox; such was the leadership's strength that it never needed to distinguish between the different shades of the seamen's rebellion.

Given these circumstances it was impossible for rank and file trade unionism to flourish amongst seamen notwithstanding their fragmented and scattered occupation. To talk of an active body of shop stewards would have been ridiculous even in the post war period. What was more if politics stamped the activist in towns as different as Liverpool, Glasgow and London then adventure stamped the deserter; yet even within this divide there were still vital sections of the sea going labour force that were not within the union but for whom the union negotiated, situated as it was between the agencies of Shipowner and State.

To sum up then, we can witness some of the different strands of what one future seamens leader termed "the tradition of cowboyism". A period of stratification within a casual industry radically different from that of the docks yet having arisen from the same ports structure. A union leadership desperate to distance members from any other liaisons on the waterside yet at the same time having to fight certain traditions of "men on whom the custom of spasmodic or irregular work has been forced to suit the employer will often practice it to suit themselves".⁵³

This quote was originally stated in 1904. It was of some note that its applicability was still valid in the third decade of the century. The dichotomy of the distance between work practice and institution on the waterside made one writer of the period aware that, "since it speaks all tongues and says nothing it is the right form for us awaiting the content we could give it when we awake to the fact of our general amity".⁵⁴

In terms of the Liverpool waterside where a study of the 1930s listed 28 industrial sectors as employers of casual labour and 231 separate call on points or stands, along the seven miles of the waterfront it suggests that this process of unification was not at all easy.⁵⁵ The seamen had been extracted as a totality themselves away from these myriad bargaining structures yet seamen were still part of that same waterfront in terms of culture; equally Gramsci's statement might be turned upon its head within this context in that, "relations of production which have become regressive can continue indefinitely because of the growth and persistence of supportive structures and ideologies".⁵⁶

That seamen were victims of the worst aspects of both casualism and authority could be assessed in the amount of control that was framed in the institutions around them. In the 1930s there was very little scope for those whose ambition was to change their own organisation from within; with their fragmented dissent there was little scope either for those who remained as far away from the Union office as possible. The assessment of dissent was

nowhere near complete to match in turn the prestige of the dominant institutions of the industry; and they returned to the seamen the glow of their harmony and emptiness of their vision.

The Levels of Dissent, Part Two, The 1940s

Seamen got their industrial experience during the war, wrote George Foulser, but it did not make relations any better between that strand of dissent that fought for change within the Union and that hierarchy of officialdom above them. In 1947, "NUS officials informed me that it was in order for NUS members to take the Ivor Rita - a Canadian Ship on Charter - Officially I could take the ship with a clear conscience. However as the NUS is notorious for its lack of Solidarity with other Unions I decided to get a second opinion. I obtained it from some friends of mine who were associated with the Rank and File Seaman's Committees in Liverpool and London."⁵⁷

These Committees were the hallmark of dissent in the early post war period. With the system of direct control that had taken place during the war there came from this phenomenon two central demands, that the state should continue to take more of a role in the actual employment of seamen and within this a process of representation should be set in motion that would give seamen the right to Union delegates and recognised committees on every ship.⁵⁸

These demands bore much more the hallmark of

industrial intervention than was witnessed in the 1930s, a decade characterised by individual and local militancy and matched by the torpor and degradations of the times. Now in the immediate post war period that other strand of dissent that had originally sought change within the Union from the Vigilance Committees of 1920 came more into operation.

The 1930s had not seen the proliferation of ships committees, they had not provided the central strand of dissent during the decade and even in the 1920s, those that had worked for change within the Union had not supported them but instead, notably the Communists, worked for the build up of the Minority Movement within the Union.⁵⁹ Historically they had been a syndicalist demand but the latter 1930s and the consequent war had changed all that.

From out of the Militant Seaman's Group formed in Liverpool in 1936 one recalled that, "They got me barred from sea, for forming Ships committees and they kept the bar for years ... not that that stopped me from going to sea and in the latter 1930s I was abroad the Linaria with my brother. We were three weeks on strike in Boston with American seamen and a Defence Committee with three local parsons picketing the ship. The British Consul wanted to split us up and send us home as Distressed British Seamen but we told him all together or not at all. The Consul told the crew that their leader was an active Communist as he had been informed by Scotland Yard ... well we still won and they sent us back to Liverpool in a Liner."⁶⁰

With the cooks and stewards having been brought

into the union as part of that same wartime collectivisation process there came the request from ships companies that "we desire to establish a hundred per cent seamans union on a democratic basis, to ensure this we must have a monthly branch meeting and recognised delegates on all ships".⁶¹

The 1947 strike was distinct in that it was fought over the nature of manning that brought into question the particular forms of decasualisation within the industry and as part of that, the process of representation in which the central power of the union was not seen as sacrosanct to be joined only in communion with the upper echelons of owners' representatives.

Ever since Bevin had come to Liverpool in 1941 and declared that the Seamen's and Dockers' position would never again be allowed to remain that of the inter-war period, and with Seamen losing over 30% of their comrades, a higher proportion not only of other workers but of the armed forces as well, the issue of manpower and of representation was bound to reflect an interventionist strand of thinking in the post war period.⁶²

The strike movement in 1947, its organisation by the rank and file committee and its central demands for ship's committees and more control over the process of employment had to be seen within the context of its time. The "commanding heights" of the economy were to be taken over and nationalised by the new Labour Government. The industry had been nationalised in the war; the attitude of the committee was that the state had been used to frame

the laws that dealt with seamen's lives, in the present context it might also take a part in employment supply and rid the industry of the major aspects of casualism.

This demand came from seamen who had worked for change within the Union through the hopeless decades of the 1930s and it was precisely over the new manning "scheme" that came into operation in 1947 that provoked the strike.⁶³

The removal of the "war bonus" and the categorisation of seamen into different groupings with different rates of pay in the peacetime also fanned the flames of dissent. Hundreds of seamen signed petitions and marched en bloc to protest to an ILO meeting being held in Seattle in 1947. It was this movement that directly brought the strike back to Liverpool in the winter of that year and to suggest yet again the close relationship between that port and the ports of the American Seaboard that tended to focus dissent. The present general Secretary of the NUS stated himself of the role of the Liverpool men in this way, "I remember being in Halifax Nova Scotia on the Pacific Exporter when the 'Aquitania' came in. One of the old Cunarders, a four funnel job. There were a couple of people on her who were well known ... There was Billy Hart and Paddy Murphy and a few other lads."⁶⁴ Later in 1947, it was these same persons who led the rank and file strike committees against the implementation of the new manning schemes.

The employment scheme introduced after the war - and after the pooling scheme of 1941 had acted as a form of direct labour - was the "establishment of service"

scheme. This was the socialisation of the workforce with labour contracts being offered to men "with good service".⁶⁵ The principle that lay behind the scheme was that seamen "had now to directly report to the centralised pool instead of approaching companies for the ships of their own choice".⁶⁶ At the pool however was the shipowner and the union, with the states stamp for reference. The militants fear was that this scheme would merely be utilised for "preference men" and anyone not deemed "suitable" could be refused employment; dockers had struck against these measures in an earlier period.⁶⁷

The reason was simple, the new manning arrangements would simply lead to a distinction between preference and "non preference" men. Non-preference men could again be classed as "casuals" with all the moral overtones that that implied and seamen would again be divided amongst themselves. In short the scheme would institutionalise many of the ubiquitous strands of casualism that militants within the union had fought so hard to have abolished. For their own part, seamen thought they had made enough sacrifices and that a greater degree of security of employment must be found even though the Establishment Scheme was a distinct improvement on the inter-war period. The divisions between contract and non contract men had all the overtones of the union/shipowner relation in the earlier Ports Consultation Document, PC5.⁶⁸

A statement given by the union to the Journal of Commerce at the beginning of the strike would seem to have confirmed their fears; "The new scheme gives seamen three

alternatives. Company contract with the shipping Owners, a contract with the shipping pool - administered jointly by Shipping Federation and Union - or to remain unestablished. The Rank and File Committee were formed recently from the Disestablished Class and they enlarge upon every minor flaw in the M.N. Establishment Scheme."⁶⁹

"Not one ship has yet delayed its sailing through the action of the Merseyside rank and file committee ... It is an unofficial body and consists in the main of seamen who have been discharged for various offences or who are no longer genuine seamen. The ostensible project of this Merseyside Minority Movement is the abolition of the present Merchant Navy Establishment scheme and a reversion to the war time reserve pool."⁷⁰

In their interpretation of the Committees as belonging both to, "an old movement" and as part of a "casual malaise" there was the insinuation by Union leaders that the committee was not consistent with the aims of "real seamen". That the leadership of the committees did consist of men in the Communist Party merely added fuel to the Union arguments that like their counterparts of the time in France they were merely out to cause trouble and split the union. The language of the cold war did not recognise that strand of syndicalism that had turned to communism.⁷¹

What the rank and file committees wanted - non preference in labour supply and Ships Committees - became irredeemably mixed in with who was to control the union; the leadership saw it as a test of their legitimacy. Unlike

1933 where the union had merely signed one set of agreements with a specific shipowner these issues went deeper and involved relations with both State and Owners at a much wider level.

This legitimacy declared itself all the more as there had been no move on the part of the committee to break away from the union and indeed historically the protagonists of the 1947 stoppage had been those who had always sought to work within the union.

That other strand of dissent or apathy, the cooks and stewards, had been brought into the union by the war. The state had been responsible for that, notwithstanding statements by Thomas Yates that "within six months he had worn down all opposition of Liner and Liverpool Steam Ship Owners" to bring the catering section into the union.⁷² The State could continue to play a supportive role in labour supply.

It is interesting to note that while those who had always sought to work for change within the union saw the entrance of the cooks and stewards as a major possibility for advance; the union leadership had a slightly different view. At the 1945 conference, an official stated that with their entrance, they could continue "steadily building and maintaining ... a strong union ... Contributions have risen from 28,000 to 60,000. In less than three years 1942-45 income has doubled from this section. Surely this is progress."⁷³

Thus the likes of Foulser could say that not only did seamen get their full industrial experience with

the war but that, "Now seamen have realised the value of their rank and file movement I think we shall obtain our freedom and our legal ships' committees but no thanks to Government and no thanks certainly to the shipowners and their NUS lapdogs."⁷⁴

Thus not only was he stating the role of the triad that had coalesced around the life of the seamen but the manner in which the way forward lay. His statement on the role of "legal ships' committees" shows also how the State could come to be utilised in this post war period. It was within this context that the strike lasted from 25th October to 7th November 1947.

Yet in relation to this new employment scheme and the nature of its implementation as in the past the union regarded this rationalisation as progressive and gave its agreement without consultation of the membership; Jenks commented on the modes and practices of casual work within the inter-war period; "Even had the war not intervened, some sort of scheme giving a hitherto unknown of permanent employment to seamen would eventually have evolved. The Establishment of Service scheme was an advance in that "not only would the scheme rid company preference and sectarianism amongst seamen such as the Liverpool vessels who regularly use the South Docks and who were regarded as prerogatives to Southern men, bitterly hostile to men of the North End but also to show to those others "that those men who cling to Freedom that their freedom is illusory".⁷⁵

Thus while hundreds of seamen were demonstrating

on the streets of snowbound Liverpool, the union issued the following statement; "The establishment scheme set up on April 1st this year is a unique scheme to give security and continuity of employment to Seafarers to a degree never before attempted in this or any other industry. The malcontents ask for the re-institution of the Merchant Navy reserve pool in force during the war ... yet this pool was sponsored and financed by the wartime government and its cost was colossal and could not be possibly be borne in these times by the public purse or by the industry."⁷⁶

In 1947 the rank and file committees were led mostly by the deck crews and those down below, historically the heart of the union and whose leaders had always been for working for change within the union. Their fate however was the same as that of the Syndicalists or Casuals or Coastermen of an earlier period, "their influence will wreck our union" who they had fought so hard against in maintaining the only path was through the union. Under a heading entitled Unions Reply to the Extremists a statement was made to the Journal of Commerce which "condemns efforts to belittle and indeed sabotage the Established Service Employment Scheme". Two days later the Shipping Federation commented in the same Journal that "Shipowners believe the National Union of Seamen are right when they say it is quite untrue to suggest that Genuine merchant seamen want to revert to a system of universal direction of labour."⁷⁷

Percy Knight the National Organiser who was to

fight Yates for the post of General Secretary the same year stated at the AGM of 1947, "The NUS was started in 1887 and has a membership of no fewer than 80,000 active seamen. The unofficial movement represents only a handful of seamen who are attempting to call out on strike thousands of good Liverpool seamen." In conclusion Mr Knight demonstrated the strength of the institutions that governed the industry, "The National Maritime Board which has a record of nearly thirty years success was the Joint Industrial Council for the settlement of all problems. This board consisted of all representatives ... and it was the function of the NUS to see that all genuine views held by their members were brought to the notice of the board,"⁷⁸ de facto, an unofficial committee could not possibly represent genuine views.

Despite the strident campaigns by the Owners, Union and Press for a return to work, a number of ships were still affected and other Liverpool seamen walked off vessels in other ports. Eight men left the Franconia at Southend and were reported as saying that "we have to work and live with Liverpool men and our wives have to mix with the wives of Liverpool men ... women can make things very difficult".⁷⁹ The Queen Mary was held up in Southampton after her crew had voted in support of the Liverpool action. In a series of incidents in Liverpool a number of seamen were arrested for stopping a haulage wagon bringing seamen from other ports down to the ships.⁸⁰ After one week of such action the National Organiser stated that the Union had still managed to get 33 ships manned and sailed and

that, "a pleasing feature of the position at Liverpool is that local seafarers are now realising how they have been misled ... there is a clear indication that Liverpool seamen have now perceived they have been used as tools in the furtherance of a Communistic attempt to hold British shipping to ransom. This attempt has failed."⁸¹ These could have been the exact words of Captain Tupper, another organiser, from the stoppage of 1933.

The idea of duplicity ran like a thread through the history of the union. And always the heritage drawn from "the misleaders" was the crimp, the shark, the doxy, the pariah out to make capital from the "honest" seaman. The local press took up the call at another level. The Liverpool Echo stated that "the unofficial strike organised by the Merseyside Seaman's Rank and File Committee provided another example of a lack of discipline which is injuring the trade union movement. The strike was against the NUS. There is ample machinery for considering seamen's claims and the NUS properly condemned a strike that was a betrayal of Trade Union principles. Such anarchy undermines democratic institutions and weakens Trade Unionism."⁸² Yet for more than 20 years the NUS had denied seamen the right of representation at a local level and had proceeded with every issue "from above".

Eventually isolated, much in the manner of which the coastermen had been a decade before, the Committee terminated the strike although the terms were to be negotiated throughout the union; that there should be no victimisation and that a special branch meeting would be called

at all the ports, "when delegates from ordinary members of the union will be elected to join a negotiating committee for the purpose of examining the Established Service Scheme and that delegates from Merseyside, Glasgow and Southampton will attend the next meeting of the Union's Finance and General Purposes Committee to open discussions on the mens alleged grievances."⁸³ Nearly two thousand marched in a parade around Liverpool and the following statement was issued "The Merseyside Seaman's rank and file committee have carefully studied the position and have decided this strike should be brought to an end ... with a reversion to constitutional means to resolve grievances." One of the leaders, Bill Hart asked the strikers "to return to their jobs in an orderly and dignified manner and to continue under the present established Service scheme until the promised negotiations were completed. Until then all seamen both established and unestablished will be treated the same". There would be no discrimination.⁸⁴

What remained of this dispute was not the granting of ships committees nor the revision of the new employment scheme but the jailing of the Committee leaders. Barney Flynn, Bill Hart and Pat Murphy, all Liverpool men, one shipping out of Southampton, were all sent to gaol for six months in the December of 1947.⁸⁵ Once again the State and the shipping owners had administered the discipline that the NUS itself upheld. Statements such as "Liverpool seamen have now perceived that they have been used as tools in the furtherance of Communistic attempts to hold British Shipping to ransom"⁸⁶ had as much to do

with seamen being linked to broader movements as to any desire for change within the industry. It had conveniently used the red scare and the communists on the Merseyside committee to disassociate itself from the questions being raised. Though there had been no attempt to form a separate union the NUS had engineered a position where it appeared the Committees were a real threat to its existence instead of another link in the process of representation.

This was echoed at the conference following the strike. The debate on "ships' committees" was seen to be used as a device by "untrustworthy elements" who were only using the critique of the Established Service Scheme for their own ends. Mr Tanner, the Assistant General Secretary from Southampton, stated that the "NUS's income and membership was higher today than at any time. Were they going to start experimenting and throw it all to the wind?" This experiment concerned ships' committees while Mr Ingram an official from Newport said that, "he had heard things this morning that took his mind back to 1925 when George Hardy was operating the Seaman's Minority Movement from Hamburg. Most of the seven points put forward then had been achieved ... with the exception of ships' committees; were they going to sacrifice 50 years of struggle and achievement simply to introduce a little experiment?"⁸⁷

The theme of the debate was that power would get into the hands of the "wrong people". This had been a preoccupation of Havelock Wilson's and his heirs take a similar stance. This was echoed by the South Western District Secretary who in true conspiratorial

style noted that he had "the words of the agitators clearly imprinted on his mind ... that the strike on the Queen Mary had shaken the NUS to its foundations, we have now concluded the open part of our work ... but you must still maintain your ships' committees. From time to time you will receive instructions ... keep your committees in being. It is the only way you will gain control of the NUS."⁸⁸ Another added, "If there were three delegates to the 3,000 British ships they would need 9,000 delegates. What chaos could be caused by their irresponsible actions ... The Queen Mary strike committee had supported the Merseyside strike and they said they were helping the Union. He put it to the meeting that they were trying to split the NUS. They were agitators ..."⁸⁹

Even when it came to motions of support to aid the jailed seamen; the General Secretary noted that the Union, "had offered its help but this was refused by a certain lady who was helping to make propaganda out of their actions".⁹⁰ Bill Hart's sister and his companion Pat Smythe had helped organise contributions and support amongst women and seafarers in Liverpool. Their campaign attracted large amounts of publicity.⁹¹ On the other hand the leadership of the Union viewed their imprisonment as something divorced from the procedures of Trade Unionism and more within the realms of the Shipping Laws. It was another indication of how the corporations of the shipping world controlled through the nexus of various different agencies.

Yet even with the voice of officialdom being

decisive and the General Secretary concluding the debate in which ships' committees were drowned in a sea of uproar by 71 votes to 12, the origin of how the strike had begun and over what issued could not as easily be put aside. One of the honorary members of the union stated "that as an old socialist and Trades Unionist I welcomed the day when we would see an end to the casualisation of labour but since the Established Service Scheme came in the Unestablished man is carrying the established man on his back."⁹² Another added that "the unestablished men are strong supporters of the union and if equality of engagement cannot be granted then the whole scheme should be terminated".⁹³ A resolution was carried that the ESS should be made more attractive to encourage the over 40,000 Disestablished seamen to join the scheme.

What the 1948 conference serves to illustrate however was how that strand of dissent that wanted to work within the union was just as firmly isolated as syndicalists-coastermen and casuals had been in the inter-war period. Far from rank and file ships' committees being seen as an extension to the union they were perceived as threats on the part of agitators who wanted to wreck the union; it would seem that the title of "the angry despair of those who have nothing" could be applied by those in power without any distinction.⁹⁴

The enthusiasm which the committee could stimulate life aboard ship was regarded as just another communist foil; "They had a ship's committee on the Queen Mary for six months and it had generated more interest in

the union than in my forty years of going to sea."⁹⁵

More the case was a novel published in the same year of the stoppage which spoke about the newly unionised catering workers, "At sea these wretched stewards work eleven hours a day seven days a week at really frightening speeds for spells of four months or more for a pittance of six pounds a week. Ashore this would be enough to cause a commotion but at sea 'the laws have been wisely and carefully framed' to see that there are no strikes among the crew. At the first sight of trouble, 'mutiny' is mentioned and that is that."⁹⁶

As time passed the initial fight back of 1947 died. Only the log books of the year following shows the underswell of dissent. The war had come and gone but nothing much had changed with the running of the union.⁹⁷ The rank and file Committee had only been invited to discussions after taking action and some weeks later as the talks had petered out had stood trial and been sent off to prison. A communist organiser on Merseyside commented "a lot of the problems came in the immediate post war period. There had been massive efforts made and sacrifices to win the war; that was the major undertaking. The docks and seamen had made enough sacrifices and they had indeed. After the war there were many visions of a new life especially with the labour government. Expectations were foiled and then there were new batteries of joint committee's and discussions with employers at the top of the unions and the political visions were being ground under; there was a return to

fight the battles again on the floor."⁹⁸ For the seamen this meant back to the same old action where the "home ports" were considered too unsafe to strike.

In terms of this rebellion, actions from the pre-war period were carried over into the post-war, that characterisation so common to the waterside of attitudes not changing with the circumstances⁹⁹ in the same way in which the Union was frozen into its own mould; defying those who sought any change from within.

It would be too much to suggest that, after the failure of 1947 to change systems of engagement and representation seamen returned to the old methods of individualistic and anarchic forms of action. Too easy a correlation yet after the imprisonment of the strike leaders and the series of victimisations after 1947, it would be equally facile to think the world might be a better place if seamen were to rely solely on their Union. As for their General Secretary's remarks that, "these misguided men, many of whom are not seamen, by their reckless action condemn much of the good work being done as this nation attempts to reconstruct",¹⁰⁰ well, they had heard such words since 1920.

Major flash points came upon the Liners though they were not merely confined to these ships. Areas of the city provide a useful guide within the traditions of dissent. Geographical boundaries were often of more importance than different departments. For example of eight ships registrars taken in 1949 over 600 seamen inhabited the inner and waterside districts of Liverpool.

Of this number some 322 were stewards - 2½% of total numbers of stewards in Liverpool in 1949 - and a further 301 persons belonged equally to the Deck and Engine Crews. These inner city inhabitants outnumbered by nearly 2:1 those living in the outer parts of the city, where 60% were from the Catering Department, more importantly of the 150 different "offences" that took place on these ships during 1949, more than 90% were committed by the inhabitants of Liverpool 5 (notably), Liverpool 4, 6, 7 and 8 (substantially) and Liverpool 20.¹⁰¹ On the Samaria a consistent 100 extra men had always to be signed on to work in "the gang" and act as substitute for that number of waiters who either refused to work, got drunk or who broke down completely during the strains of "the cruises" from New York to the Caribbean.¹⁰² On the Parthia there were a mass of offences in 1948 and 1949. A dozen men refused to sail from Liverpool because of conditions.¹⁰³ The usual stringent sentences were applied. On the Mercian and the Tactician, "mutinies" occurred with crew walk offs.¹⁰⁴ On the Mento a huge brawl took place after crewmen had been charged with insulting officers.¹⁰⁵ On the Parthia 189 separate offences of indiscipline were recorded out of a regular crew of 321.¹⁰⁶ What must be remembered is that offences were not committed solely by "casual seamen" moving from ship to ship but also amongst those that had sailed regularly with a company.¹⁰⁷

Between 1947 - 1950 twenty ships were involved with walk offs and strikes on the Eastern Seaboard alone.

It illustrates the nature of rebellion against a series of impositions and controls "from above" and of which the union was a synchronised part.¹⁰⁸ Three hundred stopped work in New York over the sacking of three waiters.

After two days of sleeping on the waterfront the union stated that practically all had applied for reinstatement. "I cannot say what would be done about the men who have not applied" said Mr T. Yates General Secretary of the NUS.¹⁰⁹

Records show no particular trend. Seamen jumped on the long runs, the six month trips to the Colonies and the Americas, on the even longer ones to the East. Tales of Christmas time in Kobe, Japan with snow on the bridges, came back to relatives in Birkenhead from the Blue Funnel deserters. Between 20 and fifty jumped ship from the Liners each articulated trip. On the Corinthia "There were a great many charges of insolence to officers", "the above charge was read over to the rating concerned who said they did not agree with the charge. The ratings concerned saw the union official and they declined to proceed any further."¹¹⁰

New York was a famous place for jumpers of ships. The Market Diner and Laceys on East 42nd Street were well known haunts. Montreal was the same though not so good for picking up work. Dockers stayed in the smoky French bars near the front and seamen hardly made it uptown to Saint Katherines Street. And if there was a Cunard boat in the harbour then there could be the stow back to Liverpool. Up to the 1960s seamen, stewards especially, could spend winters going back and forth between

Liverpool and the East Coast and go nowhere near a union or shipping office.¹¹¹

These acts of insolence formed an essential part of the seaman's defence. They kept him upright whilst all else, "was designed against him". There was little faith in the union, yet no urge to break it. Like shipowners you had to live with it. And it could be useful, "evidence shows that when workers had a choice between even a corrupt and racketeering union and no union at all they would prefer the former".¹¹² It was such an attitude that continually prompted the union to contemplate, like an officious headmaster, its wayward children. This was certainly the case as long as the triad remained intact and control ran smoothly.

"In the war, Merchant Seamen had been called heroes and of course the Younger ones could read all about that ... South Shields the town where I was born, bred and sailed out of for all those years, is a small town and most people won't know of it but it lost over 13,000 seamen during the war, Just that one small town."¹¹³ Combined with a number of other features of the 1950s, this had the effect of turning the normally quiescent group of North Eastern ports to come alongside Liverpool as the well spring of the seaman's discontent in the later period.

What the 1940s had witnessed was a recognised change after the war time experience in the extreme casualisation of the labour force. Conditions had changed but not enough for those who wanted a much more regulated

supply of labour without any discrimination against specific sections of the workforce. This involved the State. In Liverpool, the committee was aware of the traditions of "backing out" but sought to harness this form of seamens dissent with another of working within the union. Too many factors were against it however and the fight for the demand of the "ship's committee" as an extension of union activity became just as isolated as the other strand of more marginalised militancy of the quayside.

Irrespective of the words of the strikers that, "The real thing is the disciplined labour force enforced with Union discipline because I've no doubt that's the real enemy of the owner, the disciplined Union. The wild eyed revolutionary. He can handle him but he cannot handle the disciplined Trade Unionist."¹¹⁴ The strike committees were outmanoeuvred with such sentiments that came from the Union Leadership that they were little more than the sharks, crimps and pariahs that had preyed upon the seamen of old. Here were past attitudes in changing circumstances that had originally come to frame the leading institutions of the industry together in a form of corporate protectionism.

Now after the war, "a complex act of reconciliation between the classes was being attempted. It was hoped to preserve the sense of one nation that war had created, by building a new and democratic community of which Commonwealth/Empire was the expression overseas and the welfare state at home."¹¹⁵ If full employment was

to end the class war then the other side of this coin was to be the harmony of the Community. This was why the rebels of 1947 were to be classed "outsiders" even if they wished for change within the union and pressed for more action by the State in the guarantees of full employment, without the tarnish of seamen into different groups of Company Men, Established Men and Unestablished Men.

Equally symptomatic was the Union's comment that, while all branches of Industry, "Church and State asks for a united effort towards recovery, one of Britains greatest and Important industries is being threatened by a few unemployed malcontents".¹¹⁶ A research officer at the National Union noted the significance of 1947 however and with it that definite strand of dissent that had always attempted to fight for change within the union. In the immediate post war period they had been outmanoeuvred yet, "the strike leaders gained in experience which was to be only handed on years later"¹¹⁷ and this was most notable after the middle years of the 1950s.

The Levels of Dissent, Part 3, The 1950s

"It must be stressed that pure spontaneity does not exist in history, it would come to the same thing as 'pure' mechanicity. In the most spontaneous movement it is simply the case that the elements of conscious leadership cannot be checked, have left no reliable document. It may therefore be said that spontaneity is characteristic of 'the history of the subaltern classes'."¹¹⁸

When dissent emerged again on a collective footing it was in the very different economic attitudes of the middle 1950s. It came from aboard the Liverpool liners, from crews that had been unionised virtually in the past decade and that from above. If the 1947 dispute had witnessed a level of dissent that wanted the formation of ships' committees as an extension of work within the union, the 1950s dispute could be characterised as a reversal of the trend; the formation of ships' committees was still in the air yet it was seen as an end in itself outside of the union.

The strike was thus characterised as being one of "teddy boys". It was only after the talk of "break-away" came into the air however that the old hard line words of Communism and subversive came into play and the old familiar methods, jailings for broken contracts, came into operation. In an epoch of quietism after all the despair of the 1930s and the brave battles of the 1940s had been fought, the 1950s became remarkable not only for the extension and Americanisation of the home market but for the battles that took place within major unions over the question of democracy.¹¹⁹ 1955 came in the middle of an epoch in which the different levels of dissent were not only raised but put into operation in and around the waterside. In this manner the seamen's sporadic rebellions and isolations became tempered within a wider industrial confrontation. Within this context, that line of dissent that had expressed itself outside of the union structures became even more circumspect.

Paradoxically when sociologists were proclaiming the embougeoisement values of the consumer oriented working class, "When the improvement of living standards and the adoption of some habits hitherto confined to the middle class may have made labour movements less radical",¹²⁰ transport workers of all descriptions were fighting on the questions of representations within the unions; questions that had characterised both wings of dissent with the seamen.

In this era of full employment however, the leadership of the seamen's union was aware "of those out to cause trouble". It would have agreed with the historian who stated that, "there was a rise of the bottom dog consciousness perhaps expressed best in the music in which the proletarian young discovered in this decade and which soon became the general idiom ... Its stars working class boys and later girls preferably from the least middle class assimilated backgrounds, such as the Liverpool or Bermondsey waterside."¹²¹ It coincided with the conception of diletantism which the "problems" of full employment brought with them.¹²²

That Liverpool was again the centre of this waywardness there could be little doubt. Even the Norwegian shipping office in the city felt compelled to comment that of the hundreds of young recruits not many were suitable; "after a couple of months they take their pay and look for a shore job. Then they become Teddy boys and are finished. Some do stick to the sea but not many from Liverpool. Liverpool boys are too much trouble."

This prompted the reply from the NUS that "there was no unemployment in the industry. Entry into the service was restricted so that no hard core of unemployment developed. I am not surprised that the type of boy who tries to go to sea on foreign ships is unsuitable - they are the chuck outs the Merchant Navy does not want."¹²³ The elements of control were there on recruitment and even within that the union took its own indomitable line with any dissidents.

The strikers of 1955 were classed as the young and dissatisfied, escaping from National Service by entering the Merchant Navy. Those in authority would have agreed with the description offered by a commentator of them being The Juke Box Boys, whose "regular, increasing and almost entirely unvaried diet of sensation without commitment is surely likely to help render its consumers less capable of responding openly and responsibly to life, is likely to induce an underlying sense of purposelessness in existence outside the limited range of a few immediate appetites. Souls which may have had little opportunity to open will be hard gripped, turned in upon themselves, looking out 'with odd dark eyes like windows' upon a world which is largely a phantasmagoria of passing shows and vicarious stimulations."¹²⁴ But if these were the sentiments of a latter day General Booth then Rock and Roll had replaced the Music Hall even if Maritime House was slow to notice.

It was within this context that the crew of the *Ascania* walked off their ship in the late May of 1955.

The crews of Britannic and Saxonia attended the meeting they called. The walk off came within the dock strike of that year with the dockers split between unions, the T&G and the National Association of Stevedores and Dockers, the "Blue" union, the Tugboatmen in a running feud with the T&G, the old Mersey Carters and Motormen still fighting for their place within the T&G machinery, the rail strike with different sections divided. The waterside was fragmented at every level.¹²⁵ We shall see later how this affected seamen.

The immediate complaint was to challenge agreements made between Union and shipowner but the issue as always developed into one of representation. "The position is confused" stated Sir Donald Anderson for the shipowners, 'The NUS of which the men are members are making every effort to get the men to return to work'.¹²⁶ Later the same day however James Scott, Liverpool District Secretary endeavoured to have the Ascania's men to return to work. He was repeatedly shouted down, "Above the uproar Scott told the men they would get nowhere without the union ... and nothing could be done until they returned to work".¹²⁷ A resolution was passed that demanded shorter hours, "and the recognition on board ship of their own elected officials".¹²⁸ In contrast to 1947 the fight it seemed was as much against the union in a manner of returning to the old quayside bargaining.

Cunard for their part emphatically denied that a deputation of strikers had been accepted at Cunard House.

"The company states that no such arrangements have been made and nor would they receive such a deputation without the local representative of the NUS being present."¹²⁹

The stewards and cooks who had been within the union little over a decade were taking action over the amount of time they were forced to work and the absence of any shipboard delegation to represent them. A seven man strike committee was elected and The Times reported that "there were hints that the dispute might spread to other ports". The messages of support for the strike and of no confidence in the union flowed in and while "The NUS called on all members to return to their vessels forthwith and carry out their duties in a loyal manner" seamen for their part had "had more than ten years of evasive promises from the union and that more than enough".¹³⁰

The strikers meanwhile had appointed an old AMWU man as their secretary, W. Ridley, and at a meeting on the 5th June another resolution of no confidence in the NUS was accepted.¹³¹ This was taken at the same time as a move to have the stoppage extended to other liners, notably at Southampton. However the fragmented manner in which the striking seamen could be seen to be isolated came in the way both owners and State constantly served reminders of the legitimacy of the NUS. The port of Liverpool employers stated that representations on any matter affecting conditions of service on board ships, "will be received only from and discussed with the NUS through the medium of the National Maritime Board".¹³²

After a week of action the seamen decided to send a letter to Sir W. Monkton at the Ministry of Labour asking him to intervene in the dispute and to Sir D. Anderson for the shipowners; the replies were the same; "Whilst always the most serious attention is given to the accredited Trade Union representatives the shipping owners could hardly be expected to re-open negotiations which have just been concluded."¹³³

And in further contrast when the suggestion was put to the strikers by a Liverpool member of the EC that a deputation of the strikers should be formed to meet the union, this proposal was firmly turned down. The strike leaders could emphasise that the strike was on behalf of Merchant Seamen and not against any one company yet in their attitude towards the NUS, their isolation was to become complete. This was reflected in the manner of which a "breakaway" union was proposed. It was a mark of desperation similar to the coastermen of 1933 and bore all the same traits of isolation when striking seamen had offered to go back to the company but not as members of the NUS. The historical irony was all too obvious in the proposed choice of a name: the body that had enrolled seamen as members from as early as 1912 but had been progressively isolated as the union entered into more and more comprehensive agreements with shipowner and state; "The British Seamans Union" had effectively ceased to exist before the Union and shipowners entered the second and most comprehensive agreements which led to the National Maritime Board in 1920 and the joint control of labour as

the apotheosis within the transformation of the union.

The Hegelian farce of history the second time around was all there when, "at Liverpool yesterday 500 seamen voted in favour of forming a breakway known as The British Seaman's Union. Only a small number voted against the proposal but several stressed the futility of such a move."¹³⁴ This time the seamen were caught in action that had embraced all the waterfront, and indeed had revealed all the shortcomings of a quasi casual labour force with its own traditions against an authoritarian union.¹³⁵ A William Armitage voiced that other strand of dissent before he was drowned down, "If such a union was formed then they would be in exactly the same position of the dockers at the present moment. We will have to recruit from the NUS than find ourselves against the TUC and the shipowners will still refuse to deal with us."¹³⁶ Here was the reality; the recognition that the "Blue Union" on the docks had itself broken from the T&G in 1923 and had henceforth been confined as outsiders within negotiating committees. The Blue Union could only achieve recognition by other dockers' dissatisfaction with the T&G. That the two unions still existed to split the dockers in the major ports in the 1950s was to a certain extent a measure of the dockers' local strength.¹³⁷ An alternative union for seamen had been defeated long before in the 1920s and at best remained clothed in the shadows of the past as heroic dream.

The coalescence of forces above the seaman's head was too strong to permit any deviancy notwithstanding the

strikers' comments that "a breakaway could be formed in a short time".¹³⁸ This was stated from an obvious point of weakness. With the news that another telegram had been sent to the Conservative Minister of Labour asking him to intervene in the dispute it was quietly disclosed to the strikers that "the committee had decided for a time to shelve the idea of a breakaway". When the minister's reply came it confirmed that last decision; after stating the futility of the strike: "the Minister added that he could not intervene in an unofficial stoppage and could only advise them to accept the recommendations of the National Union".¹³⁹ This came at the same time as a statement from the union's General Secretary on the refusal of the Queen Elizabeth's crew to join the strike, "I know the Queen Elizabeth will crack this thing wide open. I think we have broken the strike in Britain always remembering it is not just the Cunard Service which is at stake but the reputation of our industry built up over the past thirty years."¹⁴⁰ These were the comments of Tom Yates, with talk of resorting to form a "breakaway union" this gave the NUS all the case it needed.

It is instructive to compare the dockers and the seamen here especially in relation to the isolation of the agitator. While Thomas Yates was giving the crew of the Queen Mary an impassioned speech, stating that certain benefits would accrue without any action and they in turn, "unanimously passed a vote of confidence in the NUS and gave an assurance that regardless of any element they would take the ship to sea";¹⁴¹ John Tudor the National

Secretary for the Docks Group TGWU, stood on the Dock Road in Liverpool and urged dockers to go in. He told hundreds through a loudspeaker that there would be a special meeting to discuss the situation, "Your Job" said Mr Tudor, "is inside those gates." "Inviting the dockers to follow him he walked through the lines of pickets of the "Blue" union. No-one followed him."¹⁴² Compare the dockers split down the middle - 11,000 strikers to 7,000 non strikers in the dispute - in Liverpool and the revolt of the seamen could be seen in greater perspective.¹⁴³ The coalition of forces in that area of transport were in much greater control. In that respect any opposition became isolated and as such, so did the character of the resisters themselves.

Listen to this account to note the way in which this isolation among seamen was given its place. One of the aspects of the strike was supplied by the Master of the Saxonica, entered into the log book on the 13th June 1955. "At about 1500 hours I was informed by the chief steward that a meeting was taking place on the after deck and a large number of the ship's company were present. I gave orders that these men were to muster abaft the 1st class shelter on the sports deck. On the muster being reported I met the assembled crew and endeavoured to ascertain the reason for their unrest. Reasonable progress was being made when an interruption occurred caused by a man afterwards ascertained to be a member of the Ascania firewatch who had boarded Saxonica from Brittanica by means of the after mooring ropes. This man was

obviously an experienced agitator of the wrong type and in a very few minutes before being moved from his vantage point on top of the 1st class shelter, had swayed the crew present from their state of apparent willingness to continue the voyage - they having been assured that shortages would be made good - to a frame of mind that they were not prepared to carry out their duties ... and so forced me to the reluctant conclusion that I must return my ship to her berth in dock and abandon voyage."¹⁴⁴

Agitators of the wrong type, was this the new "casual" of full employment whose antecedents had been categorised as the volcanic masses and latterly as communists?¹⁴⁵ Agitators of the wrong type; not only did they come from a different "class" but there was something not quite right about them. Had not the dispute started over the disciplining of stewards with the playing of their guitars? Developments of the 1950s took in the young seamen as much as they did the waterside working class yet their demands were strangely similar from an older time; "this then was the style of an act which sanctified the outsider. As far as the squares knew Charlie Parker had been a man making silly noises on a saxophone. But there was no escaping Johnny Ray. There he was, deaf, neurotic, crying, camp, crucifying himself twice nightly to everybody's delight. Driving himself to public orgasm in, 'Oh what a night it was'."¹⁴⁶

Yet after the strike had failed to spread to other ports, there was no institution to which the strikers could turn.¹⁴⁷ The Union could afford to wait.

Isolation was complete. Mr Bull the Liverpool spokesman for the NUS "reported that the union had still had no official complaint from men who are unemployed and in breach of their contract by their own will", and from London came the verdict that "these Liverpool men broke their contract of service and placed themselves on the wrong side of the law. The union membership remain assured that we can give no countenance to indiscipline, recklessness and disruptive action of this nature".¹⁴⁸

This was the rule of law, of State and stability within the industry. The apotheosis of the triad. From the union's point of view, asked why he had delayed so long and eventually never met with any of the strike committee Yates commented that he was not prepared to meet men, "responsible for advising other men to break their contracts and commit offences under the Merchant Navy Shipping Acts". He pointed out that seafarers had never had to refer cases to arbitration as they had always settled problems through the National Maritime Board. This was in oblique reference to the sending of messages to Ministers of State by the strikers and the thought that they could possibly set up a breakaway union. "With few exceptions the strikers of 1955 had only entered the industry since the war"; what is more in a section of the workforce that had only experienced full unionisation in that past decade. "The problem was an old one for the union however. They would have to educate them to judge the union's progress and give the negotiating machinery a further chance to improve conditions."¹⁴⁹

Forced into a stalemate there was little the strike committee could do except, with diminishing odds, to extend the struggle. There was no line of communication upwards through the union. In time they were forced back to work through a mixture of voluntarism and coercion when Cunard paid extra rates for the Queen Mary to sail and at the same time issued injunctions against those strikers who were of the age liable for conscription to the National Services. This brought questions in parliament about the liaison between the shipowners and the State in such matters but there was little to be done as long as the union remained welded within such a structure.¹⁵⁰ In the process of representation, the strikers could not be allowed to have any form of ships' representation. The teddy boys, the decade's equivalent with the communism, casualism and syndicalism of earlier times, "numbered only some five or six hundred out of a membership of 80,000. Recognition of unofficial bodies would imperil the union members and would endanger future negotiations."¹⁵¹

The 1955 stoppage, although it belonged firmly within that strand of dissent that had not fully recognised the Union, did not take place in isolation. The Liverpool waterside of the 1950s posed these questions in a much wider light. A common feature linking the disputes between gig boat men, tug boat men, dockers, carters and motormen and seamen was their fights with the centralised Unions over aspects of local control. The tradition, a legacy of casualism, of "working your own corner" was nowhere more manifest than on the docks.

The numbers of the Transport and General Workers were more than halved. Yet in wanting nothing more than to be free of centralised "unrepresentative" structures the struggle on the docks was held up as a mirror to the seamen; for while the massive desertion, "really shook" the giant Transport Union, it was ultimately divisive for the dockers.¹⁵² What had historically characterised the decades from the 1920s onwards between the different levels of dissent amongst seamen was all to be found on the Liverpool waterside of the 1950s. Questions of having little to do with a major union that gave such little attentions to the problems of the casual trades and local control; while on the other hand, the Port Workers Committee that came into being after the stoppage of 1943 was for working upwards for change within the unions.¹⁵³ For the former the Industrial League pamphlet, "Hands off the Blue Union" describes the syndicalist philosophy in relation to the big brother T&G and ultimately towards the TUC/Labour Party alliance with its emphasis on local militancy and control spreading outward to form wider alliances instead of being imposed upon from a centralised and divorced centre. The Blue Union was not affiliated to the Labour Party and one of its spokesmen in Liverpool stated that, "Labour or Conservative the slums have stayed the same around here."¹⁵⁴

On the other hand a spokesman for that other strand of dissent could see only a weakening of strength, when for thousands of Merseyside dockers the only issue was to become merely fighting for the recognition of the "Blue

Union". "We reiterate the policy of the Liverpool Port Workers Committee in relation to the intentions of the Blue Union in Liverpool. Any strike of the one precipitated can only further serve to split and divide us further and to divide dockers from the main tasks of fighting to have implemented 'the dockers charter'."¹⁵⁵ It seemed to bear sustenance to the fact that not only were dockers and seamen divided as groups, "sea and land transport met at the port but their condition of functioning and existence were different",¹⁵⁶ but would continue to be split amongst themselves with their different levels of dissent towards authoritarian policies issued from above.

We have seen since 1911/1920 how Liverpool was viewed as a centre of many different strands of dissent, of how "control" issues always seemed to be sparked off from there and thus the problems that arose with the actual formation and legitimation of general unions on the waterside carried over from there into different periods. The General Secretary echoed the same feelings when he stated in 1956 that Liverpool "has been the most difficult port in the history of this organisation".¹⁵⁷

It was notable after issuing this sentence that he made an immediate comparison with the early 1920s when there had been three unions operating for seamen, "and where it's a question of more than one body the case is weakened". The antagonisms caused "made the NSFU suffer all down the line".¹⁵⁸

The question remains that if rebellion amongst

seamen was confined to "the furtive acts of individuals, then ships' committees then to ideas of breakaway unionsim" to what extent did this follow the example set down by the docks, where casualism and its form of militancy was much more localised and gave rise to such sectarian traditions? For example, Birkenhead's bad relationship with the Liverpool docks which made it in many ways the heart of the Blue Union - yet still enclosed it within the same port structure.¹⁵⁹ When the contradictions of this relationship were exposed in 1955 between dockers and the major Transport and General Workers Union what examples were given to seamen? In the aftermath of their own defeat the stewards had seen the dockers more divided than ever; like the recently elected Conservative's relationship with free trade, strands of seamen's dissent went one way then another. At one point during a decade, a moment of explosion followed by intemperate bursts of individual action against a specific ship or company, was there to be no other way?¹⁶⁰

Up until a decade before they had not had a full union membership. With the cooks and stewards "adding a further volatile interest to the shipping industry" it took until the middle 1950s for the latter to come to terms with a union machinery¹⁶¹ that they had bitterly hated since 1921 and that attitudes formed either through apathy or despair in earlier periods had themselves to be worked out; before a coherent opposition could be placed before the union.

This had certain parallels with another group of casual workers, the Mersey Carters' and Motormen's union that had entered the T&G in 1947 and had fought through years of bickering and local actions, "before our members came to grips with the machinery of the big union and started to work to change it".¹⁶²

For the seaman however, the portrait of this quarter century is of a seagoing membership isolated and without any means of control and that dissent occurred on a mass individualised basis except the once a decade strikes originating in Liverpool. It made General Secretaries "Philosophically resigned to the fact that Liverpool is full of dissidents"¹⁶³ whilst the tendencies of the 1920s towards breakaway unionism and the union's arch resistance with the shipowners and the State, made certain of a continued isolation.

Too much time had gone by and with it changing circumstances, to talk of the old dream of a sole union power base across the waterside. At the grass roots level it was through that other strand of dissent, the tradition of working and liaising upwards through the machinery, that the Port Workers Committee would try and heal the rift between the different sections.¹⁶⁴ It was notable that after 1951 this committee contained all shades of opinion, from Catholic right wing labour through to Communists and Syndicalists. It could not prevent the splits of 1955 yet it did its best to smooth over them for the future. This was at a time when anything unofficial

was frowned upon.¹⁶⁵ Even the Communist president of the Confederation of Shipbuilding, an extremely well known figure from the 1930s in the Liverpool Labour movement, felt compelled to tell the strikers that they were acting against their own best interests, and Merseyside shipyard workers could not support them.¹⁶⁶

It is here that other workers on the waterside come into perspective. For years, activists amongst the dockers and the Seamen had encouraged liaison and for as many years the appeals were but of momentary importance. Dockers supported seamen in the three illustrated disputes but it was always in wider issues involving themselves; the formation of the Irish Seamans Union in 1933, the Canadian Seamans Union between 1947 - 1949 and the refusals of certain work regarding "blacked" ships during their own inter-union dispute in 1955. It was more particularly after 1955 that the seamen's way forward was to come in relation to their own union aided and abetted at local level by dockers and other groups within the Port Workers Committee.¹⁶⁷

If the 1930s was characteristic of an individualised militancy then in the latter 1950s this form of action as a mode of dissent to the Union was on the wane. So often however collective outbreaks of dissent depend as much upon the individual sparks of the past years as on the contingent social and economic situation. Resisting this the Union was quite happy to categorise the 1955 strikers as the young and discontented and to state of them as with their songs, "all have been doctored for

presentation so that they have the kind of beat which is currently popular ... they are delivered with great precision and competence so that the noise would be sufficient to fill a good sized ballroom rather than a converted shop in the main street. The young men waggle one shoulder or stare, as desperately as Humphrey Bogart across the tubular chairs."¹⁶⁸ The description of the tunes and the ones who listened was woven together by Richard Hoggart much in the same way as Sea Lawyers came to be associated with Casual Bums, Syndicalists with Empire breakers, Communists with the Disestablished Class. All were not proper seamen according to the Union at various moments of its history. A history that had outmanoeuvred the many different forms of that dissent.

And in no small way due to its relationships with the other dominant institutions of British shipping. James Scott the Union's national organiser, promoted after the dispute in Liverpool, the same James Scott shouted down by strikers in Liverpool as being unrepresentative of seamen, stated at the Union's General Meeting in 1956: "In the post-war period criticism has been levelled from many sources at the Trade Union movement. It is alleged that the membership's leaders are too distant from the membership ... At no time am I prepared to accept that allegation in so far as this union is concerned. Nevertheless I have felt there was a need for closer liaison. My approach to my new position was to endeavour to effect a closer link with the membership and your executive committee ... because primarily this

is an industrial union."¹⁶⁹

This was one of the few occasions where there had been conceded the necessity for closer liaison at the waterside; with its reference to industrial unionism it echoed the fact that no longer could the running of the Union be left to the patronage and moral codes of the 19th century. No longer could it be merely a relationship as the one that Charles Booth had outlined that, "in accepting their leaders' discipline lies their only hope of success".¹⁷⁰

Within this the most pressing problem was for representation from below. It was here that all strands of waterside dissidence presented themselves in their full complexity. That they had lasted until the 1950s showed clearly the tensions between the environment of production and the relationships of that production mediated in the world of shipping by the Union and its tight hierarchy. This was echoed that, "in the absence of shipboard representation it was impossible for Trade Unionism to take the form it did elsewhere; at rank and file level to consist of a series of nuclei of active members."¹⁷¹

The 1947 stoppage had shown that even the most committed member working for change could be isolated; 1955 had shown the futility of that other strand of dissent. What had been the overwhelmingly dominant position of the union since its transformation between 1911 - 1920, had seasoned its moral righteousness in the protection and supremacy of an industry, "as National Asset", had

been when, "the membership could not play any continually active part, union organisation became the exclusive domain of the shore based full time officers".¹⁷²

This was its power and this was its reason yet all had come through a process of historical negotiation. For the seamen, the outsiders to this relationship, there had been the added fragmentation of different modes of dissent which had complicated their problems. Communist philosophers might assert that, "One's conception of the world is a response to certain specific problems posed by reality which are quite real and specific and original in their immediate relevance. How is it possible to consider the present and a quite specific present with a mode of thought elaborated from a past which is often remote and superceded."¹⁷³ The truth was that it was all too easy for many seamen, given the nature of their relationship to the Union and that organisation's conception of its members.

Having had to live under this tutelage, from being classed as Syndicalists, Casuals, Communists and malcontent teddy boys, the equivalent of latterday casuals, the strands of seamen's dissent had always finally been isolated. In this the more perceptive noted that within their own circumstances a dominance had been achieved that stemmed not solely from economic conditions but ran to the lengths of law and civil society in which seamen were placed between intermeshing agencies that governed not only pay but conditions of conduct, modes of behaviour, codes of criminality and civility in a permanent hierarchy

of relations. In opposition to this their actions could not be separated from the history of actions, nor culture from the history of culture. Their opposition had been fragmented, broken and isolated at every stage. It was to this problem, to the recognition of the union as a pawn in a wider intermeshing flow of control that brought them in a search after the 1950s to reconcile the strands of dissent and fight for change within. To fight moreover against the conception of a world in which they merely existed below the power of the institutions and "the consent given by the masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant social group".¹⁷⁴

It was not to assume that the whole battle could be fought out on the barricades of ships' committees or a close down on the waterside but that the problems went deeper and were formulated far from the rivers and seafronts. A recognition that political behaviour is not "purely adaptive or reformist, totally under the control of the unrestrained powers of intervention of the state and of the ruling class" but the extent of these dominant groups within the industry in which the union was so often the junior partner.¹⁷⁵

In many respects it was the failure to see the Union as junior partner that could be said to have contributed to the failure of movements inside of and outside that organisation. Nevertheless it was the mantle of undisputable authority and intolerance that its leadership

wore that provided the return party to those same forces of rebellion. After 1955 with the whole waterside wracked with internal dissent there was a move towards all sections fighting for change within the Union.

In hindsight this is what Communists had been saying since the 1920s yet it was a far broader movement that had contributed to the formation of the National Union as a recognised force and consequently a far broader group that became subsequently alienated with its pursuits and procedures. We have noted how old Syndicalists formed the AMWU and how Cooks and Stewards remained outside the Union until the 1940s. Whether it took the decade after the war to convince these elements that the Union was worth fighting for - a process similar to the Merseyside Carters in relation to the T&G - or whether the experience of the waterside gave ample illustration of what "Break-away Unionism" actually meant in the 1950s is an open question. It was notable that after this time however all the major fights were to take place within the Union and contain all tendencies of dissent. In this, what the latter 1950s were to bring was the reconciliation of that line of dissent that had always lain outside the Union structure. More importantly perhaps was that a number of militants in different ports came to work on the coast,¹⁷⁶ "For whom the elements of conscious leadership would always want to be checked and documents kept to record all progress".¹⁷⁷

Footnotes to Chapter 3, Part I, The 1930s

1. A. Gramsci, Collected Works, Vol. 3, Turin, 1949, p. 9.
2. J. Scott, On the Anniversary of His Promotion to National Organiser, AGM, NVS, 1956.
3. T. Lane, "A Crew of Scoundrels: British Merchant Seamen 1850 - 1910", Unpublished MSS, University of Liverpool, 1983, p. 29.
4. Pictorial Weekly, 1930, p. 412. TUC Library.
5. J. McFarlane in a review of C. Bollinger's Against the Wind: The New Zealand Seamans Union. The Walsh era led from 1927 to 1963. Prior to this Walsh had coordinated the Seamans and Port Workers Union in support of the striking NSFU and AMWU members from Australia in 1925. Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History, No. 27, 1970, p. 78.
6. M. O'Riordan, "Larkin in America", Saothar; Irish Labour History Society, No. 4, p. 53.
7. E. Tupper, Seamans Torch (Hutchinson, London) 1938, p. 295.
8. C. Bell and H. Newby, "Sources of variation in agricultural workers images of society", Sociological Review, 21, 1973, p. 234.
9. T. Lane, "Work, Discipline and Liverpool Seamen c. 1850 - 1920", Unpublished MSS, University of Liverpool, 1979, p. 23.
10. B. Bright, "Shellback: Reminiscence of a Mariner", eds. P. and P. Seeger, History Workshop Occasional Series, 1979, p. 28.
11. Interview with Billy Donaghie, November 12, 1978.
12. Liverpool Daily Post, June 30th 1933.
13. Liverpool Echo, July 1st 1933.
14. Liverpool Post and Mercury, July 15th 1933.
15. Ibid.
16. Statement by R. Spenge, General Secretary NUS, Journal of Commerce and Shipping Telegraph, July 4th 1933.
17. Ibid.

18. Journal of Commerce, July 5th 1933.
19. Liverpool Echo, July 12th 1933.
20. E. Tupper: his following comment was an excellent exposition by which the union viewed dissent: "This disturbance which had no connection with seamens 'real grievances' was a deliberate attack to wreck the union and its relations with employers." Seamans Torch, op.cit., p. 297.
21. Lloyds Register Nos. 144235 (Lairdsbrook)
132019 (Lady Leinster)
Registrar of Shipping and Seamen, Wantrissant, Cardiff.
22. F.J. Lindop, "Unofficial Trade Union Militancy in the 1920s", Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History, No. 38, 1979, p. 29.
23. F.H. Hanham, Report of Enquiry into Casual Labour in the Merseyside Area, H. Young, 1930, p. 72.
24. NUS AGM Report, No. 45, 1934, p. 28.
25. E.J. Hosbbawm, "Should the Poor Organise?", New Society, May 1979, p. 23.
26. Liverpool Post and Mercury, November 6th 1933.
27. The Times.
28. NUS AGM Report, No. 47, 1936, p. 82.
29. Ibid.
30. R. Williams: "The first years working of the Liverpool Docks Scheme", Liverpool Economic and Statistical Society, 1914.
31. J. Phelan: The Name's Phelan, London, 1948, p. 276.
32. Seamans Charter, ed. F. Champion, No. 23, 1980.
33. J. Woddis, Under the Red Duster, London 1939 (1947) p. 82.
34. Liverpool Echo, June 23rd 1931.
35. Shipowners constantly complained of indiscipline. From the 1920s to the 1930s Alfred Holts estimated that they lost £50,000 a year through seamen pilfering from Liverpool ships alone. Fairplay commented: "The Court then proceeded to deal with the three delinquents and fined them £5 each. To those who know something of the extent of this evil of theft and pilferage, such a punishment seems to be farcical. It cannot act as a

- detrerant." Fairplay, June 23rd 1931, p. 978.
36. Interview with Sid Foster, Merseyside Industrial Organiser 1947 - 1960, Communist Party. Denbigh, N. Wales, September 27th 1978.
 37. S. Hill, The Dockers, London 1976, p. 102.
D. Wilson, The Dockers, Penguin, 1972.
 38. Journal of Commerce, July 17th 1933.
 39. D. Caradog-Jones, Social Survey of Merseyside, Liverpool University Press, 3 vols, 1934, p. 89.
 40. J. Woddis, op.cit., p. 92.
 41. M. Thornton, British Shipping, Cambridge University Press, 1939, p. 222.
 42. P. O'Mara, Autobiography of a Liverpool Irish Slummy, London, 1934, p. 283.
 43. T. Lane, op.cit., p. 28.
 44. It made little difference whether the ship was old, worn out, or not. The ages differed considerably between the Phidias and the Orbita, 1913 - 1915 and the Deilo and the Pinto, 1928, yet dissent was found in all of them.
Registrar of Shipping and Seamen, Llantrissant, Cardiff.
 45. Interview with Dr C. Taylor, MD, November 1979.
 46. The Times, November 6th 1933.
 47. Interview with W. Kerrigan, Seaman, Liverpool Trades Council, September 9th 1979.
Hobsbawm, op.cit., p. 24.
 48. On the London docks for example the standing joke was that the permanent men, the perms, "would never come out". It was the way the company, the PLA in this instance, had fashioned them. Interview with J. Wright, Millwall, November 1983.
 49. Hobsbawm, op.cit., p. 24.
 50. Frank Campion and Bill Donaghie were prime examples of this, yet there were many others to a lesser degree who jumped ship as adventurers and returned to Liverpool as committed trade unionists and political activists. See also:
Frank Deegan, No Other Way, Liverpool 1980.
Tony Lane, "Stan Coulthard. A Merseysider in Detroit", History Workshop Journal, No. 13, 1982.

51. T. Lane, "Work, Discipline and Liverpool Seamen", University of Liverpool, 1979, p. 23.
52. As Chapter One attempted to illustrate, the actual conditions under which the NSFU had to organise, turned with the "transformation" of the union after 1920 into characterising any dissent as breakaway trade unionism. For the leadership, this became a cause celebre, knowing it would always find a certain resonance. As Bill Hogarth noted in 1964, "no trade union anywhere in the world has a more colourful history".
The Story of the Seaman, NUS, 1964.
53. E. Rathbone: Report of an Inquiry into the Conditions of Dock Labour at the Liverpool Docks, Liverpool, 1904, p. 17.
54. J. Common. "Hot Hymnal - The Sweeper Up", The Adelphi, Vol. XIII, September 1936; reprinted as Revolt Against an Age of Plenty, ed. H. Beynon, Newcastle, 1980, p. 72.
55. F.C. Hanham, Report on Enquiry into Casual Labour in the Merseyside Area, H. Young, London, 1930.
56. A. Gramsci, op.cit., p. 23.

Part Two, The 1940s

57. G. Foulser, Seamans Voice, MacGibbon and Kee, London, 1961, p. 115.
58. J. McFarlane, "Our Seamen", Trade Union Register, 1970, eds. K. Coates and T. Topham, p. 138.
59. F.J. Lindop, "Seaman and Dockers Unofficial Trade Union Militancy in 1920s", Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History, No. 38, 1979, pp. 13-15.
60. B. Flynn, Strikes, ed. R. Leeson, Allen and Unwin, 1973, p. 139.
61. McFarlane, op.cit., p. 140.
62. For example The Times commissioned a special report on port workers in Liverpool: notably the way casual attitudes refused to die in what was supposedly a controlled and efficient war-time economy. "The Welt", The Times, August 14th 1942.
63. Interview with Frank Champion, Seaman, editor, Seamans Charter, February 7th 1979.

64. Interview with Jim Slater, March 21st 1984.
65. Liverpool Echo, October 17th 1947.
66. A.H. Jenks, "Continuity of Employment in the Merchant Navy", University of Liverpool MA, 1953, p. 14.
67. E.J. Hobsbawm, "Trade Unions on the Waterside", Labouring Men, Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1964, p. 207.
68. Interview with Frank Campion.
69. Journal of Commerce, October 25th 1947.
70. Liverpool Daily Post, October 27th 1947.
71. The general strike in France in the winter of 1947 had originated with the Communist led Seaman and Dockers Union with wide support from the anarcho-syndicalists especially in Nantes and Marseilles. A. Sturmthal, "Nationalization and Workers Control in Britain and France", Journal of Political Economy, Vol. 61, 1953, p. 77.
72. Thomas Yates as Assistant General Secretary (Catering), NUS AGM Report, No. 53, 1945.
73. Ibid., p. 47.
74. G. Foulser, op.cit., p. 70.
75. Jenks, op.cit., p. 15.
76. Liverpool Echo, October 28th 1947.
77. C. Booth, Merseyside District Offical, NUS, Journal of Commerce, October 27th 1947.
78. Liverpool Daily Post, October 29th 1947.
79. Journal of Commerce, November 4th 1947.
80. Bill Hart lay across the tracks of a railway wagon bringing supplies to one particular ship. Interview with Mrs Pat Taylor, November 13th 1979.
81. Liverpool Echo, November 3rd 1947.
82. Ibid., November 12th 1497.
83. Statement from the Merseyside Rank and File Committees, Liverpool Daily Post, November 6th 1947.
84. Journal of Commerce, November 7th 1947.

85. Barney Flynn was to state, "I will be the happiest man in the world walking down Scotland Road and for others to say, 'He went to prison for the seamen'." Letter from Bill Hart to Mrs Pat Taylor nee Smyth.
86. Percy Knight, National Organiser NUS, Liverpool Echo, November 13th 1947.
87. Debate on Ships Committees, NUS AGM Report, No. 56, 1948, pp. 77-80.
88. Ibid. Mr Warner EC Member, London.
Mr J. Thompson, District Secretary, SW Coast.
89. Ibid. Mr Hutchinson, Catering Official.
90. Ibid. Thomas Yates referring to the help offered to the relatives of the imprisoned seamen by Mr Booth, Merseyside District Official.
91. It was estimated at one stage that over 30 women were organised in the campaign to attract help and support for the jailed seamen. Besides Bill Hart's sister Jean, they were led by Mrs Minnie Coward, wife of Jack Coward one of Liverpool's major sea-going communists and a major figure within the Merseyside labour movement.
Interview with Mrs Pat Taylor.
92. Ernest Jones, NUS AGM Report, No. 56, 1948.
93. Ibid., Delegate from Dundee.
94. Any distinction made between officials of the union and seamen themselves was immediately rescinded by the Chair. "Mr Gray I must bring you to order. The same as last year you said 'officials and men' and I take strong exception to that."
Thomas Yates as General Secretary was well aware of his heritage.
NUS AGM Report, No. 56, 1948.
95. Mr Lowry, a catering rating from Southampton.
NUS AGM Report, No. 56, 1948.
96. R. King, No Paradise: Tales from the SS Hawk, Hutchinson, London, 1947, p. 167.
97. "Within the NUS the full-time officers are a very powerful oligarchy. Their defeat is theoretically possible, but in practice it is doubtful whether the official line has ever been defeated. A close examination of the NUS AGM Reports over 25 years, 1943 - 1968, produced no evidence contrary to this point."
McFarlane, op.cit., p. 139.

98. Interview with Sid Foster, September 27th 1978.
99. It must be stated however that residual attitudes were not just confined to workers at the waterside but were relevant to the total structure of shipping throughout this period.
G.S. Sturmey, British Shipping and World Competition, London, 1962, p. 377.
100. Mr C. Booth, Merseyside District Official, and Mr T. Yates, General Secretary NUS.
Liverpool Echo, October 25th 1947.
101. Ships records of The Algerian and The Mercian - Ellerman and Pappyani Company - The Scholar and The Tactician - T&J Harrisons - Prometheus and Mentor - Ocean Steamship Co - and Parthia and Samaria - Cunard.
Registry of Shipping and Seamen, 1949, Llantrissant, Cardiff.
102. Ibid. Articles of Samaria No. 145923 Lloyds List, 1949.
103. Ibid. Parthia No. 182417.
104. Ibid. Mercian No. 182413: Tactician No. 149683.
105. Ibid. Mentor No. 181078.
106. Op.cit., Parthia.
107. Interview with Jack Kinahan, Research Officer NUS, April 12th 1978.
108. G. Foulser, op.cit., p. 131.
109. Liverpool Daily Post, April 12th 1952.
110. "Carinthia" Lloyds List No. 187137.
Registry of Shipping and Seamen, 1955, Llantrissant, Cardiff.
111. Interview with John Richards and Frank McKenna, The American Bar, Liverpool, October 1977.
112. E.J. Hobsbawm, "Should the Poor Organise", New Society, May 1979.
113. Interview with Jim Slater, September 1983, NUS, Maritime House.
114. Tony Lane, Interview with Bill Kerrigan, September 1983, p. 9.
115. E. Wilson, Only Half-way to Paradise, Tavistock, London, 1980, p. 17.

116. Thomas Yates, General Secretary NUS, Liverpool Daily Post, October 25th 1947.
117. J. Kinahan, "Strategies and Concepts within the British Merchant Navy", Journal of Maritime Studies, 1974, p. 7.

Part Three, The 1950s

118. A. Gramsci, Prison Notebooks, ed. G. Hoare and G. Nowell Smith, Laurence and Wishart, 1971, p. 196.
119. A. Marwick, British Society Since 1945, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1982, pp. 163-66.
120. E.J. Hobsbawm, Industry and Empire, Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1968, p. 290.
121. Ibid., p. 290.
122. Statement by Thomas Yates, General Secretary NUS, The Times, June 9th 1955.
123. Liverpool Daily Post, February 18th 1955.
124. R. Hoggart, The Uses of Literacy, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1958, p. 202.
125. The six most important strikes of 1955, The Times, June 20th 1955.
126. Sir D. Anderson, Chairman of Shipowners at NMB, The Times, June 3rd 1955.
127. Liverpool Echo, June 3rd 1955.
128. Journal of Commerce, June 4th 1955.
129. Ibid.
130. The Times, June 11th 1955.
131. Journal of Commerce, June 6th 1955. Ridley had been an active member of the AMWU at Hull during the time of the 1925 strike.
132. Liverpool Daily Post, June 10th 1955.
133. The Statement by the Union concluded that, "Liverpool will begin shortly to wither at the roots (by) a group of men who are in breach of their contract and of law, by their own will." The Times, June 10th 1955.

134. Journal of Commerce, June 9th 1955.
135. Indeed it was interesting to note how the press characterised the Labour Party where in the House of Commons, "the Socialists rejected Communist influence in the strike".
Liverpool Daily Post, June 11th 1955.
136. Journal of Commerce, June 9th 1955.
137. W. Hunter: "Hands Off the Blue Union", A Labour Review Pamphlet, October 1955, p. 6. The British Library.
138. L. Hargreaves, Strike Committee Leader in Liverpool, Journal of Commerce, June 9th 1955.
139. Ibid., June 10th 1955.
140. Liverpool Echo, June 10th 1955.
141. Journal of Commerce, June 9th 1955.
142. Ibid., June 7th 1955.
143. A good example of the dockers localism and strength came from the Surrey Timber Docks in London where thirty years before they had broken from the T&G. "Mr R.A. Pollard a member of the NA&D Executive - Blue - appealed to 2,000 men in the docks not to strike. 'I am not content to see you "led" by Merseyside into this strike. I don't want to see you suffer like you did last time. You won't gain anything from it, this is the wrong policy.' But only one man mounted the platform to support him and the appeal was rejected."
Liverpool Daily Post, May 24th 1955.
144. Ships Log, SS Saxonia, No. 135494. Registry of Shipping and Seamen, Llantrissant, Cardiff.
145. The NUS statement asserted that "certain non-seafarers and ex-seafarers are attempting to prevent men joining their ships and are using artificial complaints in an attempt to invoke the sympathy of good trade unionists."
The Times, June 16th 1955.
146. J. Nuttall, Bomb Culture, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1968, p. 26.
147. At one point the Queen Mary was delayed from sailing at Southampton. This brought a temporary success but was dispelled when Cunard immediately sought 49 injunctions from the courts in accordance with the Shipping Acts.
Journal of Commerce, June 21st 1955.

148. Journal of Commerce, June 18th 1955.
149. Ibid., June 22nd 1955.
150. David Logan MP for the waterside constituency of the North End of Liverpool (Scotland) stated "I want to tell the Minister of Labour that on the question of putting men into the army because they are out over a strike is going to cause more trouble in the Merchant Navy than I have ever experienced in Liverpool."
The Times, June 22nd 1955.
151. Journal of Commerce, June 22nd 1955.
152. "The recognition strike lasted seven weeks denied strike pay, repeatedly stabbed in the back by their Executive, unsupported by London T&GWU men and rapidly losing the support of the 'White' Union men in the Northern ports, the strikers were compelled to return to work." Disillusion and despondency were the results.
F. Deegan, There's No Other Way, Toulouse Press, Liverpool, 1980, p. 57.
153. Communists joined the port workers committee after the jailing of the Joint Docks Committee in 1951 and played a prominent role thereafter.
Interview with Bill Donaghie, March 5th 1980.
The point was also made about one employer who stated that he could work the port with only 6,000 of the 18,000 workers.
154. P. Kerrigan, "What Next for Britains Port Workers", Syndicalist Industrial League, London, December 20th 1958.
155. G.A. "Bunny" McKeachie, Vice-Chairman, Liverpool PWC, Liverpool Echo, May 17th 1955.
156. E.J. Hobsbawm, Labouring Men, Weidenfield and Nicholson, London, 1964, p. 222.
157. Thomas Yates referring to the aftermath of 1955.
NUS AGM Report, No. 64, 1956.
158. Ibid.
159. Even port worker activists from The Transport and General found it difficult to get a hearing "on the other side of the water".
B. Donaghie, November 1978.
160. This is the theme of a long time activist docker of the T&G, a Spanish war veteran and Communist Party member.
F. Deegan, There's No Other Way, Liverpool, 1980.

161. B. Moggridge, Labour Relations and Labour Costs, in G.S. Sturmev (ed.), British Shipping and World Competition, London, 1962, p. 290.
162. Interview with Hugh David, Divisional Officer responsible for Road Haulage T&G and an ex-member of the old Mersey Carters and Motormens Union. November 14th 1978.
163. Thomas Yates quoted in J. Hemingway's Conflict and Democracy, Oxford, 1978, p. 46.
164. H. Hikens, "The Liverpool Dockworkers in 1967", H. Hikens, ed., Building the Union: Studies in the Growth of the Workers Movement, Merseyside, 1756 - 1967, Toulouse Press, Liverpool, 1973.
165. Interview with Sid Foster, September 1977.
166. Leo McCree: obviously influenced by events at the docks. Liverpool Echo, June 18th 1955.
167. Interview with Frank Campion, February 1979.
168. R. Hoggart, op.cit., p. 202.
169. James Scott, "Organisation at the Docks", NUS AGM Report, No. 64, 1956.
170. C. Booth, Life and Labour in London, 1st Series, No. 3, London, 1902, p. 87.
171. Yet from the termination of the war there had been a consistent demand at the AGM for the implementation of shipboard representation.
McFarlane, op.cit., p. 138.
Hemingway, op.cit., p. 51.
172. T. Lane, "Work discipline and Liverpool seamen 1850 - 1920", Liverpool, 1979, p. 24.
173. A. Gramsci, Selections from the Prison Notebooks, eds. Q. Hoare and G. Nowell-Smith, Lawrence and Wishart, 1971, p. 324.
174. A. Gramsci, Collected Works, Vol. 3, Turin, 1949, p. 23.
175. G. Eley and K. Nield, "Why does Social History Ignore Politics?", Social History, 5, 1980, p. 265.
176. This was the case of Joe Kenny, Bill Kerrigan and Roger Woods in Liverpool, Jim Slater on the NE coast, Vernon Miner on the Bristol Channel. Combined with the activities of P. Neary and G. Foulser this overall provided more active liaison between militants in different ports.
177. A. Gramsci, op.cit., p. 196.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE RECAPTURING OF RADICALISM 1943 - 1968

The major concerns of this work have been the inter-relationships between different organisations, social ideas and social forces which then materialised in a framework that came to dominate seamen's lives. This Chapter will attempt to illustrate the tensions within these relationships when seamen began to organise a grass roots movement within their own organisation to challenge normally dominant ideas and practices. The effects of this action was to challenge in turn, the Organisation of Shipowners and the role of State and Law as it applied to the Shipping Industry.¹ As such, the centrepiece of this chapter is the great seamen's strike of 1966 which in the aftermath of the formation of the Reform Movement in 1960 further strained the three way relationships formed with such distinction in 1920. The breaking of these relationships was to concern the seamen not only with wider groupings of labour but with the traditional place reserved for them within the British Economy.²

One aspect of this, especially in the post war period when "a complex act of reconciliation between the classes was being attempted"³ was the action of the State to promote a manifestation which had been historically negotiated since 1920 by the dominant Institutions of the Shipping Industry. In placing itself at the centre stage

of the seamen's strike in 1966, the State came to act as broker for these relationships. With its categorizing of the seamen's dissent as "Communist inspired" it brought back to that stage all the old manners and philosophy of earlier Union leaders when dealing with seamen who dissented from their policies. It was a measure of the seamen's achievement between the years 1960 - 1966 that their own organisation could no longer categorize them in such a manner.

Earlier Union leaders had argued that their policies of "mutual respect and understanding"⁴, of collaboration with the other bodies of the Shipping Industry, were ultimately best for the Seamen and for Britain within the Aegis of Empire. Here was the point. Those days had gone yet the philosophy that underlay them still prevailed. Prevailed at one point only, that of maintaining seamen within a "unique" place, locked within shipping Law and of equal distance from other groups of workers. Shipowners found no such restraint when moving their capital out of these frameworks or within the financial empires of multinational companies. The State was the ultimate holder of these relationships.

The irony was that just as the State attempted to hold the old framework together it was in the process of being broken apart, just as "Labour's determined idealism about the Commonwealth suggested an ignorance of what the Commonwealth really stood for".⁵ On the one hand Seamen were refusing to be civilised from above in the 1960s whilst on the other, and much more importantly, was the

fusion of shipping interests into other forms of commercial enterprise that had traditionally been the dominant force in the direction of British Society. That the Seamen's Union, "going through a period of re-birth"⁶ should feature in that most bitter attack by the State in the form of Government upon a Union in this period frames the heart of the contradiction; the seamen as metaphors for the Empire within a rapidly changing world.

Here was the point. What the post war world had brought, after a breathing space that lasted until the 1950s, was Britain's continued decline as a Shipping Nation; "When I first went away to sea in 1955 shipping was bathing in the post war boom. The world's ports were full of red ensigns. Imperial dependencies, upon which the industry had grown and prospered, were still strong despite actual and immanent transfers of sovereignty. Yet seamen were bitter even then. They felt, with some reason, that their rewards were not commensurate with the degree of the nation's dependence upon them."⁷ Britain's continued decline as a shipping nation, from a post Imperial Empire state meant that into the 1960s even the old, stable and Colonial and Dominion markets came to be challenged. It made the seamen's bitterness even more acute, not out of sympathy with earlier Union policies but from the trappings of a system that had left them few crumbs.

The third decade after the war forms part of a particular historical watershed here, for just as the homogenisation of the unskilled working class took place in the years leading to 1920, the 1960s were characterised

by the calls for increasing democratisation within the Unions. Whilst massive numbers were stratified and isolated after 1920 and the Unions dominated by tight, authoritarian hierarchies; in the latter 1960s at the same time as important and democratic changes were to be made within and between waterside Trade Unions;⁸ the waterfront itself was to 'lose' such a great proportion of its labour in the combination of advanced technological developments and the diversification of shipping capital within the wider complexes of Capital we have mentioned above.

A shipping nation was challenged not in depression but in time of unprecedented expansion by other emerging nations formerly harnessed within the post Imperial rubric. As one commentator suggested, "One principal cause has been the old plutocratic system of colonies. Over the 1960s the developing world took off into a gigantic industrial surge."⁹ Combined with this there was a fundamental restructuring and redirection of British Capital just as had been apparent in the 1920s, and as then a return to the reorientation and dominance of the City of London over the affairs of industry. Shipping as a carrier of industry yet always a child of commerce was to be particularly hard hit by this development.

Within this process and amidst such complex sets of relationships it was not too much of a paradox to find Shipowners coming closer to the State to actively promote the latter's intervention within labour disputes, whereas before, Shipping Law and acquiescent Trade Unionism had been sufficient. Two major developments within the industry

presented themselves then during this post war period and were characteristic of the role of Shipping within the realms of wider British Society. The first was the Ship-owners' relationship to the State, to the seamen's Union and latterly to wider groupings of Merchant Capital. And secondly was the pressure to which an authoritarian Union was subjected from below, in order to make democratic changes and to meet with other groups of workers in enforcing those changes; and in doing so come to meet the State on radically different terrain to what had been negotiated in the years up to 1920 and which resulted in the formation of The National Maritime Board.

The theme of this chapter might well be entitled, "The interrupted flow of the Triad", for as the rank and file newspaper Seamans Charter noted in opposition to the claims of the Shipping Federation - that the NSFU/NUS had always been plagued by endemic breakaway groups of militant seamen - "We ask our readers to remember that the Shipowners have always wanted one Union of seamen and seamen only; the shipowners visibly trembled at the idea of seamen becoming part of a wider movement officially which would integrate further the links at local level."¹⁰ This was at a time when British Shipowners share of trade had fallen.¹¹

These concerns became more pressing after the great seamen's strike of 1966 and once again as in the transformation of the Union between 1910 and 1920 focused on seamen's relationships within the wider labour movement.¹²

The shipowners wanted the state utilised in every aspect of the industry providing it did not interfere with their notions of "commerce". Thus when the war brought into focus the desperate need for some form of regulated labour supply, shipowners would only comply if they thought it favourable to their interests and their conception of rationality within the industry. The General Council of British Shipping published a pamphlet also in 1943 to coincide with Government and charitable organisations concerning seamen. Entitled "Freedom and Efficiency" it maintained that "the suggestion that shipping could be operated as a department of state or by one or two National Corporations indicates a complete lack of understanding regarding the nature of shipping. Traders have always insisted on using the best ship carrying power available whatever may be its flag."¹³ Shipowners' fears concerned the actual power in running the industry. In every other aspect they were concerned that the State should give them as much assistance as possible.

This was echoed by the government in the immediate post war period through the exemption of new recruits to the industry having to face conscription to the Armed Forces. As Moggridge comments, "Norwegian owners have not enjoyed the benefit of a similar exemption and have had to face full employment as best they could; the results have been twofold; increased recruitment of foreigners and women; and high wages."¹⁴

It was in the years following however that

shipping's contribution to the balance of payments started to decrease. Expanding trade and markets in the post-war world no longer "automatically" found Britain amongst the leaders. This was not so much the feature of tonnage owned but rather in relation to the new types of bulk cargo vessels being built in Scandinavia and especially in Japan.¹⁵ Contracting trade and markets in the new epoch drove shipowners collectively to exhort Government to work more in line with their aspirations.

These exhortations came in a number of ways but not least "in the lessening of the excessive levels of taxation that have deprived the shipping trade of the money badly needed to maintain the tools of the trade. The Cunard company stating that ships were now four times as expensive as before the great war complained that the, "exchequer was eating away funds that were essential to the companies existence" and that of £47 million made between 1949 - 1953, £19 million had been paid in taxation. They argued that sufficient money was not being allowed to be held back to build new fleets. Government was implored to lessen taxation in this age of high costs; a cargo liner for the Brocklebank Company (one of the company's subsidiaries) had cost £119,000 to build just before the great war, in 1939 the cost had risen to nearly a quarter of a million (£247,000); now in the middle of the 1950s the amount needed to build such a ship was £900,000. The major feature of the Annual Report of the Mercantile Marine Service Association was that the "British Shipping Industry

is slowly being strangled by taxation and Government ineptitude".¹⁶

The three major freedoms for the shipping industry, stated the chairman of the LSSOA, was that Flag Discrimination should be ended, that excessive taxation should be curtailed and that the government should provide immunity from labour troubles.¹⁷ As ever a paradox: the shipowners wanted more government relief on the one hand and more government interference on the other. This was the purpose as the industry continued to contract. Manning had fallen from 230,000 seamen before the first war to 160,000 in the inter-war period to just over 100,000 in 1955.¹⁸ It was to fall by a further 35% the following decade; this was to have important consequences in the conflict between the triad, with the NUS increasingly under pressure from below.

However the shipping industry needed the union more than ever at this particular juncture. The decade since the war had given other countries the chance to build their ravaged fleets and they were soon back in competition. Moreover, third world countries were beginning to intrude with the "spread of practices of flag discrimination by Governments to promote or create Mercantile Marines by methods in which competitive spirit plays no part. India now has agreements with the USSR, Checkoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Turkey and Romania that all trade between them is carried in their own ships; were such practices to become widespread neither International Trade nor its servant, International Shipping could thrive and

prosper."¹⁹ The breathing space that the British Shipping Industry had enjoyed since the war, was over.

As Sturmev was to point out some years later, Government and Industry were incapable of working together except with the Union in providing an overall framework in manning and discipline. Research of market conditions, forward planning and investment development were all notable absentees. It showed ultimately the wider trajectory of British Society in the post war years.²⁰

Another failure of the State according to the Shipowners was the inability to hold down labour costs and other such vital commodities as steel. This was accompanied by continuous requests to allow shipowners more revenue from earnings. The Fairplay journal ran continuous statistics on the spiralling costs of building ships even when all the European and British shipyards had full order books up to 1963.²¹ Ineptitude on the part of the State was the attack made by shipowners. Yet the State in turn commissioned reports and found that "Between the end of World War Two and a few years ago is depressing. In general UK tramp owners did not foresee reasonably profitable conditions continuing after a short lived Post War boom and as a result they did not invest sufficiently in new ships to maintain the fleet. Some withdrew entirely from the business. Between the end of the war and 1956 the tonnages of UK tramps were declining although throughout this period freights were on average sufficiently high to provide reasonable profits. By contrast world tramp tonnage must have increased by 50%."²²

Since the war there had been a continuous increase in the proportion of British trade carried in foreign ships that had grown from 34% in 1947 to 46% in 1955. Correspondingly the profits on tonnage for tramp and cargo voyages had fallen from 32% to 10% and a similar story was applicable to the liner trade where the percentage of real capital value fell more than half in the period under discussion and this despite massive depreciation allowance after the war.²³ As ever the British Shipping Industry stuck by its tried and trusted methods - methods from another time. Much of the failure of British ships to carry British trade was due to an inadequate response to the onset of the tanker trade - even though of the 43 ships between 10 - 15,000 tons built in British yards in 1955 only one was not a tanker - the fastest growing sector of the mercantile marine.²⁴

Yet it was within the tanker trade that certain developments were taking place and were to act as an example to the future capital and structure of the shipping industry. Even before the war when this trade was growing British Shipowners had proved reluctant. And although British yards in the 1950s were building tankers the amount built for Greek and other foreign ownership was substantial; the world's fleet was to grow much more substantially, when their shipbuilding skills increased also. British yards were to die. Such was to be the case with British Shipping without any direct intervention. What was new however was that the ownership of the tanker fleet was substantially in the hands of two or three massive companies

with many diverse interests outside of shipping. This was to provide a pattern for the direction of other Shipping Companies over the next decade.²⁵

Britain was bottom of the European shipping nations' league during this period if average compound rates of growth are taken into consideration. Thus although British cargoes had expanded by over 20% between 1938 - 1955 the actual trade itself had substantially contracted. Combined with an amalgamation process and the petitioning of State to free shipping from labour troubles and excessive taxation, Mr L. Bowles for the LSSOA made the all too obvious comment that he "Looked forward not without confidence to the granting of further alleviation ... all we ask is to be allowed to retain enough of our money to maintain our fleets in comparative strength."²⁶

This of course had been in a time when British Shipping had the breathing space to rule the world's fleet. When a loss of markets and the steady encroachment of other countries' Merchant Navies came into existence; shipowners were consistently calling for Government to intervene often in the negative by "Freeing Shippers of all burdens". Throughout this recent history British Shipowners had always been "Burdened" from post-Imperialism through to monopoly capitalism and yet in the post war period they felt under sufficient threat to drift ever closer to the State.²⁷ This was to become even more the case with labour relations.

At this juncture, it is worthwhile to return to that other strand of development taking place within the

other relationships of this period, notably the pressures and tensions within the Seamen's Union itself.

Traditionally the Union, as a historic vehicle in that chain of Institutions that dominated the Shipping Industry, could be left to denounce recalcitrant seamen should such circumstances arise. Yet the war and resulting boom, even within the changing structure of the markets, brought demands for more representation from below; all the more so because of the history of the whole inter-war period and the sacrifices made by seamen during the war itself when more of their number were lost than any other percentage of the armed forces.²⁸

The demands on the docks echoed that of seamen for more representation at a local level. "All the Liverpool docks came to a standstill in 1943 over a dispute on an Irish coaster. So I put forward a programme. There should be lay members on all committees that affect our work. The union's attitude was that 'it's unofficial'. It was agreed that the men adopted the charter of demands. The union would give its answer within a month providing work resumed. It was a noisy meeting ... shouts that I had let the men down. Agreement to go back. Next morning another walk out. Nearly ten thousand men on a blitzed bomb site. I asked them to stand by the decision of the meeting; all returned to work upon the demand that 'we want our place in the machinery'. In those days dockland operated on rumour. If we had had shop stewards instead of all power in the hands of the full time officials

that strike need not have happened."²⁹ This echoed the seamen's demands for "ships' committees" and more control at a local level. Like the docks the committees that arose were denounced by the official union as being communist inspired. Seamen's leaders were jailed for striking against the new State-Shipowner-Union establishment scheme. To strike against this scheme according to the union "was not living in the realities of this world".

In the stoppage of 1947 which was concerned with discrimination between established and non-established men, different modes of employment and benefits, the Union said of the strikers, "The Malcontents ask for the re-institution of the Merchant Navy reserve pool in force during the war ... yet this pool was sponsored and financed by the state and its cost was colossal and could not be possibly borne in these times by the public purse or by the industry."³⁰ Yet running like a thread throughout its history was the union's concern with its own legitimacy; to open up would lead to disintegration either through breakaway groups from below or the undermining of its authority from above in relation to shipowner and State. Thus the union leadership had viewed the subsequent Liverpool strikes of 1947 and 1955 as further attempts, residual from pre-war days, to undermine their authority. This was a reflection of the tight hierarchy that viewed any dissent as being Communist inspired and as such a dual threat with the proposed unification of differing unions and the consequent "liberation" from Empire which would cost seamen

thousands of jobs. After the war Empire turned to Commonwealth but the earlier rationale continued to prevail.

The Union pointed to an ILO document of a study of shipping and labour supply on the Indian sub-continent. The general thrust of the argument was that there were enormous problems in the amount of casual labour that existed; that the seamen's unions were quite strong yet were hopelessly divided between race, religion and differing departments, and what was worse these divisions took place at geographic level between the Bombay and the Calcutta Unions. (It also gives some indication of the size of India's merchant fleet when we consider that of some 70,000 seamen 80% were employed on British Registered ships³¹ - some cause for wonderment at the offices of the British General Council of Shipping who were condemning India for separate State agreement on shipping with Eastern Bloc countries. The non-intervention of Governments had not prevented the passing by the British State of the Indian Merchant Shipping Act which brought wages down for Indian Seamen (1901).) However the important moral that the Union could draw from this study was that in its conclusion the report stated that "Such rivalries between unions are unfortunately by no means peculiar to India. Instances could be cited from nearly every country in the development of Trade Unionism. As the Trade Union movement grows to full maturity it is to be hoped that the present rivalries and differences will disappear and that

the Seafarers Unions ... as regards their degree of organisation will be able to set a degree of unity in defence of the interests they represent."³² It was within this stabilising yet progressive role that the NUS had seen its own early vision. A vision that had come from the strife and turmoil of its own early years when it had to crush other organisations and vested interests for the total allegiance of Seamen. That this was done with a high degree of bureaucracy and a specific categorisation of "types" of seafarers was to some degree incidental.³³ The Union had come through.

The General Secretary of the NUS made allusions to the "respectability" of seamen throughout the 1950s alluding to that "social decency" that Captain Tupper constantly referred to in the 1930s. The 1951 Census report supported these comments. Secretary Yates showed the discrepancy between what was supposed to be the prototype of the seaman and the reality. Of a man without a home and family responsibilities, frequently broke and often a drifter; the Census report showed that out of 92,000 seafarers only 40% were single. To the secretary this demonstrated that "the majority of seafarers are men with family responsibilities"³⁴ and therefore honest and did not make trouble. Down the ages there had been the "others" the Casuals, the disestablished, the Communists. In the 1950s and in particular after the 1955 dispute they were "the sea-going Teddy boys who by their irresponsible and disloyal action have brought us unfavourable publicity".³⁵

There was a wider point to be made and this

returns us to the earlier paragraph about divisions within the Indian Labour Movement. Stewards had been in the NUS little over a decade; what was worse the NUS had actually broken their strike in 1921 which in turn broke their organisation. Stewards were still the bete noirs of the Union, which Moggridge interpreted as "adding another volatile element to the industry".³⁶ Sections of the stewards had been disloyal by striking in 1955; they had been disloyal even though the Union had "consistently - tho' gradually it is true - improved the lot of these men who were in the wilderness between 1921 and 1942". And the reasons they had been in the wilderness was that in the early days of the 1920s when the triad coalesced, "there were three unions representing seamen then and the moment there are divided interests then the whole case suffers".³⁷

Again the overall interests of the movement were considered. Outsiders could not be tolerated for as the chairman stated in justification of his actions in 1955 in breaking the strike; "I say that if anybody is honest enough to look at the record and study it alongside with the history of negotiations in any section of the Trade Union movement and see what has been done for 'these Men' in the last ten years. Remarkable strides have been made."³⁸

The stabilising role of the Union could have been seen in the aftermath of 1955. Much attention was given that year to "counter the insidious propaganda of subversive forces" and promoting officers to do more union

work on the ships especially between the USA and Liverpool. The historical role of this port and its relationship with the union was testified to at the 1956 Annual General Meeting when Thomas Yates praised the Liverpool officials for their work in explaining the position of the union to seamen and concluded that "let us hope this continues on Merseyside because in truth it has been the most difficult port in the history of this organisation".³⁹ The strike of 1955 was treated then as just another manifestation of deviant behaviour, from a workforce in a deviant port. That the union had historically its major base there merely added to the paradox of control.

The relationship towards its members however was only part of a wider liaison that the Union had consistently to nourish. Questioned in Parliament by a Liverpool Docks MP about the way the Cunard Company had applied for men to be taken to the army as they were on strike and that the State was being used in alliance with shipowners, the Minister of Labour, Sir Walter Monckton, explained that "the Merchant Navy Establishment was set up by both sides of the industry and that he was only notified when men were off the register".⁴⁰ Pressed further, he replied "that if he and the State were still being subjected to criticism he must be allowed to take a little comfort from what the General Secretary of the NUS had said with regards to the State calling up striking seamen; 'We never regarded this situation as abnormal. The Establishment were duty bound in accordance with law to report men to the appropriate ministry who missed their ships and failed to carry out

their contracts.' The Minister of State concluded that "If I have erred in this matter, I have erred in good company."⁴¹ He was satisfied that the Union were just as concerned as he and the shipowners were about irresponsibility within the industry. Here was the classic case of the State/Owner/Union triad asserting itself. The 1950s quite possibly witnessed the zenith of this relationship.

From above there had come the crushing indictment of any action on board ship. Furthermore there was the tragic case of the dockers in 1955 where the unofficial movement was completely split between the Transport and General Workers and those that had moved to the "Blue" Union. All these factors, combined with the general nature of the shipping industry in the post-war period would have made the union leadership concur with Sir L. Roberts, Chairman of the Liverpool Owners and Docks - and incidentally echo Charles Booth's words from the last century - that seamen and dockers "can at least choose and follow responsible leaders ... this modern trend in industry for small militant groups of workers to act in defiance of their union by inciting men to join in unofficial strikes is one of the most damaging features of modern industrial life."⁴²

Modern industrial life however was to distinguish Britain from the rest of developed Europe after the war - fractured economies alongside Japan began to make inroads into the space Britain had enjoyed since the war. The millions of dollars that were spent in resuscitating City

Institutions - from the Marshall Aid programme - gave some confirmation of the dominant financial as opposed to industrial role in the development of British Society.⁴³ A child of that development when that society had experienced its first real threat after the first war; the closeness of relationships between the different bodies of the Shipping Industry, "To maintain the supremacy of Shipping within the British Empire" was being put in question by the 1950s.

Not only did oil as a major source of power fix the demise of thousands of "the black gangs" in British Shipping, but in its rise as a bulk fuel from 20% to nearly 50% of all trade carried between 1937 and 1955,⁴⁴ Britain also suffered a corresponding loss especially in comparison with Norway and Japan where research and Government investment played an important part of their development. Britain's major fleets were still tied to dry cargo trading and passenger Liners although even here the development of air transport especially on the routes across the Atlantic meant their role was increasingly challenged. Between 1950 and 1956 passenger travel across the Atlantic fell as air travel rose by nearly 70%; this was to have important consequences.⁴⁵

Combined with these threats to British Shipping, the developments of Flags of Convenience and the juncture of the Suez Canal crisis in October 1956 proved another strain to relationships formed in a different time. Reference to Flags of Convenience was made by the General

Secretary at the Union's 1956 Conference. Before the war Liberia had registered only two small ships under her own Flag for American owners; from half a million tons in 1950 her fleet had jumped massively to over 12 million tons of shipping by 1956 for foreign owners not subject to tax, nor insured wages. This was a most dangerous development Thomas Yates told the conference. Companies like Cunard who had thought of registering part of their shipping abroad had to be prevailed against in the interests of British shipping and seamen.⁴⁶ The closure of the Suez Canal, the bulk of its trading in oil, signalled another development for relations in world trading and shipping and traditional British dominance. For whilst France especially took note of this major departure from European Imperialism and sought to develop different structural patterns of trade within Europe, Britain remained locked into her old traditional triangle, a pattern which Harold Macmillan termed "the three relationships" formed at a different time.⁴⁷

The rationalisation of shipping had occurred in the aftermath of the First War but within this, the Liner Companies established a structure in which the lesser companies were absorbed yet maintained their own family boards and directors. This quasi-independent mode of organisation was wholly inappropriate to the developments now taking place in world shipping. The gentlemen's club atmosphere which characterised the Old P and O and Ellerman's groups was out of time and out of joint. Britain's

role was no longer assured as the dominant carrier of goods, nor emigrants, nor most certainly in the fuel and bulk ore supplies of the Western World.⁴⁸ It was from the 1950s that such companies began to look beyond the world of shipping-technological developments, the industrialisation of the third world and the escaping into Flags of Convenience were to confirm this more than a decade later - the space of the war and the decade that followed had meant a holding operation from British shipping. After 1956 those holds were never so tight; it meant that in the post war world, maritime developments would have to increasingly take place between the Industry and the respective states;⁴⁹ this was in contrast to the total development of British Society. The closest that relationships between State Shipowners and Seamen's Union had developed were classically over the question of Labour. Because these relationships had been built at such a crucial time as the 1920s when the organic nature of British Shipping and Markets were first challenged, there was little break in the pattern after the second world war and into the 1950s. The State as social legislator merely became the social conscience of the old stable industries of the North while the domination of Commerce continued apace in the South and abroad;⁵⁰ shipping and seamen were to be caught in this contradiction after the "breathing space" decade of the later 1940s to the later 1950s.

Such contradictions characterise the role of shipowners to State through to the end of our period. If

strikers were not doing damage to the industry then it was foreign governments with interventionist policies.⁵¹

Both sets of circumstances motivated by Communists and other opponents of "fair competition" brought petitions and lobbies to the State. Help from the State yet freedom from "interference" became the hallmark of the British Council of Shipping during this period at a commercial level while the Shipping Federation rallied to make sure that labour within the industry was sufficiently contained.

This was an increasingly prevalent demand from owners; they came to rest within the agencies of the State and the acquiescence of a Union for as this statement suggests, "except in open company Unionism few employers can ever have enjoyed the partnership of a Union leader and so accommodating to employers as the Havelock Wilson of the 1920s. Though the Union recovered its dynamism under Wilson's successor, by the 1950s it was once again in quiescent mood. It certainly cannot be said to have been belligerent towards shipowners since the outbreak of the 1914 - 1918 war. If British ocean shipping has grown so slightly since 1920 this can hardly be blamed on inharmonious labour relations or on irresponsible Unions."⁵²

What was at stake was the new dimensions of the change within the post war world as new shipping fleets came into operation, aided and financed by separate States not just in the "undeveloped" countries of former Imperial networks but in the old countries of Europe and Scandinavia. It placed greater pressure on British shipowners if they

were to maintain their traditional position not only within World Trade but in their relations with the agencies of State and the quiescence of the Seamen's Union.

Seamen might be responsible and married and not conform to the image of "roistering ashore possessing nothing but the clap"⁵³ and the General Secretary was quite correct in pointing to the fact that of 92,000 seamen in 1950 only 40% were unmarried. If this was the litmus test of "respectability" then a survey taken from Liverpool ships in 1959 showed that for the first time, members of the catering departments outnumbered their fellow members from the inner-city and could show that the suburban/respectable process was well in train.⁵⁴ Yet in contrast to sailors and particularly firemen who still lived overwhelmingly within the inner city wards, the major flash-points of militancy throughout the decade came precisely from the cooks and stewards, and the strike committee of 1955 all came from outside the inner city wards. In the strike of 1955 the stewards might not have shown the same discipline as the deck-led dispute of 1947 nevertheless were they merely reckless dissenters as they tried to come to terms with the central control of the Union and which had thrown the total Liverpool waterside into dispute amongst other older warriors of "Industrial" warfare like the Dockers? The question of reckless dissenter or quiescent respectability is a redundant one. Action on the waterside up until the latter 1960s was always fragmented and never completely in relationship to the one specific

instant in which it took place.⁵⁵

As we suggested in the previous chapter when cataloguing the different strains of dissent amongst seamen, a definite welding together of dissent became apparent after the middle 1950s. Apart from the wider circumstances of shipping within British Society, the crisis of Suez and the phasing out of conscription - which Merchant Seamen had been exempt from between 1945 - 1959 - the Bridlington Agreements at the TUC which forbade Unions to "attract" other Unions' members were accompanied with a number of deep sea seamen who had been trying to work for change within the Union since the war, coming to work on the coast. It is not to suggest that the older individual action did not die but in many ways it became welded to the new. Listen to the way in which this picture of dissent was drawn: "Next day the old man said he'd got the union down and would we stand by what the union official said. I agreed and we were all battened down and waiting when a man told me the union official was on board though he was midships with the captain first. He came aft later and the first thing he said to me was 'It's wrong of you to hold up the ship. The old man's prepared to forget the logging if you sail tonight.' 'Is this ship properly manned?' I asked. 'Yes' said he. 'You Bastard' I shouted. 'Get off this ship.' Two older seamen saw him down the gangway and threw his briefcase after him. 'Right' said the skipper, 'From now on it's between you and the judge.' It went on to and fro for nine days. The

company had no leg to stand on though they were quite prepared to exploit the Merchant Shipping Act against us. So we got away with that and our success made quite a stir in the North Eastern ports. THAT KIND OF INDIVIDUAL ACT WAS THE BUILD UP TO 1960 WHEN THE NATIONAL SEAMEN'S REFORM MOVEMENT CAME INTO THE PICTURE."⁵⁶

The National Seamen's Reform Movement of 1960, brought into being with the strike of that year, reflected these developments and the prospects of change within the shipping industry. The Reform Movement was a novel feature in that it combined all the fierce "anti-union" talk of prior years with a strict policy of working within the union, and as its name suggests of trying to pass beyond a merely local level. It not only reflected the changing attitudes towards the union but reflected the times in that it wanted to bring the union away from the relationships that had been formed and cemented since 1920. As such it played a crucial role in determining later relationships between the Union and Shipowners and State. "The most significant decision of the reform movement was to continue the campaign within the union's ranks. The effect of this strategy was to give a prominence and continuity to the militants' aims, where previous disenchantments had been assuaged by spasmodic unconnected revolts, or by the setting up of independent unrecognised and eventually unsupported rival organisations for seamen."⁵⁷ It is important to remember however that the strategy of this new movement had not been born in a vacuum but out

of bitter experience that went right back to the very formation of the NUS and culminated in attitudes and tactics "residual" from all the disputes, whether of the "furtive acts of individuals" or the collective but increasingly isolated stoppages in Liverpool in 1933, 1947 and 1955.

The dispute began on the Liverpool Liners with the Cunard Company taking measures to discipline certain seamen. This met with an angry response.⁵⁸ It was over the need to have more representation against such acts besides the general demand over conditions, that MacFarlane could comment that "the strike spread rapidly to other ports as a general show of discontent with conditions in the industry".⁵⁹ The strength of this new movement was that it brought the major ports to a standstill in a wave of action in July 1960. What was even more successful was the way in which the official union was almost tempted to act in the September of that year when the movement called for another wave of stoppages. Rank and file leaders were influenced by the fact that on other occasions when members had taken unofficial action the union had responded with a repression that matched that of the shipowners. Perhaps with the TUC enquiry in its mind there was a moment of ambivalence.⁶⁰ Certainly the Reform Movement's leaders detected the fact that here was an opportunity to split the combined bodies of Union and Shipowner. The Unions response was predictable, "This group of irresponsible people in Liverpool is misleading and misrepresenting the issue. This sort of thing is nothing more than Industrial

Anarchy."⁶¹ Yet one offshoot of this broader form of attack on the part of the dissenters was that from this date the Shipowners began increasingly to look for protection from the State and could no longer rely so completely on those cemented ties with the Union.⁶²

In 1960 with the movement calling the strike, the jailing of militants whose threat in years past had had the effect of driving men back to work in small isolated groups - whilst the union spoke of unlawful procedures - now worked in just the opposite manner. George Foulser mentions how a body of seamen marched from London's East End on a Sunday morning to demand the release of Paddy Neary who was jailed during the second wave of the strikes; "For some reason the police escorting us seemed rather tense. I wondered why until we got to Brixton Prison and then I found out why the police were a bit dodgy - some of the lads began attempting to scale the walls. Usually such direct action would bring out the police batons like lightning. I was dumbstruck to observe a police inspector using velvet glove treatment to persuade the boys down from the big back gate and the adjoining wall ... I should admit that we had one bloke in the procession who is a little extreme in his ideas while everyone else was shouting RELEASE NEARY this chap kept reiterating, 'HANG THE SHIPOWNERS' ... They had discovered that all Cunards millions allied with the Board of Trade, the Pool and the Shipping Federation, Lloyds and all the rest were not strong enough to move a ship one inch in any port where

the seamen were in full unity."⁶³ Perhaps the proposed resignation of the General Secretary and the declared ambition of the reform movement to work completely from within had caught the union off its guard.

With the union for once hesitant between the months of July and September 1960, it was used as a constant platform for the reformers to talk of the lack of democracy within that organisation: the loaded composition of full time officials on the executive committee, the manner of the agenda at the Annual General Meeting⁶⁴ and perhaps more importantly the issue of the gerontocratic vote, where older members including officials could have up to four times the voting power of the younger members, a practice inaugurated by Havelock Wilson in the early 1920s to stop "the communists" from taking over. All these issues came to the fore in 1960.⁶⁵ Previously where seamen had voted with their feet until forced back to work, there now came a systematic campaign which even The Times noted "was in changed circumstances from the anarchic relations of the past"⁶⁶ and even The Daily Telegraph commented that "SIR THOMAS YATES AND HIS COLLEAGUES HAVE SIDED WITH THE ANGELS SO LONG THAT THEY HAVE SACRIFICED THE TRUST OF MANY OF THEIR FOLLOWERS."⁶⁷

A prominent figure in the "unofficial" movement on the docks stated that it was only in 1960 "that the seamen were trying what we had done on the docks before the split. We went along to give our support to the reform movement."⁶⁸ This was as seamen in the reform movement

were stating "to make it clear that this is not a break-away movement from the union. We are the union ... what we are aiming to achieve is to have a caucus inside the union which would keep the pressure on ... A few fellows mooted the idea of a breakaway to us. But we knew we could never make it last. We were a separate organisation within the NUS."⁶⁹

The developments were of tremendous importance within the field of control for the seamen engaged in the strike had not only decided that one of the causes of their unsatisfactory conditions lay in the composition of the NUS - this was nothing new - but that they wanted to work within that organisation for reform. This would combine with the practice of having ships' committees at sea, "It is not much use paying your two shillings dues and leaving the rest of it to somebody else as seamen have done in the past. The best method would be for the members to hold meetings on the ship as they do on ships of other nationalities."⁷⁰

Between the months of July and September 1960 there developed the battle lines within the union that was to continue until the middle of the decade. As late as September when the seamen had already been on strike over two periods of the summer, the General Secretary was declaring in the usual manner that "the Reform Committee in Liverpool cannot obtain recognition from this union. They are unofficial and confined to Liverpool and the N.E. coast and my executive would not in any circumstances recognise

an unofficial body."⁷¹

By September however, such had been the strength of Reform Movement's campaign that in the middle of the month an agreement had been concluded with the NUS over the following major points. The last two are illustrative of the features of control that we have discussed throughout.

1. All branch meetings to be reconvened.
2. Recovery of wages owing before the strike.
3. No victimisation of strikers by Employers or NUS.
4. Revision of Merchant Shipping Acts to be sought.⁷²

There was an indication of the battle lines being drawn up here between the reformers and the union; after the struggles of that summer which had involved 10,000 men in two phases of strike action the arguments were moving beyond the ship's deck and now taking place in union offices and branches.

The strike had been "roundly condemned by the NUS" noted Fairplay echoing a statement made by the Shipping Federation and the employers' association of Liverpool. Unlike others however it had come just before negotiations between the owners and the union.⁷³ Strike action continued in wave after wave during the summer of 1960 and again brought forth retorts from the shipowners that there would be "no dealings with any agitators who accept no responsibility themselves and seek to upset an industrial agreement which has been constitutionally arrived at by both sides".⁷⁴

In contrast to 1933 and 1955, the Seamen's Reform Movement had no intention of finally trying to talk to the shipowners themselves. That only played into the

terminology of "breakaway" employed with such success by the Union leadership. It was the jailing of Paddy Neary, one of the Reform leaders, in the September, that served to increase the demand not only for wages and conditions but "representation" within the union. It was this act that besides incensing seamen also brought the press to inquire about the way the Union conducted its business. Even the Fairplay noted that "Just when it seemed the unofficial strike might end quite abruptly following the loss of Southampton, the smouldering embers were smartly fanned into flame upon the commitment to Prison of P. Neary ...". The article continued that "subsequent events have shown beyond doubt that the main grievance is the traditional discontent with the leadership and organisation of the NUS. Accusations that the union is out of touch with the men can be seen in the response to the unofficial strike which shows there is a widespread conviction to this effect among the rank and file."⁷⁵ That the Journal of the Shipowners should be stating this was little short of being fantastic. It gave some indication of how relationships were always interwoven within the shipping industry. Indeed the precedents were there before when shipowners' role with the Union influenced the State; and latterly how shipowners were to turn to the State when they could not have a hand in controlling developments within the Seamen's Union. Possibly they chose this interregnum to comment at the imminent departure of Tom Yates, the last of the school trained in the mould of Havelock Wilson and recommended

to the "Skipper" by "Captain Tupper" for his cool head in the anti-subversive activities in Liverpool of the 1920s.⁷⁶

Now some forty years later a film was being shown to Seamen and Dockers in major ports. In "Men of Brazil" the leader of the unofficial Port Workers Committee in Sao Paulo sets out to kill the leader of the legal Union, Nelson Carvalho. Good finally prevails because Carvalho, "had found a new weapon in the doctrine of Moral Rearmament and was able to win the potential killer over to his way of thinking".⁷⁷ At a time when the unofficial committees were strong in the port, this gives some indication of the way a certain order could be appealed to, "Only on their submission to authority lies any hope of organised success." The shipowners were merely trying to renegotiate the old terms.

They were seen to be doing this when in the immediate aftermath of the 1960 strike the reform movement had maintained an unceasing barrage of demands for the development of grass roots representation within the ports, at the Branch Meetings and on the ships themselves. A Liverpool leader commented that for this policy to be effective there must always be the threat of wider action, "Above all we must maintain our solidarity and unity. We have shaken the employers and the leaders of the NUS and have shown the phoney set up in the union that has been choking the development of real trade unionism amongst the seamen for many years. The NSRM must continue to fight to bring about a reform of the union."⁷⁸ The Daily Telegraph's

comment rang true that the strike did "leave behind another of those more or less permanent bodies challenging the authority of the union leaders" but this time there was no talk of breakaway unionism.

From a series of autonomous caucuses the NSRM tried to organise itself as a complete national movement; this impetus came mainly from leaders in Liverpool, Southampton and the North East coast and while nationally the movement did not gain much ground the Reformers remained strong in these areas. Demands for ship's delegates had always been strong in Liverpool and it was these supporters on a number of ships sailing from Liverpool and Southampton that were vital in keeping the movement going. A newspaper was produced each month and distributed nationally around the ports; Barney Flynn, jailed in 1947, wrote in 1961 that "ship's delegates are the backbone of our Union"⁷⁹ and it was the North East coast that provided backing for this demand. Branches, reconvened especially after the strike, were urged to send in motions demanding the union take up a policy of having ship's delegates and committees. Over twenty branches did this and the EC had to consider a vast number of resolutions. These were all rejected on the grounds that they could not be put to the AGM nor the rules committee which met every five years.⁸⁰ Again however there was the impetus for the NSRM to grab the nettle within the organisation.

This became all the more imperative with the election of the new General Secretary in the October after

the strikes. After the "early retirement" of Sir Tom Yates there came the brief leadership of James Scott who in spite of his militant posturing turned, "to be one of the biggest dictators this union has ever seen".⁸¹

Regarding the subject of shipboard representation Scott followed in the old school's footsteps. From District Secretary based in Liverpool at the time of the 1955 stoppage through to his promotion as National Organiser in the immediate aftermath; no other forms were to be tolerated outside of the central structure of the union. Despite certain talk of "more democracy" through his election campaign, on attaining the post of General Secretary he declared "I will dismiss every official the day that ships' delegates come into the Merchant Navy".⁸² In the same speech he assured the shipowners that the Reform Movement were planning another strike and dubbed them "the wreckers" of the industry.

One union official stated that "Scott had just been elected and he was demonstrating to us and to the employers that he wanted their support, and if they wanted him to play ball with them, they had to pay for it."⁸³ Otherwise the price would be the continued ascendancy of the Reform Movement within the union. Scott's victory came at the annual negotiations in May when the owners agreed to a reduction in hours from 48 to 44 at sea and in port. Scott hailed this as a victory over the tactics of the reform movement. Three leaders had already been expelled from the union in Liverpool and the Shipping

Federation in tacit collusion with the union were making life difficult for a number of others in Southampton and on the North East coast. On Reformers, the new General Secretary stated after the favourable agreement with the shipowners in 1916 "the only two items they have left now are the elections of ships' delegates and the elections of officials every two years". What they wanted, he told the conference of that year, "was to establish a core, a centre a union within a union to take away the power of every man sitting in this room from a democratic line".⁸⁴ This was the old talk that led to "breakaway" in the past and for any action to be that of dissidents, subversives, communists. Yet in 1960 this new movement could not be so easily outmanoeuvred.

Thus it was somewhat ironically recognised that the NSRM were working within the union and were not to be characterised as just another breakaway yet the phrasing of the General Secretary's remarks bore a similarity with those others of the past that had to confront opposition. The reform movement for their part stated that "it cannot be stressed too strongly that the NSRM never has been, is not at present and will not ever become, a breakaway ... notwithstanding the vituperative comments of Mr James Scott."⁸⁵ In contrast, the theme of the reformers newspaper, The Fo'c'sle was the consistent liaison over the previous four decades between shipowner and Union in which "we have seen how in the mercantile marine membership of a certain trade union has become obligatory. The employers

actually collecting subscriptions for the union. The corollary of course is acquiescence and the adoption of stern measures against men who kick over the traces. "It was for this reason that many of the reform movements pamphlets in Liverpool carried the inscription 'Remember 1911', the symbol of when the rank and file of all the waterside rebelled."⁸⁶ The 1920s had meant isolation, sectionalism and collaboration and after that any action was interpreted as trying to smash the union. As Jim Slater commented, "Out of that unofficial strike in 1960, despite all of the abuse of the reform movement, improved pay and conditions and the strengthening of the union were the results."⁸⁷

The amount of abuse that Slater was referring to came when he himself stood as the Reform Movement's candidate in the election to General Secretary after the death of James Scott. Scott had died after having been in the chair little over a year and if anything had made the gap wider between reformers and officials. This could be witnessed by the amount of "anti-communist" propaganda pumped out by Maritime House; Special Branch reports on Reform Movement activists, the denunciation of Slater as just a "front man" for the communists and in some cases the actual rigging of votes in the "dangerous areas" for the official candidate, Bill Hogarth. All this was done in a manner reminiscent to the 1920s when a "spy" was paid by the Cunard Company and later found himself passing information to the Seamen's Union with regard to subversives.⁸⁸

Hogarth won the election; yet recognising the 10,000 votes that had been given to Slater, he proclaimed himself in favour of some form of shipboard democracy. This was an early attempt to cut away the central foundation of the reformers' argument. On his accession he immediately declared, "the election has said clearly one thing, the time has come to quietly bury the Reform Movement".⁸⁹ This was a quieter statement of philosophy than that which characterised the brief reign of James Scott and sentiments such as, "the NUS has to be autocratic because of the nature of the membership scattered across the world and even divided within ships. What is needed is a very aggressive but moderate dictator. Somebody some group have got to dictate which way the Union is going."⁹⁰ Between 1960 - 1962 there had been an unprecedented amount of activity at local level built up by the Reformers. It was later to translate itself within the Union for, "The Battle of the Institutions"⁹¹ and no General Secretary could afford to ignore its soundings in the way it thought the Union should be more open and the snug liaisons with dominant bodies of the Shipping World brought into question.

It was an indication that the last member of the Triad, the Union, should not be expected merely to fall into line. Warnings were clear when the Clyde tugboat men were prepared to go through the courts to leave the union in 1962. Their leaving to join the Transport and General Workers played an important part in the attitude

with which the new leadership came to view the members.⁹² The reaction by the Shipping Federation was also one of concern should there be serious efforts to create a wider liaison of the transport unions.

At another level at the 1962 conference the activities of the Syndicalist, Seamens International Union was causing concern especially with regards to wooing of British seamen on the Great Lakes trade. It was as a guest of this Union that one of the jailed Reform Movement leaders declared some months after his release that this union "have what we want. The election of officials. Union hiring halls. The rotary system of shipping. Ships' committees and ships' delegates and one man for all the crew."⁹³ The NUS could declare that the policies of this union were harming the cause of the Free Trade Movement, yet sufficient of the membership were still concerned with the processes of representation for it not to be dismissed out of hand.⁹⁴ This had been the case in 1947 and 1949 when Thomas Yates had used the opportunity to further scourge the threat of "communism" within the union, when seamen and dockers supported the Canadian union.

Over time and after the impetus of the strikes and the rush of activity 1960-62, the reform movement lost ground. Factions emerged at the way subsequent strategies were to be utilised. More radicals joined the executive council at later elections and at each conference after 1962. The Communist Party had always had an involvement for the struggle within the union and the Party as a whole became involved in the methods for new strategies.

As one reformer testified, the organisational methods were not greatly different, "we worked more or less as a clique but not an organised clique if you know what I mean. The organisation end of it was finished as a unit. This was when I believe the CP said it's time to move in now. Because the lads were saying now there's no reform movement we've got to have something to hang onto to fight the union. Quite a few joined the party."⁹⁵

In some ways this was a facile comment for Communists had a long history of working within the Union for change. What was probably more the case was the idea of "harnessing" the different forces that had always characterised opposition and dissent amongst the seamen. Factions were bound to arise given the residual feelings between those who saw the Union as a useless vehicle and others who had consistently fought within it from the desperate 1920s to the 1950s. As the previous chapter attempted to stress it was the tentative coming together of these different elements; a combination of time and circumstance as well as deliberate choice, that gave the reform movement its power. No longer could dissidence to official policies simply be classed as "communism" from within; nor quite as easily be characterised as, "the angry despair of those who have nothing" from "outsiders". If these tendencies were never completely overcome they nevertheless combined to give the Reform Movement enough room for manoeuvre to extend the framework of their dissent throughout the Union.⁹⁶

A corresponding feature of the move towards new relationships within the union was the new face that had to be turned towards shipowners and State. In the same year as the passing of the shipboard liaison scheme the union's negotiating committee threatened to resort to industrial action if the shipowners would not concede the 42 hour working week before 1966. Such talk had not been heard since the early days of national recognition and certainly not by full time officials. In the Story of the Seamen written by one of these officials he recalls that "only the peaceful intervention on the part of the Ministry of Labour averted union action".⁹⁷ The role of politicians and the State was to have particular consequences in 1966, in the forceful attempt at re-establishment of the Triad. For the moment it is sufficient to suggest that as the relationship of forces within the seamen's union turned it towards scrutinising its own affairs, there was a corresponding weakening of allegiances towards shipowners and State in terms of accommodation.

This maintenance of pressure within the union placed the leadership within a new arena; of trying to placate demands whilst still holding tightly the reins of power.⁹⁸ This could be witnessed in 1964 when not only was there an intervention on the part of the Minister of Labour in negotiations with the shipowners but when a minimal scheme for "liaison committees" as a substitute for direct ships' delegates was passed at that year's conference. It was notable that both Yates and Scott who had

been in power such a short time before were totally opposed to any developments of this nature. Once again it was the way a leadership had to be seen trying to make change.⁹⁹

To a certain extent the official strike of 1966 was the apotheosis of change that had been struggled for within the union since the unofficial strikes of 1960 had brought forward the Reform Movement. An indication of the way in which faith had grown in the strategy of pushing the union and changing the institution from within came in 1965. At the annual negotiations, weekly hours had been extended in return for a substantial raise in basic payment. It was felt by those that had supported the Reform Movement that this rise would enable married and older seamen to send more money home to their families, something which they could not do if they were dependent on overtime earnings alone. It would also raise the pitifully low basic wage into something more approximating a modern industrial wage.¹⁰⁰

This was completely overlooked by those who saw only the increase of hours from a forty-four hour week into one consisting of a full fifty-six hours. This was taken to be a sell out even though it was the stated intention of the Reformers to fight for less hours after the increase in the minimum had been won. In Liverpool 200 men walked off yet were almost immediately persuaded to go back to work and wait for the coming year and in the North East their calls for strike action immediately met with

the same unhesitating refusal. It provoked one of the old style Syndicalist type of fighters to denounce the tactics of the reformers; "When Jim Slater did not call his N.E. coast men out, this was so surprising it was almost incredible. Worse than that - due to the trust and reliance seamen had placed in Slater, the lack of Geordie backing in the strike caused Belfast, Glasgow and Hull and other ports to hold fire too. Seamen all over the UK, including myself looked up to and trusted Slater and we regarded him as our sea green incorruptible in our struggles against the ship-owners and gangster unionism. After the May AGM (1965) Slater was found to be just another guy who took the easy way out."¹⁰¹

The quotation above forgets the way militancy had been sought to channel through the existing institutions with the threat of industrial action being more important than its actual use since 1960. It seemed as if Liverpool and the N.E. Coast as the major areas of the NSRM were aware of this. However the indictment does again bring us back to the chosen role in "the battle for the institutions" taken by the reformers in their battle against the synchronisation of the shipowners and agencies of the State, that for so long had reflected policies of the NUS. In doing this they were bound also to incur the wrath of those old time fighters who saw all three bodies as ineluctably corrupt and wanted independent action whenever circumstances afforded. The reformers' strategy was supported however and that of the older style militants largely ignored.

Events were to move faster than they had thought, such was the weight of feeling against the extra hours of the working week between 1965/66. No-one however wanted to return the increases in the basic wage and equally no-one wanted to take action without the full backing of the union which had significant additions from the old Reform Movement. The explicit moves of working within taken from the latter years of the 1950s and demonstrated in 1960 was beginning to work in a popular mobilisation. Havelock Wilson and Captain Tupper would have turned in their graves yet there was not a breakaway to be seen. In addition this mobilisation of support bolstered the Executive Council members who had come from the ranks of the reform movement and were no longer cast under the shadow of successive authoritarian General Secretaries. Old unofficial leaders from the major ports, Kenny from Liverpool, Slater from the North East and Vernon Miner from the Bristol Channel were all sitting at the top table.¹⁰²

However when the Union declared that there was to be an official strike from the 16th May 1966 there was an immediate outburst as to who was actually controlling this strange phenomenon. One account stated that, "The 1966 strike really came about because the rest of the EC members believed a strike was inevitable and that the best thing was to control it as an official strike rather than oppose it."¹⁰³ To oppose would incur the opposition of all forces of development within the Union since 1960. Even then accusations came thick and fast from old style

Syndicalists that the Reformers had been duped by Communists to come to an agreement with moderates on the Executive in the way the strike should be conducted.¹⁰⁴

Included within this 'Communist duplicity' was the leadership's stance in being reticent in taking the support and offers of solidarity from other port workers, with the result that ships moved around the ports (interior), throughout the dispute. In this way the Liverpool Port Workers Committee which had originally called for a general stoppage in support of the seamen was overruled by the London District Committees precisely over the lack of firm directives from the Union.¹⁰⁵ It returns to the seaman's relationship with the wider labour movement and notions of solidarity that still spanned the divide at a national level. For a time confusion reigned in relationships at the waterside.

Indeed at a conference for Workers Control held at Nottingham during the strike it was illustrated by those attending from the ports that the Syndicalism of Peter Kerrigan in Liverpool had substantial support in Liverpool whereas in London it was the Communism of Jack Dash and his colleagues that had the greater support.¹⁰⁶ Indeed during the Dock Strike one year later it was a member from "the Blue Union" that successfully led the unofficial Port Workers Committee in Liverpool.¹⁰⁷ Between 1955 and 1960 these tensions had been somewhat overcome amongst the seamen to produce the Reform Movement yet lingering doubts about the ability to "sell out" remained. This was

captured in 1966 by an old style syndicalist when he walked down to his Union office at the beginning of the strike and saw there bundles of the Communist daily paper The Morning Star. The sight of the local official asking seagoing members to take a copy made the unbelievable even more absurd from an office that had always chastised any notion of Communism.¹⁰⁸ For the officials time was not to be wasted distinguishing between different categories of dissent but rather to be aware of changes taking place within the union since the fusion of the Reform Movement. Indeed, "The 1966 strike was essential not to achieve the claim but to demonstrate to the membership that the NUS was an active Union."¹⁰⁹

Perversely, as the strike grew longer and solidarity lay unbroken the press came increasingly to state that it was the Communist militants that were holding the seamen out.¹¹⁰ Reformers thought that it was an effort on the part of the "establishment" within the union to show the membership they were willing to put on a militant posture as long as control of the union remained within their hands. This had originally been James Scott's analysis with which to defeat the reformers in 1961. William Hogarth had been taken further and he knew it. Not the least unobtrusive of all these forces was the position of a Labour government, its position within the State and on the labour front towards employers and workers. It was this force, historically the eminence gris of the triad that in the finish decisively swung the issue concerning the strike.

The position of the government and the employers were outlined in the days that led to the final deadline of the strike - the strike for a forty hour week at sea. The Times of May 2nd recorded that "The fact remains that the union are sensitive about talk of a split because there has been an extreme left wing section driving for stronger action. Moderate members realised that there were agitators attempting to cause trouble and the executive took the view that if there was going to be trouble it would be best to make it official ... The Shipping Federation spokesman last night described the claim for a forty hour week as a complete 'red herring' and saw the matter as a question of who controls within the union."¹¹¹

Two weeks later it noted the day before the strike was due to commence; "the 47 man executive of the NUS decided that the strike of Merchant Seamen will definitely begin at Midnight tomorrow ... The Prime Minister made it clear to them that they would be fighting the government and the State."¹¹² This statement was of the utmost import because within his measured address to the nation on May 16th "Mr Wilson said that the Seamen's Strike was the act of a group of men who sincerely believed there was no alternative; but in fact there was an alternative - a court of inquiry to examine the seamen's long term grievances."¹¹³ It is important to bear in mind the Prime Minister's use of the State and of a group of men for the same words were to be used with particularly devastating effect some thirty-seven days later on the

20th June 1966.

What we are suggesting here is that whilst the fight continued within different sections of the Union; whilst shipowners were virtually nonexistent on the sidelines, the Government and State utilised itself in a far more aggressive role to keep the Triad as a functioning unit, the first time outside of war that it had been called to do so on such explicit terms. That it was a Labour Government was a phenomenon that further compounded the irony. Bent on its statutory wages policy that it saw inviolable outside of any historical context it redoubled the war of position Labour had to adopt towards Trade Unionism when in power.¹¹⁴ If the threatened breakdown of incomes policy brought in the State - it must not be forgotten also at the request of shipowners - the dilemma reflected not only relationships within shipping but of wider alliances and liaisons between official leaderships of Trade Unions and their members. This was especially the case in the push towards more democracy that took place in the latter 1960s. William Hogarth, wanting to keep within the boundaries of autocratic leadership but forced into manoeuvre on all flanks, stated that "We are going into this strike firmly believing it is a fight to the finish. It is hard to see an end to it at this stage." These were no words of an autocrat but of a man who did not wish to see a strike in the first place, who voted against it with his officials but who had to bow to wider forces that had been mobilised within the union; a man seeking

ultimately to control those forces.¹¹⁵ The government was to recognise this and to give him time.

Stories began to circulate often from unexpectedly high circles about the exhausting battles taking place within the seamen's union. This at a time in early June when embargoes were being demanded on all United Kingdom ships and demonstrators outside the TUC and Maritime House paraded with placards stating "Our fight with the Owners not the Government". In these times it was reported in The Times June 8th that, "Mr Hogarth and other moderate minded officials had an exhausting day yesterday trying to prevent the executive from demanding action even more drastic than on which they had finally agreed." Time and again Mr Hogarth and his colleagues urged caution on the executive ... whilst in government quarters last night there was extreme caution to ensure that nothing should spoil the atmosphere in which the shipowner and seamen will come today to their first readings of the conclusions of Lord Pearson and his three colleagues."¹¹⁶

It was Justice Pearson's report that the Prime Minister had so much vaunted as an alternative to the strike in a statement issued in May. Now, nearly a month later the Seamen's Executive rejected the interim report out of hand.¹¹⁷ The Times succinctly caught the mood of the other contestants in the triad of Government, Employer and Union. "The leaders of the NUS started out on their aggressive policy although the ship-owner made an offer which was by no means unreasonable in view of the improvements

they had conceded not so long before. They went on with it although the Government set up a court of enquiry. They now pursue it still, rejecting the interim report of the court as the starting point for a settlement. Any merit in their case has now been completely destroyed by the arrogance of their conduct."¹¹⁸

George Woodcock General Secretary of the TUC flew back from his holiday to attend the meeting between the General Council and the Seamans Executive. Far from giving more support to the seamen he threatened withdrawal of all TUC services unless a compromise was agreed. "As Mr Woodcock left TUC headquarters for the Ministry of Labour, boos, hisses and shouts of traitor came from a crowd of demonstrators but many of these appeared to be dockers and left wing agitators rather than seamen."¹¹⁹ The acting Minister of Labour, the Prime Minister, carefully timed a statement just before this meeting between the TUC and the Seamen's Executive, "that delicately prepared the way for a personal intervention in the dispute if the seamen's leaders wanted to find an escape route out of their present position".¹²⁰

This escape route was not taken up by the third member of the Triad, notably the General Secretary of the Seamen's Union; not taken up more in an admission of failure to control the wider forces mobilised within the union rather than the active negation of the Prime Minister's help.¹²¹ Therefore exactly seven days later, the Prime Minister, the Acting Minister of Labour in the guise of

the State made his position clear. "Mr Wilson indicated in the Commons yesterday that a group of Communists and their allies - notably the reformers - were manipulating the National Union of Seamen to prolong the Merchant Navy strike." He went on to state that "It has been apparent for some time - and I do not say this without good reason for saying it - that since the Court of Enquiry's report, a few individuals have brought pressure to bear on a select few on the executive council of the NUS who in turn have been able to dominate the majority of that otherwise sturdy union."¹²² Fuel was added to these statements by Special Branch reports of reformers being duped by Communists and of meetings that had taken place at the home of the National Organiser of the Communist Party.¹²³

This latter accusation is worthy of note because it serves as a nice illustration of the way in which the seamen's historical case was overlooked. Jack Coward the Communist organiser in question had been a seaman since the 1920s and fought consistently within the Union; indeed in the 1925 stoppage he led a group of seamen off their ships in New Zealand and marched with them to the Court House and the Auckland Prison rather than face the new conditions agreed to by the Union. Throughout the 1930s to 1940s and 1950s he had fought all the battles within the Union and was regarded as the tutor to many Liverpool seamen who fought in the Reform Movement. Of even more ironic note it was at such a "meeting" when the Liverpool contingent to the EC stayed at his flat that a suggestion

was made by the Industrial Organiser of the Communist Party that "the seamen were tired, they had made their point and really should go back to work".¹²⁴

However the history of rebellion within the NUS and that since 1960 had often fused differing groups together within the Union. This had been achieved a little too successfully on the one hand but left the way open to be attacked on the other in the sheer belief of what was achievable given the solidarity of the membership around the issue. What must not be forgotten was that most seamen had spent their lives at sea and not known what it was like to be on strike. There came along with the stoppage a certain moral righteousness that frightened officials in every union. "Union leaders have been infuriated by the behaviour of the Seamen's Union and their executive, that their actions had been shown extreme folly and lack of experience and not realized that success depended on negotiations."¹²⁵

We have here glimpses of how dealing should be done between the different bodies of the industry. Between 1960 and 1965 there were movements for change within the union. In 1966 militancy outran even the expectations of the reformers and nothing was to be conducted outside the jurisdiction of the union. Shipowners, normally used to dealing with an acceptable union leadership, now found themselves pushing the State for solutions where normally there had only been the call for ratification of agreements through the NMB. When the autocracy of the Union

was fragile the State had to provide firmer guidance. When this in turn had been utilised the next step was to separate and divide the malcontents. Classically this had been the NUS's role when manoeuvres to isolate them into "breakaways" had largely been successful, notably in 1933 - 47 - 1955. Classically the Prime Minister achieved this separation with his statement on Communism and supplied the moderate and official leadership with a let out clause. The offer that earlier the General Secretary had had to refuse "that delicately prepared the way for a personal intervention ... if the seamen's leaders wanted to find an escape route ..." ¹²⁶ was now placed firmly into his hand.

"Mr Hogarth, the Union's General Secretary, went to No 10 Downing Street to see the Prime Minister and to receive an explanation of his statement. When he emerged after about three quarters of an hour he had no comment to make on Mr Wilson's references to political activities within the Union, which he said they did not discuss." Two days later George Woodcock of the TUC again went to see the full Executive Committee. "They agreed to meet the Shipowners on the terms he suggested and decided by 31 votes to 11 to send not only the inner group of nine who were concerned in last week's abortive talks but another eleven members of the executive who are also members of their Standing Negotiating Committee. This is a victory for the moderate element and should facilitate negotiations of a final settlement if the present talks

lead in that direction." Without fail, one day later The Times reported that "Shipowners and Seamen began ... to discuss ways of ending the strike and are to continue this morning."¹²⁷

The Prime Minister, the highest personage theoretically within the Government, and Labour Minister of State, had tried to set the Triad functioning again with his statements of Communism within the Union. Even The Times concluded however that "he did not remove the impression that he has exaggerated the conspiratorial nature of Communist intervention and its importance as a factor in the prolongation of the Seamen's strike."¹²⁸ What he had done was to reassure the older more trusted elements within the Seamen's Union their traditions of safe anchorage within the triad. In this way he echoed his old namesake Havelock Wilson; the difference was that the State had had to change from passive ratification of agreements into the direct facilitator of them.¹²⁹ The spectre of Communism was lit up across the sky and passed to the current union leadership to remind them of their direct historic role - statements normally the prerogative of Union General Secretaries in their battles with seamen's dissidency.

Thus less than two weeks after the Prime Minister's first message and three days after his last the strike was formally concluded. Concluded amongst bitter recrimination from seamen and under the aegis of the Court of Enquiry that Government and Shipowners had pushed for all

along; concluded also for the General Secretary who stated that, "The strike has been a victory. It has been worth while because we have gained quite a lot and it has shown we have a membership second to none in Solidarity."¹³⁰ This latter part of the statement was indeed correct but did not prevent hundreds of placards demanding the forty hour week being thrown down and trampled on outside Maritime House the union's headquarters and the letters in red paint "Judas Hogarth" being scrawled on the front steps.

The State's intervention was to show who was to be in control of the union. "The executive's decision by 29 votes to 16 showed a turnover of 10 votes from the Militant to the moderate side since Saturday but Union officials insisted that this had nothing to do with the statement by the Prime Minister on Tuesday." Of this majority 12 were officials of the union, this meant that within the executive seventeen seagoing members had voted against sixteen and it is within this context that the importance of the State's intervention must be witnessed. "The meeting is said to have been marked by unusually firm chairmanship by Mr Hogarth who acts as chairman as well as General Secretary. When the negotiations committee withdrew there were some attempts particularly by Mr Kenny to discuss Mr Wilson's speech before dealing with the industrial situation. Mr Hogarth however kept them to the main issue and insisted that 'The time of decision had come'."¹³¹ This was the last and final irony in the episode of the seamen's strike.

If we could sum up this episode it would be to

concentrate on the changes that were in a state of flux within the Union. "The battles for the Institutions" were begun in 1960; by 1966 substantial representations had been won by seamen coming originally from the fusion of the Reform Movement. The Militancy of 1965 and 1966 was concerned principally with the issue of "more hours to work" but led from there to a questioning of the whole legal structure that bound seamen." Moderates within the Union, officials that had opposed any action throughout their history were caught in this upsurge of action.¹³² The question became whether to oppose or to try and control. When this danger had progressed with each day that passed, the State in the form of Government stepped in to "assist" the moderate element and then went beyond it in order to find agreement between the courts, the Shipowners and the Union; in short to promote again the active functioning of the Triad.

It is an interesting note that in The Seaman there appears a full chronology of all the dates and events during the 1966 strike. What is singularly missing from this account is any mention whatsoever of Harold Wilson's speech of Communists within the Union that was so influential in the termination of strike.¹³³ By a curious twist in this principle, the Government in directly involving itself in all the institutions of the Shipping World began to unravel a hermetically sealed alliance that had existed for the best part of half a century.

Indeed the Prime Minister was far from happy in

the way he had enforced the role of State and privately accused the Union - and its officials - of being "a child of the Shipping Companies" for too long; his government having to suffer the consequences of the seamen's rebellion which brought it face to face with the State.¹³⁴ "It has been suggested that the government perceived in the NUS a sacrificial lamb with which comparative ease could be slaughtered on the altar of an incomes policy. The strike developed into one of the bitterest disputes since the second world war and the intensity of the Labour Government's attack on the strikers took even its most ardent supporters by surprise. This attack reached a climax with the accusation of a tight knit red plot."¹³⁵ This was generally the terrain and ownership on which the union and Shipping Federation had found agreement. Now the State had shown its full face. Within this light, it is interesting then to recall a comment made during the 1960 stoppage and of the wave of stoppages led by the fusion of the National Seamen's Reform Movement, "They had discovered that all Cunard's millions allied with the Board of Trade, the Pool and the Shipping Federation, Lloyds and all the rest were not strong enough to move a ship one inch in any port where the rank and file seamen were in full unity."¹³⁶ For in reality the great stoppage of 1966 was a conclusion to the events of 1960.

The irony of this conclusion was that it was taking place within a changing world of shipping in which old frameworks were beginning to be eroded; this came not

only on the part of Labour, nor even with the State but with the cartelisation of shipping funds into wider and diverse areas. Within months of the 1966 stoppage a series of Consortiums were being developed to deal with the containerisation process, "amidst new world shipping conditions".¹³⁷

Yet in the aftermath of the 1966 stoppage it is worth concentrating on that secondary strand of analysis with which we began this chapter, the pressure to which the union was subjected in order to change, and to note its effects within a wider orbit.

It was a certain fear that had grown throughout the early 1960s about the alignments within the union that prompted the General Secretary to comment after the strike that, "We have gained a reputation of a union going through a period of rebirth, a union in which the membership is waking to their democratic responsibilities, but take for instance the stupid idea that to be active in the NUS today implies membership of the Communist Party or adhering to Communist policies."¹³⁸ This was sentiment far removed from the General Secretary's remarks upon his accession to power some four years earlier in 1962 when he stated categorically that "All I have to say about the so-called Reform Movement is that you've had your day in this union".¹³⁹ The time had gone however for any moves backwards to auto-cracy. To the chagrin of the shipowners the impetus of change continued within the union. The established leadership's major platform was trying to ensure that pace to be gradual.

This was the case with the liaison scheme: a watered down ship's committee which with little real autonomous power came into operation in 1965. Lack of interest or not however, the Liaison Scheme had to be pressed on with, to be more radical even, more in line with an autonomous ship's committee even if the ideal, "of giving the Union back to the members found little implementation in reality". Doors and more doors had still to be opened to let the membership pass through should they wish. Increasingly this had become the strategy of the Reformers and much had been achieved since their original fight of 1960. It was in the aftermath of developments in 1965 and 1966 that led Reformers to think that the best possible way forward for seamen, represented at all levels by lay committees on the waterside and on the ships was in the amalgamation of the NUS with the Transport and General Worker's Union. However any thought of this was still vociferously opposed by the leadership in an argument that returned in time to the 1920s.¹⁴⁰

Yet within the "battle for the institutions, six sea-going members were chosen to be represented at the Union's Rules Revision Conference in 1967. This was an important gain as for the previous forty years the membership of this body had consisted of solely full time officials. Other gains were made when old reformers were elected to sit on negotiating panels on conditions throughout the industry. The dominant feature after the strike was the consolidated aim of giving more control to the

members through the changed structure of rules within the Union. A major feature here was that plural voting was rejected, an anachronism that had lasted over forty years and was originally intended for Havelock Wilson to have more control over the union through older members and officials having up to four times the vote of "young hot-heads". A resolution granting AGM voting rights to sea-going EC delegates was passed in order to counteract the automatic votes of officials. Considering the historical role the AGM had played in the affairs of seamen this was a factor of great importance.¹⁴¹

With this accountability procedure went a similar one that all appointments within the Union were to be taken out of the hands of the General Secretary and placed within the EC. This brought old reform movement members to official positions for the first time. Combined with this was the passing of a resolution that granted AGM voting rights to sea-going delegates. Previously this again had been the sole domain of officials within the Union.¹⁴²

How this change was reflected in the union's position came in a series of articles entitled "Old Attitudes and New Skills" that appeared in The Seaman between 1962-67, and were a characteristic of Bill Hogarth's early reign. These drew attention to the dichotomy between the new skilled man to work on the new fleets and set against this the conception of the old casual, who wanted only "the peace of the sea and to look through the

bottle at the stars".¹⁴³ Admittedly this had not been the characterisation of the casual when there had been dissent with Union policies. Time was moving on however and what was changing was Union's characterisation of its members. This point was echoed in a research paper taken up by the Union and published in the later 1960s. It stated that "the major requirement is a change of attitude on our part ... change is needed in our attitudes to leisure and liberty".¹⁴⁴

What this dimension of change echoed was a major re-think in union attitudes towards the pub, the casual and the mature trade unionist and a recognition that all three stereotypes could be attached to the same person rather than conceived as separate entities. Since 1920 union pronouncements had inevitably linked recklessness and drink together as the central ingredients of the casual labour force with the intermittent outbursts of unrest as a natural characteristic. Now there was a changing manifesto concerning the criteria of judgement in what was regarded as correct or incorrect about the membership's behaviour.

Related to such changing conceptions was the wider change in the industry itself. Between 1959 and 1969 the British Fleet increased by only 15% whereas the tonnage of other major European, Scandinavian and Japanese countries was over 100%.¹⁴⁵ By the later 1960s after a further process of cartelisation that re-echoed the 1920s and early 'thirties, some 70% of the total fleet, including tankers, was in the hands of a very small group of companies.¹⁴⁶

Whilst Britain had the third largest tanker fleet in the world the proportion of her size in relation to the rest of the world's fleet had fallen from 19.9% in 1953 to 12% by 1970. The British Information Services commented that "whereas Britain had 19.9% proportion of the world's fleet in 1953 today the figure is 12% although the total size of the fleet has increased."¹⁴⁷ They thus incidentally commented on the increasing use of Flags of Convenience utilised by British companies, to register their shipping elsewhere under more favourable tax laws and in the absence of strong labour organisations. Liberia's fleet had grown from less than 1% to 48.9% of the world's fleet by 1970.¹⁴⁸

Ships and seamen could hardly not be affected. The numbers of ships had fallen by 30% between 1950 and 1970 and whereas in 1951 there had been nearly 100,000 British seamen below deck there were at the time of the strike in 1966 little over 60,000. Figures were to fall more rapidly after 1970.¹⁴⁹

Yet what the 1966 strike had shown was that even on a united front how easily the union could be isolated. With the abrupt termination of the stoppage after the statements of "communism" and "subversion" within the union, mistrust again ran through the ranks. They had heard these words too often before. Not only was there mistrust with the leadership but at the State's ability to manipulate that leadership into its own way of thinking. Consequently there was a renewed campaign to develop

activity at the lower level while increasing thought was given towards the drawing together of all transport unions on the waterside. It was from this time that increased NUS activity within the International Transport Workers Federation was manifested.¹⁵⁰

The NUS had re-affiliated to the ITWF in 1934. Like the re-established connections with the Labour Party however they came to form only part of the machinery "from above" as if to sanctify the NUS's "rehabilitation". It was not until the 1960s, in common with the changes taking place within the Union, that the rebels came to utilise these channels. In part this explains the glaring omission of the Labour Party as any focus for political activity amongst seamen during all these years. Paradoxically this was to change after the 1966 stoppage.¹⁵¹

Past attitudes in changed circumstances had been eroded by the Reformers' tactic of change within the institutions of the union; could not the institution itself be developed into a wider framework? A new era was dawning yet once again seamen had found themselves isolated. This time not away from their own union, the first time in more than half a century; yet as one militant explained with regards to the union "because of the time lag between the technological and the manifestation of its full economical and social implications some of the long run effects of the pressure have still to be appreciated."¹⁵²

Historically dominated through the power of property relations and the position of shipowners with their

relationships to the law and the Board of Trade, the Union from its inception had been moulded to their image. Furthermore it was seen with what power the State could intercede at both ideological and legal levels to isolate seamen. It was within this context that reformers within the Union sought to incorporate seamen within the realms of a wider trade union structure and in doing so resuscitate in different circumstances the old dream of a one union waterside. An impasse with which the inheritors of the Reform movement were trying to come to terms: "that sea and land transport met at the port but the bulk of their problems in labour relations lay for the most part elsewhere and their conditions of functioning were different. This is why such obvious strategic alliances as those between seamen and dockers never lasted long and the occasional dreams of national or even international transport solidarity were never of more than momentary importance."¹⁵³ It returns us to the strands of development with which we began this chapter; the shipowners' relationship to the State and to the Union and secondly the study of social relationships existent within the union itself in the post war period.

Conclude: Weaving the Patterns

If in 1920 the facilitation by the State had brought the Shipping Federation and the Seamen's Union to sign fundamental agreements within the National Maritime

Board then by the latter 1960s the totality of these relationships were in question. It was within this scenario that the seamen would have to paint their picture or draw their dole. It was a world moreover that no longer viewed the institutions of the Shipping Industry as the fulcrum of power for the maintenance and supremacy of the Empire and latterly the Commonwealth.

For its own part, the State tried to effect changes after the seamen's mass unrest. In what the 19th century lawyer - historian A.V. Dicey called law and opinion, it tried to affect seamen's conditions and show what was acceptable both in duly constituted courts of law and to prevailing social convention. The Pearson enquiries of 1967 and the Rochdale Commission in 1970 were testimony to this;¹⁵⁴ convention in higher circles however still made the seaman an isolated figure; and in many ways the heart and soul of the contradictions within the British Economy.

The Labour Government that existed between 1964 - 1970 also found itself enclosed within this dual role; between appeasing the Bank of England and the Treasury, the City of London in State Ermine, or to build up the old and the new industries within a National Plan. It lost all confidence in the face of the City's withering attacks and demands for deflation combined with "keeping the pound riding high" for the whole of the Sterling Area; instead the Trade Unions bore the brunt of its attacks. The seamen in 1966 were the classic case. Nairn commented in a

seminal article written some twelve months before this occurrence that, "It is quite clear that the government's actual policies are remote even from the aggressive neo-capitalism profiled in Wilson's speeches; they have become a mitigated defence of the Status Quo. But so easily and so completely that one must ask whether the other alternative was in fact ever a genuine one at all."¹⁵⁵

Instead the Labour Government poured State money into shipping and to shipowners in an attempt for them to claw back some of the trade Britain had lost; allocations provided for up to 80% of the initial cost of new shipping; by far and away the highest source of funding in the post war period. Every possible inducement was provided and for a time succeeded, most notably in having foreign companies register ships in Britain and after five years return to different flags, yet as Bill Brankley the conference chairman of the NUS told delegates in 1970 there was no planned development of shipping. "It is my view that the traditional casualist approach to national fleet replacement is outdated. An increasing number of countries are now committed to publicly declared growth programmes aimed at expanding national fleets. But as far as the United Kingdom is concerned the best one can get is the old shipping correspondent's 'guesstimate' this is surely not good enough. There is a vital interdependence here - between capital resources sunk into the industry and the dependence of shipping's contribution to balance of payments - which is far too important to be left to the hazards of the market

place."¹⁵⁶ It was precisely within the framework of the market place that the larger shipping companies were diversifying their capital resources. Not only was the third world becoming industrialised but flags of convenience shipping within other "less developed" areas was becoming part of an accepted norm. It only required British Ship-owners and the Shipping Federation to accept these norms to signify that there was now a transference out of the old frameworks established since 1920.¹⁵⁷ Perhaps it was the pressure of the Seamen's Union, perhaps and more likely, the pressures of the market place and the role of British Shipping within an increasingly amorphous and internationalised industry. City interests had emerged and re-oriented their dominance of British Society. Far from shipping being integrated within a National Plan, as a child of commerce it was to remain outside any such attachment while the State became merely the social conscience of the declining and older staple industries. Shipping was central to this amorphous expansion and internal decline. It reflected the dominant bodies within British society yet the frameworks which guarded its development from 1920 were ceasing to hold.

Perhaps developments within both the Shipping Federation and the Seamen's Union were confirming what John Strachey had written in the latter 1950s, that "the main trends in the political and economic fields are running in opposite directions".¹⁵⁸ We opened this chapter on the characteristic roles taken towards the Union and the State

by Havelock Wilson and his namesake Harold Wilson; of relationships and specific roles within a certain framework. If this framework was in a process of erosion the similar names yet the totally different philosophies of the Jim Slaters of British society came to symbolise its further decline. One was a City based entrepreneur who profited from the Labour government's penchant for conglomerate mergers who also had extensive interests in Flags of Convenience shipping from Hong Kong. The other, a leader for the movement for democracy from within the NUS that in turn came to challenge the very fabric of relationships that had been assumed historically between Ship-owners, Seamen's Union and the State.

Footnotes to Chapter 4

1. W. Hogarth, General Secretary NUS was to state "The government's half nelson on us had forced us from an industrial dispute with the shipowners into a fight with the state itself."
The Seaman, November 1966, p. 163.
2. This could be seen with the Daily Telegraphs conception of the Merchant Navy as the "4th arm of the State" and with military and political strategists such as Lord Hill Norton and Sir J. Hoskyn's. J. Prescott the NUS sponsored MP was also to state there was tremendous support for the seamen amongst the ranks of Conservatives, notably the Tory patricians.
Daily Telegraph, August 15th 1960.
Guardian, November 10th 1982.
The Times, February 16th 1983.
Interview with J. Slater, March 21st 1984.
3. E. Wilson, Only Half-way to Paradise, Tavistock, London, 1980, p. 17.
4. The phrase was Thomas Yates yet it had run from Havelock Wilson's time when he described Joe Cotter's "ungentlemanly behaviour", prior to the strike of Cooks and Stewards.
Minutes of Proceedings of Special Conference, October 19th 1921.
5. T. Nairn, "Labour Imperialism", NLR No. 32, 1965, p. 8.
6. W. Hogarth, in The Seaman, December 1966, p. 183.
7. T. Lane, The Ferrymen, University of Liverpool, 1984, p. 3.
8. P. Ferris, The New Militants, Penguin, 1972, p. 109. Also, The T&GWU at the Place of Work, London, 1979, p. 4/5.
9. J. Bellini, Rule Britannia, A Progress Report for Domesday, Jonathan Cape, 1981, p. 45.
10. Seaman's Charter, October 1970.
11. "United Kingdom Trade, 1983 - 1948 - 1960", Liverpool Steam Ship Owners Association. Quoted in G.S. Sturme, British Shipping, London, 1962, p. 162.
12. This was always to be a source of ambivalence and confusion: Syndicalism was but a brief caesura in the seamens isolation up to the 1960s. Letters to The Seaman in 1966 quoted the poets Kipling and Service to demonstrate "that other race of men" notwithstanding Ministers of State suggesting that "there is a new type of seamen coming soon."

The Seaman, December 1966, p. 200.

13. Freedom and Efficiency, General Council of British Shipping, London, 1943.
10 years later the NUS was to state, it is on record - TUC Interim Report on Public Ownership 1952 - that our union did not welcome any form of nationalisation.
The Seaman, September 1953, p. 91.
14. B. Moggridge, "Labour Relations and Labour Costs" in G.S. Sturmeay, op.cit., pp. 320-321.
15. "Maritime Transport", OEEC Reports, Paris, May 1957, p. 51.
16. See also, Cunard Annual Report, Liverpool Daily Post, April 25th 1955.
17. L. Bowes, Pacific Steam Navigation Company, Liverpool Steamship Owners Association Annual Report.
Fairplay, April 7th 1955.
18. M. Thornton, British Shipping, Cambridge, 1939, p. 202.
OEEC Commissioned Survey of Crews Employed in Merchant Fleets, Paris, 1957, p. 24.
19. Report of Liverpool Steamship Owners Association, Liverpool Daily Post, March 14th 1955. Under an article "Shipping Trade Being Filched" say Shipowners", the President of the Chamber of Shipping, C.J. Denholm, noted that Britain has now only 20% of world trade instead of the 50% it held not so long ago.
The Seaman, November 1954, p. 119.
20. "Since the beginning of the last war world shipping has increased by 130%. British shipping less than 20%. Since 1949, West Germany's fleet has grown by 17%, Norway's 7.5%, Denmark and Sweden's 6%, the UK 1.8%."
P. Foot, "The Seamans Struggle", in The Incompatibles, ed. R. Blackburn and C. Cockburn, London, 1967, p. 169.
21. "Fairplay Report", quoted in Liverpool Daily Post, February 23rd 1955.
22. Report of Enquiry into Matters Concerning Shipping Industry, Viscount Rochdale, CMND 4337, Para. 499, HMSO, 1970.
23. "Economics of Shipping Enterprises" in G.S. Sturmeay, op.cit., pp. 248-255.
Another report stated that, "A recent survey of 1000 coastal ships revealed the obsolete nature of much of the tonnage. About 50% of the ships were more than 20 years old and many were more than 30 and 40 years old."
Report of Master Mariners Service Association, May 1955.

- and for cargo liners, Rochdale Report, op.cit., para. 412.
24. Best year for British shipping since 1930. Liverpool Daily Post, February 23rd 1955.
 25. W. McConville, The Shipping Industry in the UK, Research Series No. 26, International Institute for Labour Studies, Geneva, 1977, p. 27.
 26. The Cunard Company stated that, "Out of profits between 1949 - 1953 of 47,000,000, we have paid 19 million in taxation and only 3 million in dividends." Liverpool Daily Post, March 14th 1955.
 27. This, even though their tax immunities since 1945 had increased from 20% to 40% by 1949 and were to remain throughout the following decade. Lord Rochdale commented some two decades later, "We compared on a discount basis the burden of taxation falling on UK shipping companies with that of other major maritime nations ... the combination of investment grants and free depreciation weighs heavily in favour of the United Kingdom company." Financial Times, May 7th 1970.
 28. In many interviews the question always returns to the sacrifices seamen have made in times of war and how unjust their later treatment. This was exemplified by the 500 seamen from Liverpool who were prisoners of war and yet received no compensation. (The Weekly News, September 29th 1978). A brief example to younger seamen was in the Falklands war of 1982. Interview with Jim Slater, March 21st 1984.
 29. Joe Byrne, T&GWU, Liverpool, quoted in Strikes, ed. R. Leason, Allen and Unwin, 1973, p. 163.
 30. Liverpool Echo, October 28th 1947.
 31. Seamans Conditions in India and Pakistan. Report of Labour on the Subcontinent, ILO, Geneva, 1949, pp. 27-32. TUC Library.
 32. Ibid.
 33. Letter from "The Glebe" Limehouse Basin and NUS comment on the ILO Report, The Seaman, November 1949, p. 143.
 34. Thomas Yates, at AGM No. 63, NUS, 1955, TUC Library.
 35. Ibid., quoted in Journal of Commerce, July 17th 1955.

36. B. Moggridge, "Labour Relations and Labour Costs", in G. Sturmeý, op.cit., p. 302.
37. T. Yates. On the first anniversary of the appointment of James Scott to National Organiser in the aftermath of the 1955 stoppage in Liverpool. AGM No. 64, NUS, 1956.
38. Journal of Commerce, June 23rd 1955.
39. T. Yates, Chairmans remarks, AGM No. 64, NUS, 1956.
40. Fairplay, June 23rd 1955, p. 139.
41. Sir Walter Monkton, Journal of Commerce, June 24th 1955.
42. Sir L. Roberts, Chairman Mersey Docks and Harbour Board, Liverpool Echo, April 27th 1955.
43. J. Bellini, op.cit., p. 61.
44. OEEC Reports, Paris, 1957, p. 12.
45. Ibid., p. 37.
46. Sir P. Bates had stated that the Cunard Company would save £14,000,000 per year if its fleet were "transferred", enough to sustain the building of a new "Queen Mary".
AGM 64, NUS, 1956.
47. C.J. Bartlett, A History of Post-war Britain, 1945 - 1974, Longman, London, 1977, p. 189.
48. British Shipping: Heading for the Rocks, NUS, 1982, pp. 15-16.
49. "If discrimination by other countries continues to grow, the desirability of maintaining the essentials of the existing liberal policy may need to be re-appraised."
Rochdale Report, op.cit., para 91, 1970.
50. Rubinstein had noted for example the different enterprises where the City had invested and how this corresponded to different parts of the country particularly in the 1930s and the 1960s.
W.D. Rubinstein, "Wealth, Elites and the Class Structure of Modern Britain", Past and Present, No. 76, 1977, pp. 124-125.
51. The theme of the Chairman of the Council of British Shipping, 1955, reported in Liverpool Daily Post, April 1st 1955.
52. B. Moggridge, "Labour Relations and Labour Costs" in G.S. Sturmeý, op.cit., p. 321.

53. A.L. Lloyd, Folk Song in England, London, 1975, p. 26.
54. Research on 6 Liverpool ships, 1959: Parthia (Cunard) No. 182417, Mercian (Ellerman) No. 182413, Sculptor (T&J Harrison) No. 169852, Mentor (Blue Funnel) No. 181078, Calabar (Elder Dempster) No. 164664, Dunstan (Booth) No. 182457.
Registry of Shipping and Seamen, Llantrissant, Cardiff.
55. This is pointed up in all subsequent testimonies of that "close intense world".
T.S. Simey, Dockers, University of Liverpool, 1952.
A. Shea, "Dockers and Change", B.A., University of Essex, 1977.
W. Williams, The Liverpool Docks, in Writin', The Scotland Road Community Workshop, Liverpool, 1978.
Besides D. Wilson (Dockers, 1972) Hill found "that up to the late 1960s, the continuation of casual labour was the main structural underpinning of these aspects of traditionalism".
S. Hill, The Dockers, Heinemann, London, 1976, p. 8.
56. J. Slater, in Strikes: A Living History, ed. R. Leeson, Allen and Unwin, 1973, p. 212.
57. J. Kinahan, "Maritime Industrial Relations", Marine Policy Management Studies, No. 4, 1976, p. 103.
58. The Times, July 5th 1960.
59. J. McFarlane, "Our Seamen", Trade Union Register, 1970, p. 142.
60. A TUC enquiry had been ordered into the intra-union stoppages. Ironically by 1958, T. Yates was the first NUS member to preside over the TUC.
The Seaman, March 1958.
61. Lloyds List, August 11th 1960.
62. One of the strikers commented that, "there are a number of items concerning Union administration that we want altering and we are adopting the legal way of getting this done."
The Times, July 16th 1960.
63. G. Foulser, Seamans Voice, McKibbin and Kee, London, 1961, p. 190.
64. Yates at the 1960 Conference fired angrily, "Reformers! ... This to my mind is one of the most grotesque features of their performance."
The Seaman, September-October 1960, p. 103.
65. Indeed the Clyde tugboat men were all dismissed for striking in sympathy with the seamen. At this time

they were all members of the NUS (The Times, July 17th 1960). The attitude displayed towards them by the NUS was to lead them to successfully change organisations to the T&GWU by 1962.
Seamans Charter, No. 18, 1978.

66. The Times, August 27th 1960.
67. Daily Telegraph, August 15th 1960.
68. Interview with Bill Donaghie, November 10th 1978.
69. The Fo'c'stle, Paper of the NSRM, Vol. 1, No. 3, February 1961.
70. Barney Flynn, ibid., No. 4, 1961.
71. Journal of Commerce, July 5th 1960.
72. J. Hemingway, Conflict and Democracy, Oxford, 1978, p. 56.
73. Fairplay, June 28th 1960.
74. Ibid., September 8th 1960.
75. Ibid., September 1st 1960.
76. G. Foulser commented that, "It was about this time that the Daily Telegraph carried an item which strongly criticised Yates and the NUS. It seemed to me that the united front of support for the seamen had made the shipowners decide that Yates had served his purpose and could not be thrown to the wolves."
Seamans Voice, op.cit., p. 188.
77. Quoted in Fairplay, September 1st 1960.
78. The Fo'c'stle, Vol. 1, No. 4, April 1961.
79. Ibid.
80. Hemingway, op.cit., p. 74.
81. Ibid., p. 69.
82. AGM No. 69, NUS, 1961, p. 205.
83. Hemingway, op.cit., p. 66.
84. AGM No. 69, NUS, 1961, p. 205.
Yates had commented a year earlier upon the traditional linking of strong union finance and subversive "wreckers", "In Liverpool three of the leaders of this misnamed Reform Movement were not even financial members."
The Seaman, July/August 1960, p. 101.

85. The Fo'c'stle, Vol. 1, No. 6, May 1961.
86. R. Woods (Liverpool) "British Seamen 1911 - 1960", The Fo'c'stle, Vol. 1, No. 4, April 1961.
87. J. Slater, "Motivated Men", in Strikes: A Living History, ed. R. Leeson, Allen and Unwin, 1973, p. 215.
88. Spying upon "subversives" had been the practice of the British Empire Union formed in 1920. Its founder member Sir Thomas Royden, Chairman of Cunard, often met with Havelock Wilson especially around the period of the General Strike.
R. Bean, "Liverpool Shipping Employers and the Anti-Communist Activities of J.M. Hughes 1920 - 1925", Society for the Study of Labour History, No. 34, p. 22.
89. W. Hogarth at his initial speech as General Secretary. The Seaman, September-October 1962, p. 131.
90. Quoted in Hemingway, op.cit., p. 63.
91. The Fo'c'stle, Vol. 1, No. 2, February 1961.
This was not confined merely to the "reformers". Ballot rigging took place in favour of "official" candidates especially in London between 1960 - 1962. As Mr T. Bishop, Branch Secretary Tilbury, confessed his personal role in manufacturing 9,000 votes in elections to the EC and for the General Secretary. News of the World, September 27th 1964.
92. P. Ballard, Seamans Charter, No. 18, 1978.
93. P. Neary, The Fo'c'stle, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1961.
94. AGM No. 70, NUS, 1962, p. 16.
95. Quoted in Hemingway, op.cit., p. 70.
96. Seamans rank and file newspapers had always campaigned on this issue.
Seaman (Liverpool) 1947-48.
On Watch (Liverpool) 1951-53.
Seamans Voice (London, 1954-1956, which provided the title of George Foulser's book in 1960.
97. The Story of the Seaman, NUS, 1964, p. 47.
98. "Revitalising NUS Democracy", Bill Hogarth's Address to Conference, AGM No. 71, NUS, 1963.
99. The Seaman, November 1963, p. 168.
100. P. Foot, "The Seamans Struggle" in The Incompatibles, eds. R. Blackburn and C. Cockburn, London, 1967, p. 181.

101. G. Foulser, Unholy Alliance, Syndicalist Workers Federation, Surrey, 1970, pp. 1-2.
102. P. Foot, op.cit., pp. 179-82.
103. Hemingway, op.cit., p. 78.
104. G. Foulser, Unholy Alliance, op.cit., p. 4.
105. Ibid., p. 8.
106. Workers Control: Chairman W. Kendall, Conference on Industrial Democracy, Transcripts, University of Nottingham Extra-Mural Department, June 1966.
107. H. Hikens, "The Liverpool Dockers in 1967" in Building the Union, ed. H. Hikens, "Studies in the Growth of the Trade Union Movement", Toulouse Press for Liverpool Trades Council, 1973.
108. G. Foulser, op.cit., p. 9.
109. Quoted in Hemingway, op.cit., p. 78.
110. Yet even the IRIS, a Fundamentalist anti-Communist research unit which had an office at Maritime House, came to state that, "There was no subtle fantasy about the seamans strike. For decades the men have been exploited up to the hilt. No shore-based group of workers would have accepted such conditions." P. Foot, "The Seamans Struggle", op.cit., p. 192.
111. The Times, May 2nd 1966.
112. Ibid., May 15th 1966.
113. Ibid., May 16th 1966.
114. H.A. Turner and others, Do Trade Unions Cause Inflation? Cambridge Occasional Paper No. 36, CUP, 1972, pp. 116-117.
115. As late as May 1966, Hogarth had written that "If we come to strike action and we all hope we can achieve an acceptable settlement without this there will be no room for any acts by any member, outside the directives and advice which the Union and its officials will be giving." The Seaman, May 1966, p. 79.
116. The Times, June 8th 1966.
117. First Report of the Committee on Enquiry (Pearson) into matters concerning the shipping industry, Cmnd 3025, HMSO, June 1966.
118. The Times, June 10th 1966.

119. Ibid.
120. Ibid., June 8th 1966.
121. A reporter at the AGM No. 74, 1966 wrote from Worthin that "Although the General Secretary hopes to avoid it, a strike might paradoxically strengthen his position by showing the more moderate members that the Union can still be militant in the seamans interests."
The Times, May 1st 1966.
122. Ibid., June 21st 1966.
123. Hemingway was tempted to note that "The strike threatened to break the Labour government's incomes policy and H. Wilson alleged that the strike was led by 'a tightly knit group of motivated men'." As the comments in this text indicate, this was quite implausible.
Conflict and Democracy, p. 78.
Even The Times noted that, "Union leaders seem to regard the government's onslaught on extremists within the NUS as interesting rather than the general intentions of the government towards the position of the unions."
June 29th 1966.
For a truer reflection of the issue with regards the role of government in relation to Treasury, State and the dominant powers within the economy, notably the City, see L. Brittan, Steering the Economy, The Role of the Treasury, London, 1970, pp. 329-339.
124. R. Tyndall, NUS, "The 1960s Remembered". Oral History Conference, Ruskin College, November 21st 1979.
125. The Times, June 9th 1966.
126. Ibid., June 10th 1966.
127. Ibid., June 24th 1966.
128. Ibid., June 29th 1966.
129. Notwithstanding the legal framework which enveloped seamen, the Premier had been adamant from the outset that "the strike would be a fight against the government and the State".
The Times, May 14th 1966.
130. Bill Hogarth, The Times, June 30th 1966.
131. Describing "the decision of June 29th" Hogarth was to assert that, "We had reached a stage where we had to ask ourselves the question whether there was

any possibility of gaining anything more and risking the complete disintegration of the union. On top of all this we were really at war with the government and State with the shipowners backing them up. It was either this fight or as I say, the possibility of the breaking up of the union altogether." Nowhere was there a better description of the functioning of the triad in extremis.
The Seaman, September 1966, p. 119.

132. P. Foot, The Seamans Struggle, op.cit., p. 73.
133. The Seaman, August 1966, p. 107.
134. F. Whishem, Governments and Trade Unions, Macmillan, 1982, p. 126.
135. W. McConville, The Shipping Industry in the UK, op.cit., p. 51.
136. G. Foulser, Seamans Voice, McKibbon and Kee, London, 1961, p. 190.
137. J. Nolan, Chairman Liverpool Portworkers Committee, "Liverpool and Birkenhead Docks: An Observation", Report to the 4th International Conference of Port Shop Stewards, Appx 1, Gothenburg, April 1980.
138. W. Hogarth, The Seaman, December 1966, p. 183.
139. Ibid., November-December 1962, p. 115.
140. J. McFarlane, "Our Seamen", Trade Union Register, 1970, p. 143, ed. Coates and Topham.
141. Hemingway, op.cit., pp. 70-74.
142. Seamans Charter, No. 11, 1974.
 This rank and file newspaper had originated in Liverpool but was meant to provide a national perspective: its subtitle reads "Aimed to steer British seamen on course for their full trade union rights". One of its founders, Jack Coward, was particularly keen that it should remain in Liverpool. Interview with F. Campion, Editor, February 1979.
143. One quoted some lines by Service:
 "There's a race of men who don't fit in
 A race that won't sit still
 And they break the hearts of kith and kin
 And they roam the world at will."
 Letter to The Seaman, October 1966, p. 157.
144. J. Kinahan, Research Officer NUS, The Seaman, December 1966, p.192.

145. The Rochdale Report, Cmnd 4337, HMSO, London, 1970, para. 7.
146. W. McConville, op.cit., pp. 27 and 50.
147. British Shipping, British Information Services, Central Office of Information, London, 1970, p. 1.
148. Flags of Convenience: The Unacceptable Face of Shipping, NUS, London, 1981, p. 4.
149. There were 95,000 registered British ratings in 1950, 88,000 in 1960, 50,000 in 1970 and 30,000 in 1980.
OEEC Reports, 1950.
British Shipping Statistics, 1960 - 1980.
Registry of Shipping and Seamen, Llantrissant, Cardiff.
150. Interview with J. Slater, March 21st 1984.
151. The likes of J. Slater, S. McCluskie and J. Prescott as NUS sponsored MP all came out of the radicalising movement from reform to the great strike 1960 - 1966. Paradoxically J. Kenny resigned from the Labour Party. "Kenny is a life-long member of the Labour Party and adheres to what is usually described as the 'Tribune left wing'." After Wilson's speech on the 20th June, as if in order to become the realisation of the image he joined the Communist Party a soon after. Later as National Organiser he was active in promoting the widest links with seamen and port workers at international level.
152. Conference on Shipping and Seamen, Maritime Museum, Greenwich, October 1969.
"The Seaman in History", The Seaman, November 1969, p. 27.
153. E.J. Hobsbawm, "Labouring Men", Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1964, p. 222.
154. Final Report of Committee of Enquiry into Matters Concerning the Shipping Industry (Pearson), Cmnd 3211, HMSO, 1967.
155. Tom Nairn, "Labour Imperialism", New Left Review, 32, 1965, p. 9.
156. Bill Brankley, Conference Chairman, AGM No. 78, NUS, 1970.
Quoted in The Seaman, June/July 1970, p. 125.
157. This was given testimony by the remarks of Sir F. Bolton, Shipowner, Chairman International Shipping Federation.
Quoted in Flags of Convenience: The Unacceptable Face of Shipping, NUS, 1981, p. 12.

158. J. Strachey, Contemporary Capitalism, V. Gollancz, 1956, p. 180.

CHAPTER FIVE

A QUESTION OF IDENTITY

Previous chapters of this thesis have dealt with the long struggle of the seamen to become effectively organised within the union. Chapters one and two showed the extent of the effective fusion of shipowners, state and seamen's union, whilst chapter three laid emphasis on the different strands of seamen's dissent in the fragmented and uneven developments from the 1930s to the 1950s. Chapter four described a certain harmonising of this dissent that arose within the rank and file "reform movement" and carried a momentum forward not only to the great strike of 1966 but to the involvement of union officials in unprecedented degrees of militancy. Seamen were at last becoming effectively organised. Once again they pre-figured a trend that concerned trade unions and the state.¹

One historian, commenting upon changes in post-war British Society noted that in relation to trade unions, "after 1968 circumstances changed, not only was there an increase in strike activity but an increasing proportion of strikes were now "official" and led by the large unions. The origins of this change of emphasis lay in growing hostility to the political philosophy of the Heath Conservative government."² For the seamen 1966 was the first official strike since the campaign for national recognition in 1911; for many other unions no official action had been taken since 1926. Viewed through the prism of different perspectives it was a reflection of the way long established formal and

informal agreements were now being challenged and in particular between the seamen's union, the shipowners and the state. By 1970 the implicit relationships established within the framework of the National Maritime Board in 1920 were breaking down.³

The reasons for this breakdown were twofold. Seamen were gaining more democratic control within the union, disturbing the easy relationship that had existed between the dominant institutions of the shipping industry. At the same time shipowners were diversifying their interests either into capital intensive areas demanded by the new container technology or into other businesses not associated with shipping. This combined with trans-national conglomerate companies moving into the shipping world and increasingly operating under flags of convenience, and third world shipping countries attempting to operate their own fleets. Shipping as an industry was ceasing to be of such vital importance within the national economy. This decimated the number of British seamen especially after 1970.

This tragedy had a positive side to it however and concerned the way in which shipping laws, formulated and put into operation by the state, which made seamen "unique" among industrial workers, were increasingly challenged, not just in themselves but as opening the way for seamen to enter with greater confidence into the wider reaches of the labour movement. This could be seen at its most dramatic in 1969-1970 with the winning of the vote at the 1970 Annual General Meeting for the union to pursue the question of amalgamation with the Transport and General Workers Union.⁴ In this

there arose again all the visions of the one-union waterside that had so inspired the outcast radicals of the earlier period. If the tragedy was that in overcoming the isolation imposed on them since the 1920s another chasm was to open after 1970 then seamen were nevertheless determined not to remain locked within the dominant institutions of the shipping world. They refused to remain "civilised from above", and this gave a sense of purpose to their struggle.

What seamen came to challenge in these years was not only relationships within their Union but also their very categorisation as special types of workers that had been drawn out of wider agreements. Conrad Dixon has shown that in relation to their employers and to the law, it was as if one side of the Industry obeyed the economic laws of the market whilst the other had to comply with an almost feudal code of behaviour.⁵ Even Lord Pearson maintained that in the employment of seamen at the waterside, "the rites of the signing on ceremony have much in common with those of an over zealous religious group ... In modern conditions it is impractical and timewasting."⁶ As in most rituals however the ceremony implied a certain assumption about the men to be employed and this was validated by the law up until the latter 1960s. It took the great strike of 1966 and a combination of radical dissent with official Union backing, for the State to lay hands on what had become a sacred framework.

"All the organisations of the National Maritime Board agree that its constitution should be changed without

delay and we share their opinion. Until 1966 they were proud of their record in settling their differences. The events leading up to the stoppage meant however that once the two sides had decided they could not agree there was no constitutional means within the board's procedures to renew discussions." Here was the recognition that for the near half century since 1920 there had been no dispute of such measure to rock the stability of this body.⁷ To some extent, whilst 1966 was a success in having the union act in a united manner, old Syndicalists like George Foulser called it an "unholy alliance";⁸ it was not until after this event that the rebels were fully aware of what they were up against. Changing the union was only a primary target. What also needed changing was all manner of legislation for as Basil Moggridge had noted some years earlier, "the framework of legal relations at sea is redolent of attitudes that are virtually extinct in shorebound industry."⁹

At the heart of these traditional attitudes were certain assumptions about seamen. These spanned the divide between protection and discipline and could be politely described as paternalistic: seamen needed help and required discipline to keep them in order. Chapter Two described the Union's position in relation to these moral imperatives. One lawyer noted about the famous 1894 Act that was still the legal basis of the N.M.B. in 1920, "interminable of length, inflexible since its origins and growing progressively more unwieldy with age it became a victim of official euphoria. Time was found occasionally to alter certain parts of the acts in order to conform with International conventions

but the laws relating to seamen remained largely untouched ... as though none dare lay hands on the monuments to Victoriana." ¹⁰

Central therefore to the brief in which Justice Pearson originally sat down under the instructions of Government in 1966 while seamen left their ships unmanned in the dock, was that within the industry there should have to come a change: "that greater equality of status is to be expected and in our view welcomed".¹¹ While these were worthy sentiments, the old assumptions refused to die. Even with the seamen beaten and back at work and the finality of Pearson's second report thrust upon them in 1967, confused analysis over these assumptions of past attitudes in changing circumstances continued.

The recommendations by Pearson and the inauguration by Rochdale¹² for a new Shipping Bill and the change of attitude, pressured from below, on the part of the Union towards the employers and the State, were examples of the way the old triangular relationships were being challenged and corporatist attitudes breaking down. The Pearson and Rochdale reports both gave historical accounts of the stranglehold of the shipping laws and of the traditions of casualism and other areas of control that existed to circumscribe seamen's lives.

The Pearson report of 1967 found that the casual nature of employment still dictated attitudes; the shipping acts themselves were antiquated and should be reformed. Limited schemes of shipboard representation should be pressed on with so that deep levels of frustration should not again

be allowed to build up within the Union.¹³ In laying the blame squarely at the door of the Executive Council during the 1966 strike however, the reports signally failed to give an adequate account of the one institution that demanded attention: the organisation of seamen within the Union. Any account would have had to deal with the changes that had been wrought within that body since the reconciling of different manners of dissent in 1960. Also it would have had to focus on relationships between Shipowners, State and Union since 1920 to understand how assumptions about the role of seamen and the role of the wider labour movement in general persisted until such a late time into the 20th century. Such questions of British Society and its dominant institutions were unfortunately not part of the good Lord's brief. A study of trade unions and the depths to which they were being changed, ironically informed the Donovan Commission in 1968 whose original brief was to understand why Trade Union leaders could no longer "satisfactorily" control their members.¹⁴ Perhaps changes within the wider society hold the key to the explanation.

In Britain where state and society are so firmly entwined, the role of the state is not simply that of executive for the ruling class. It acts also as advocate, educator and economic agent often in partnership with the dominant forces. In relation to the seamen it fulfilled these functions alongside the shipowners and since 1920, the union. Three different levels of state intervention into the shipping industry can be categorised. a) The National Legislative framework laying the minimum rules for the

employer/employee relationship. b) The restrictions arising out of general economic requirements in the form of prices and incomes policy in which especially in the post-war period, the government had intervened with varying intensity dependent on its relationship with union and owners in the collective bargaining structure. c) Legislation specific to the shipping industry covering the dual aspect of i) the health, welfare and safety of seamen combined with ii) circumscribing all the conditions of employment especially in relation to discipline.¹⁵

Thus we can see how the state in conjunction with the shipowners and the union could affect the lives of seamen at many levels. The great victory of 1966 was that seamen refused any longer to accept that they should be "civilised from above". A notable aspect of that victory was the gaining of the right to strike by 1970.

Shipowners previously had always had recourse to the law at a time of dissent, either having seamen jailed or injunctions served to prevent seamen speaking at meetings. For the better part of half a century the Union had agreed with this, arguing that seamen had to work within a different framework of laws from shore-based industrial workers. "Under the Merchant Shipping Act, a seaman on articles cannot strike. Striking while on articles in an overseas port is mutiny, and while it is not quite as wicked to withdraw one's labour in Britain it is still illegal, as witness the test case of the 'Castilian's' crew in 1960. They all got a month's imprisonment for striking. It was rumoured that these men were jailed as a deterrent to would-be

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strikers.

During a seamans strike, a seaman speaking at the strike meeting ashore can be silenced and if necessary jailed under the Act even if he is not on articles. On application to the High Courts of Justice by shipowners or their representatives, an injunction informs the seaman in question that he must cease from speaking at strike meetings and from all other activities designed to further the strike otherwise he is liable to go to prison for contempt of court. A number of us were unable to address our fellow seamen because of injunctions received during the July strike of 1960. These injunctions were still valid in the second seamen's strike that year, August - September 1960."¹⁶

Throughout the years, unchallenged but not forgotten at this time of change, were the thousands of cases where: "The Shipping Master calmly authorised the bad discharge saying that it wasn't a bad discharge legally speaking as the words 'decline to report' merely meant what they said, that the Captain declined to report on my character. I asked him why, if it wasn't a bad discharge, the Skipper called it a bad discharge as did every Skipper and all seamen come to that. The Shipping Master, a representative of the Board of Trade, repeated that legally a Skipper could give a Decline to Report to any seaman. He did not frame the Shipping Acts, he was merely there to see that they were carried out."¹⁷ Yet in the prolonged stoppage of 1966, apart from the characterisation of dissident seamen as Communists, much in the manner of their old Union leaders who had lost control by that year, the State in return had to

promise to make corresponding changes in the law as it was to affect seamen's lives. This was to break the easy fusion of the institutions that had dominated the Shipping Industry for so long.

Between 1960 - 1970 seamen became more aware of the industrial world they inhabited and the almost feudal codes of behaviour they were expected to observe aboard ship.¹⁸ Conference after Conference, especially after 1966, paid great attention to changing the nature of the Shipping Laws and the undisputed rights of the Captain to singularly authorise bad discharges and deduct wages through the "logging ceremony". The challenge to these arrangements of undisputed power above them led seamen to challenge their own organisation and as a consequence of the seven-week official stoppage, led the Government and State to lay hands upon the sacred framework of laws that had bound seamen for so long to the interests of the Shipowner.

Even with changes being made, seamen stated at the conferences of 1969 and 1970 that the new Shipping Bill still contained disciplinary clauses, the nature of which were such that, "these clauses were still the guts of the 1894 Act and yet it is now proposed that we should be saddled with them for generations to come". Others talked of the central concept of the lawful command yet, "no-where was this accurately defined". Dickie Logan from Liverpool asked, "how can we be ill-disciplined yet man and run one of the world's most technologically advanced fleets?"¹⁹ It was little wonder that proposals came from the floor at these conferences that seamen should join with the wider grouping

of other transport workers to lessen their isolation.

The ambivalence by which they were categorised - as industrial workers on the one hand, yet as a group of workers beyond the realm of the labour movement on the other and fusing into another arm of the services or as retired Admirals and, as The Daily Telegraph would have them, the fourth arm of the State, were questions that were debated at each conference as their Union went through its "period of renewal". Both in positive terms of democratisation and negative ones of numerical decimation the effects were to be fundamental for the seaman as British shipping slipped from the centre to a peripheral place in a post-Imperial and Commonwealth-dominated economy.²⁰

The seamen's freedom had always been circumscribed and it is important not to underestimate their earlier role which Havelock Wilson ascribed to them; they were to be representatives of a wider culture and society. At the same time attitudes towards them from those immediately above illustrate that wider cultural dominance so prevalent in British Society in which seamen were viewed as parts of a machine, the effects of which produced a myopic form of social control, "Very often management cannot even identify these responsibilities of management. It comes back in the end, to class attitudes and the arrogance bred by British Imperialism a century ago."²¹

Nowhere was this more rigidly exemplified than in the British Merchant Navy. Curiously enough the more bizarre emanations came after the zenith of Imperialism and the First World War, when in the 1920s officers were given the same

uniform as their counterparts in the Royal Navy and the status of "gentlemen". In the hierarchy of relationships aboard ship, the fact was when officers "misbehaved" they were made the object of a company report whereas seamen were stopped wages, given bad discharges that marked them or finally sent to prison.

Commenting on the changes, yet aware of the shipping laws that still characterise seamen as unique, Jim McFarlane noted that the support of other workers was necessary if seamen were to be allowed to break out of a straitjacket that conformed only with a sense of a nation's Maritime History imposed "from above". "For Merchant Seamen it will be a tragedy if the Labour Movement fails them again. If it was valid to fight the legal sanctions of In Place of Strife it is imperative that the same principle be challenged in the forthcoming Merchant Shipping Bill; sacrificed in 1966 on the altar of a Labour prices-and-income policy and now after seventy years when seamen hoped to see the end of the Merchant Shippings Acts - 1894-1920 - and to be treated as other industrial workers, the muted voice of organised labour is concentrated on other priorities."²² Jack Jones noted that from the 1920s and 1930s the idea that seamen might join with a wider group of workers was always that it would give them greater opportunities not only for changing their own organisations but also the law. "As a young docker in Liverpool I was instrumental informing a Seamen's and Dockers' rank-and-file movement in the 1930s to propagate not the revolutionary business but the right to be party to agreements. We could see how Union leaders were collaborating

with employers against the interests of Seamen and Dockers. Dickie Logan and Ron Herd, an Australian, and George Garret were all around then. The idea of shop stewards was thought revolutionary at the time but it was as necessary then as it is now to protect the seamen's and dockers' interests."²³

After the strike of 1966 and at successive conferences of seamen, especially that of the 1967 rules revision meeting, what was being challenged above all was the framework of relationships that had been established since 1920, a year which had marked the end of an era for successful grass roots trade union activity. It had taken until the latter years of the 1960s for such movements to successfully resurrect themselves. It was within this latter period that a number of historians have pointed to the gains won at the grass roots to influence the policy of trade unions, whether in the traditional industries or in the newer technological plants such as the automobile industry and related services.²⁴ For just as seamen had precipitated the trend of the 1920s by becoming welded within agreements reached by their leaders, the shipowners and the state, so in the 1960s had these relationships been challenged from the bottom up and working alongside the traditional Union hierarchy. Dockers in 1967 and Ford car workers in 1968 - 1969, were to follow similar patterns.

It was also a movement for democracy and greater local control over agreements; it was a strange reversal to the years of the early seamen's movement and latterly of the Shop Stewards Movement on the Clyde. By 1970 where this movement was restrained great bitterness broke out as with the workforce of Pilkingtons in Saint Helens, a virtual company

town, and the owners' relationships with the General and Municipal Workers Union.²⁵ The problem of these years, noted another commentator, "remained one of how to bring in again under control wider social forces that the expansion of the 1960s released".²⁶

There was a larger question for reformers who had fought the "battle of the institutions" within the NUS. They were to claim that in order for the seamen not to be isolated in future as they had been when they fought (in the words of Harold Wilson) "the government and the State" amalgamation with other waterfront and industrial Unions was necessary. If this was imperative in tackling the questions of the law and their own status as industrial workers, then this question was to have a wider meaning when the diversifications of the Shipowners capital into other areas of business was to be taken into consideration and their interests spread far beyond the ports. The approaching down-wave in the loss of so many seamen to fundamental changes in sea-going transport technology, at a time of steady gains within the Union, raised many old problems of "identity" for both traditional hierarchy and radicals within that organisation.²⁷

At this point it is necessary to consider the diversifications of the shipowners for here remained the source of a contradiction. As seamen found the means to harmonise their fight against all those powers that restrained them, the shipowners were moving away from purely shipping interests or into new fields of technology combining this with the beginning of foreign registration by

the 1970s. Seamen were pitched in a battle about how to respond. Was the answer to be within their Union or in going beyond it to enter into alliances with other transport workers?²⁸ In a curious manner the diversifications of the shipowners and the straitjackets of the law were to become interchangeable to those seamen who were trying to break with the previous easy fusions of the institutions above them. They were challenging relationships formed in the era of the Great War and in the aftermath of the great age of Imperialism. Empire trade had risen from 25% to 36% of imports between 1910 and 1933 and exports had risen from 33% to 44% in the same period; this trading area no longer existed to provide a shelter for social contradictions.²⁹

Shipping companies after a series of mergers and the formation of consortia in the latter 1960s had increased concentration of capital more than any other time since the 1920s and were increasingly becoming complexes of associated industries to which shipping was just another branch of business. "The Ellerman group are perhaps the best illustration of this disinvestment/diversification programme. From a fleet of 100 ships just twenty years ago (1960) the Company now apparently owns one vessel, has a majority share in another and investment in several consortia. Ellerman have diversified widely into travel, brewing, insurance and freight forwarding, its shipping activities becoming more and more a matter of leasing and chartering."³⁰ When the family finally sold off the group in 1983 it was

significantly disposed off to the Barclay Group whose main interests were in brewing and catering. It is nevertheless interesting that the new owners had some interest in capitalising on their shipping expertise for they were among those who made an offer in the privatisation of "Sealink". Sir John Ellerman whose fortune was valued at £50,000,000 at the time of his death in 1933 had massively increased his fleet after the Great War and into the 1920s. This had taken place at a national level, after the 1960s a reverse process meant that even the greatest family firms were taken over by the trans-national companies. This process was to have great significance in developments within the British economy, although its major effects were to be experienced in shipping.³¹

Representatives of Liverpool Port-workers and seamen on the port workers committee noted that, "the pursuit of maximum profit means that shipping companies must involve themselves with advanced capital intensive methods in order to replace labour within the ports. There is also an inclination ... for shipowners to form consortiums like ACT and OCL. Associated Containers Transportation is a consortium representing Blue Star, Ben Line, Cunard, Ellerman and T.J. Harrison. Overseas Container Ltd represents Furness Withy, P & O Group, Ocean Steamship and British Commonwealth. All these were initiated prior to 1967 for the above shipowners recognised the highly successful container service operated by Sea and Land Containers between New York and Puerto Rico. It was also important that a national and international agreement be reached concerning

the standardisation of containers. This agreement, also agreed in 1967, advanced the technological gold rush of the ship owners."³²

This trend was exposed in the Rochdale Commission of 1970. Shipping companies themselves were becoming less profitable yet the way forward was in the creation of new consortia. More were needed, not the old scale mergers between individual shipping companies but the creation of new companies for the actual construction of containers, container ships and container terminals. This required massive amounts of capital. And just as the report was to note that there had been a commitment by traditional shipping companies into non-shipping business activities, there was also evidence of large multi-national companies moving into shipping. Also: "It is not too much to say that the main periods of rapid capital concentration which we have identified from the 1920s to the 1960s have all involved powerful state support for the process."³³

Viscount Rochdale might have noted that further mergers and rationalisation were to be welcomed within the industry yet in his comment that "and we do not see any need for external financial assistance"³⁴ he was mistaken in his assessment of the realities of the situation. Bill Brankley at the 1970 Conference suggested the government's financial role in the industry, and noted that "whilst 30% of container ships on order were from British Consortiums, of these 80% were ordered on cheap government loans" and that even this was not enough in that "the further 20% was received in Government Grants". The point that he was

making was that there was a massive diversification of interest going on within the industry, yet there was no proper forward planning,³⁵ of a national fleet. As seamen were confined to labour and constrained within the National Maritime Board, the shipowners took the benefits of grants and cheap loans and diversified internationally with their capital.

As part of this diversification what also had to be considered was the capital exported into flags of convenience and the re-registration of tonnage at tax free ports. Thomas Yates had commented on this phenomenon in 1956 when he stated that flags of convenience: "had accounted for less than 750,000 tons in 1939 yet by the time of this conference Liberia alone had nine million tons of this kind of shipping". Another commentator added that: "if you read The Shipping World closely you would find our shipping owners today are giving due consideration to this matter ... Sir Peter Bates of Cunard stated that in one year the Cunard Company could by transferring their flags have saved £14 mill, the equivalent of a new Queen Mary. Little wonder then that the owners are considering this question."³⁶

The transferring of flags and the re-registration of shipping was but a new development in a historical line that had as its antecedent the search for and employment of cheaper "foreign and asiatic" labour. The Seamen's Union closed shop had done nothing to arrest this source and the percentage employed on British ships had grown from 19% to 29% in the inter-war depression.³⁷ In Holland as in Britain there was a wage cut in 1932, the International Transport

Workers Federation commented, "In these circumstances the owners called for a reduction of the wages to a West European level or about 25%. When the unions refused to consider these proposals, the owners threatened to man all their ships with cheap asiatic crews."³⁸

A number of developments had taken place since that time. It was not until the latter 1960s however, with containerisation combining with Flags of Convenience and the industrialising of the third world, that the massive decimation of the British Fleet took place. Liberia had only two small American ships registered in 1948 but by 1970 her fleet consisted of some 29 million tons, the largest in the world and nearly all borne by flags of convenience.³⁹ Although other Western European fleets had suffered a decline, none was more stark than the British and this reflected the breakdown of markets, possessions and patterns of ownership associated with Empire and Commonwealth trading.

Although Britain still possessed, in 1965, "the largest merchant fleet - 13.43% of the Global aggregate",⁴⁰ this was to be confronted with Liberia's 18% some five years later. In effect the middle years of the 1960s marked the end of Britain's traditional merchant hegemony. This had gradually descended from 44% of total world trade in 1914 to 26% in 1939, to 16% in 1960. Some two decades later it was to be less than half this figure (6.4%).⁴¹ In addition to the great fall in investment in a home-based British Fleet, particularly between 1970 - 1980, there was also a great fall in the proportion of imports delivered to these islands in British registered ships. In many ways these

developments reflected the words of one Liverpool seaman at the Union's 1963 conference, words soaked with a traditional conception of greatness and the central role of the British seaman. "The TUC are far too conservative in their approach. A Sir Anthony Eden threw away the Suez Canal and got out, McMillan can throw out this country and get out. But before I close I would like to read you a little poem from Hillaire Belloc, 'When the old inns of England have gone, drown your empty selves for England is finished.' I will translate this to my own language, when the Merchant Service is gone, so too the Commonwealth and the British Empire are finished."⁴²

As a result of the collapse of cartels in which British Shipowners had played leading roles, the world shipping industry was by 1970 intensely competitive. This in turn led shipowners to seek out ever new sources of seafaring labour at the cheapest rates. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development was determined to manage the carriage of Seaborne Cargo to ensure that the fleets of emerging, newly industrialised countries of the third world would benefit by gaining a strictly regulated share of this external trade. As the Seamen's Union was to state however, "Going behind the fence" as it is termed is the obvious means for developed world capital to cope with UNCTAD's cargo-sharing policy.⁴³ The result is that the world's worst paid crews, Philippino seamen, now constitute 20% of the world's maritime labour force.⁴⁴ Along with the Sri Lankans they are the latter-day Lascars of world shipping. Flags of Convenience Trading reflected by 1970 the growth of these

new maritime social relationships.

The re-orientation and dominance of financial power in Britain, with British merchant bankers as brokers for the growth in mergers and the activities of trans-national conglomerates, took shipping out of a purely national interest.⁴⁵ It took little time before, in reciprocation, shipowners saw the profits of the new situation and left the old established and national frameworks of 1920 to crumble.

"The nature of this concentration process has been changed by the increasing activity of major conglomerate companies in acquiring shipping companies and building up their own 'in house' shipping capabilities ... Panocean Anco is now in the process of merging with the Norwegian company Stolt-Nielson, which operates 26 vessels under the Liberian Flag, and which itself received an injection of 50 million dollars in 1970 from British Petroleum, with BP providing half the seats on the Stolt-Nielson board."⁴⁶

The nature of the changes outlined above was that it reduced still further any notion of the solely British registered and traditional shipping company. A comparison with the early period and the latter 1960s led Michael Barrat-Brown to comment that, "What Lenin wrote about the role of Financial Capital in 1916 may seem to have become true also of Britain today but there are two essential differences. First the Giant Industrial Corporation is now increasingly trans-national in its operations, its source of Capital and its attitudes to governments. The division emerging in the ruling class by 1970 is between the giants of Industry

and Finance with international connections and the pygmies in the national market."⁴⁷

Given the concentration of capital on this scale and at international level, it is not to be wondered at that the notion of a solely British registered shipping company envisaged by the NMB legislation of 1920 had become an anachronism. A stockbroking firm noted for its ability to sniff out changes in economic relationships noted that, "It is unwise to assume that sentimental attachment to the UK flag will continue to influence business decisions in the industry."⁴⁸ Bottom line profits within an increasingly diversified process outweighed, as ever, any concern for maritime heritage notwithstanding the criticisms of retired admirals and the angry cries of seamen. The Shipping Industry turned outwards and was in turn penetrated by multi-national companies and foreign capital. Whilst Viscount Rochdale noted in 1968 that 20% of British shipping was owned by foreign firms or trading under flags of convenience that figure had risen to 50% some years later.⁴⁹

This had broader overtones for the increasing internationalisation of the British Economy while British shipowning interests scoured the world for cheaper overheads. Their casting off the links of relationships formed in that other period of Capital centralisation, the 1920s, was to prove the feature of the breakdown of British Shipping towards the end of the 1960s. This was notable not only for another period of mass capital centralisation but that the Labour government, true to its role as social conscience of the old staple industries, "threw money" at shipowning

companies between 1968 - 1970. This merely staunched the flow from a haemorrhaging relationship where finance re-asserted itself above industry; no such corporate nexus of relationships were needed as had been the case after the two world wars.⁵⁰

Whilst the rank and file seamen were developing new strengths and the financial structure of British Shipping was undergoing radical change, as described above, changes were also taking place within the National Union of Seamen. For the more perceptive among certain amounts of officials, themselves a product of rank and file aspirations, this meant recognising the constraints imposed upon the Seamen's Union while shipowners ranged ever wider in their interests. We turn now to an examination of these changes which concerned the very identity of the union.

Placed within this context, the disciplinary clauses of the Merchant Shipping Acts were not only seen as anachronistic by the radical sections within the union but were also providing a suitable camouflage for the National Maritime Board. Within this body there were still the hallmarks of tradition and unchanging attitudes which all flew in the face of a vastly changed industry. The dimensions of the fleet were very different from 1920 or indeed after the Second World War. The fleet had diminished from 5,000 to 3,000 to 1,500 ships in 1970. Tankers and ore carriers and high speed cargo were now the dominant ship types.⁵¹ Patterns of ownership had changed correspondingly with interests

beyond the industry yet the NMB was still utilised as the supreme regulator of labour supply and conditions of payment with the law to determine other aspects of the seaman's existence.⁵²

The problem lay in the fact that the NMB, like the law, was still acting upon premises formed in 1920 rather than taking cognisance of changing conditions. Jack Kinanan, the Union's research officer, pointed out the paradox when he implied that the powers of the Board were weakened when the Union reached "autonomous" company agreements outside of the Board with individual shipping companies; yet at the same time while seamen on the short sea runs were away from home less than a long-distance lorry driver the laws of merchant navy discipline still applied to bind them tighter than any other industrial workers.⁵³

There is little immediate correlation between the laws of the Merchant Navy and their beneficial effort for the financial powers of the shipowners except in this area of total discipline. Unlike other workers who could establish strong local and plant practices amongst the rank and file, seamen had to make major reforms at a national level within the internal structure of their union in order for overall changes to be made at a local level and at their immediate point of production, the ship.⁵⁴ As older frameworks were eroded the "relation between power and knowledge, the articulation of each on the other" became all more important within the union.

Apart from the relative failure of the shipboard liaison scheme, seafarers had now the right to chair the

Executive Council and Annual General Meetings and, probably more important, their own branch meetings, all of which had formerly been the sole prerogative of the officials. Power had also been taken away from the General Secretary who up until the 1960s had the right of appointment of all officials. There had been change of major importance when reformers were elected to the Rules Revision Conference of 1967. From this conference came the abolition of the Gerontocratic Voting system which had given more votes to those that had been in the union the longest.⁵⁵ Chapter Two specified how this system had been authorised by Havelock Wilson in the 1920s to dampen dissent. With the highest proportion of officials to membership in the entire Trade Union movement it had also consolidated the power of these officials.⁵⁶ This change within the context of other changes was to have important consequences for seamen. It was here that the commissions - with their particular briefs - failed to recognise that "the uniqueness of the shipping industry" was a carry-over from past days and that comparisons with shore-based industries, their conditions and organisation, were bound to be raised as voyages became shorter and ships more technical.

At the 1969 AGM held at Porthcawl, a great part of the agenda was given over to the "container revolution" and the changes it was bringing for seamen. Further reforms might have been made within the union since the strike of 1966 yet it was not from a position of growing numerical strength that the seamen had invited the leader of the Transport and General Workers Union to their conference

to discuss the changes taking place overall within British society and the trade unions. He had to confine himself to changes that were taking place on the waterfront as any discussion of amalgamation had been pre-empted by the General Secretary stating it had not been part of the agenda. Nevertheless no-one was left in any doubt when the ex-Liverpool docker spoke in the context of the democratisation of the unions "If ever there was a time to meet and exchange ideas, forge links and extend ourselves together it is now."⁵⁷ The great ovation awarded him was in part a recognition of the falling numbers of waterside workers and seamen, of whom the latter had declined by 30% between 1955 - 1965 and was destined to fall by as much again over the following decade.⁵⁸

To "rationalise" the changes for democracy within the union at the same time as attempting to deal with the magnitude of changes taking place outside was the most arduous of jobs. This was also complicated by the official state-directed inquiries that were being conducted into the nature of trade unionism and the casual trades in particular - part of the political initiatives that characterised the early years of the "white heat of the technological revolution" - Jack Jones knew from bitter experience the atmosphere that existed in the Liverpool docks in 1967 after the first phase of the Devlin report and "that the union could offer the formalised relationship of the branch grievance procedure and official hierarchy. But unless these could be harmonised with or improve upon the informal and unofficial customs the unions were not seen as a complete vehicle

for the men's interests and plans to alter the nature of casualism would be resisted."⁵⁹

Did the times demand such a change? The seamen's union had been transformed into a semiautarchical agency after the euphoria of 1911. Gone for ever, especially by 1920, were such words as then employed by the NSFU Treasurer on the conditions of that success, "Sectionalism was non-existent, nationalism was non-existent; the real basis was international with united action all around the ports".⁶⁰ Shipowners historically had a fear of combination of any sort, hence the thirty-year war between the Shipping Federation and the Union (1890 - 1920). When the Union had become an established fact, they sought to incorporate it as best they could within the framework of the shipping world and the national interests of Britain and Empire. Union leaders like Havelock Wilson became stalwart supporters of this. Now with Empire gone and shipowners becoming part of much larger concerns, the seamen were still within the confines of a "unique" industry whose regulations were still symbolised by the National Maritime Board formed in 1920.

A half century later, a symposium organised by the Society for Nautical Research spoke of the way seamen had been isolated and how "not only the shipping industry but also seamen themselves were, perhaps still are, influenced to a large degree by traditions of the sea"; this was in recognition of the institutions and agencies that circumscribed the seaman's existence and how power came down through these bodies, "to touch people in their apprenticeships, their daily lives". Yet the lasting impression from

this symposium echoed the concern of those seamen that had fought consistently for change within the union. "That a lag develops between rapid technological change and social relationships on board. Thus while the industry was being modernised/rationalised in the early 20C industrial relations between managers and men were still in the middle of the 19C."⁶¹ This symposium of 1969 concluded that in practice the seamen were facing the same problem in the present time.

If within the changes of their own union the radical section of seamen found themselves in rapidly changing technological conditions in which membership of the union was falling fast, then they also found themselves in a situation where many of the provisions of the shipping laws were being revised. Notable amongst these was the right to strike in the home ports after the 1970 Commission. Given that there had been so many mergers of shipping companies to span diverse interests inside and outside of shipping, the position that came to be raised was whether the NUS should not itself become a maritime section of a much wider grouping of workers.⁶² In short, for seamen to logically progress and extend methods of organisation and influence within and outside their own organisation. Amalgamation with other groups of waterside workers within the larger transport union seemed appropriate to the situation. For some it was the triumph across the waterside of the old historical dream, for others it was merely circumstance modified by the changing conditions that had sprung from the fight within their own union. It was notable however that the Rochdale Commission was firmly against the idea that the

Seamen's Union should link itself with the largest transport union.⁶³

At the 1970 Conference held in Hull in the summer of Edward Heath's victory and the return of the Conservatives to power, radical seamen stated that although the reforms they had won through two commissions of enquiry had been considerable, considering the previous history of Shipowners, shipping law and questions of the State and the Union, new forms of organisation should be looked at in order to come to terms with changes taking place in the industry.⁶⁴

A number of seamen voiced their comments within the debate and stated that the fact remained that the union's administrative structure was outmoded and had not been changed since the 1920s. The cooks and stewards entrance had helped after 1942 but the situation still demanded change. By 1970 the average weekly deficit of the union was £1,000. A year earlier £69,000 worth of shares had to be sold whilst income from contributions fell by £2,000 a week.⁶⁵ Alternative solutions to the union's life blood had to be found and within this context those that had campaigned for reform and change within the union had more of their say.

Many were opposed to raising the level of contributions when alternative solutions were to hand, such as: "sea-going branches within a wider union structure". This brought forward all the old demands for ships' committees when the contrast was so stark, "the main drain of income was staff wages and salaries. Could we afford the luxury of one official for every 300 members when this was the highest percentage in the trade union movement? Re-organisation of

the union was vital." Re-organisation could range from moving headquarters from London and thus releasing capital with the sale of Maritime House to organising the white collar trades associated with shipping and dismantling the old union structure in a series of mergers between districts and even between unions into a new maritime trades section. The major criticism was that the union was too parochial in the midst of the duplication of interests that criss-crossed and went beyond shipping.⁶⁶

It was not only amongst seamen that changes in old waterside practices were making themselves felt. The Glasgow and Clyde Tug Boat men, who had won a battle to leave the NUS and join the Transport and General in 1962, added to the fires of reform as well as undermining the perception of leadership in that period.⁶⁷

Another case was that of the London lightermen whose history in some ways matched that of the dissident dockers. Concerned by the authoritarianism of Ernest Bevin after the formation of the Transport and General in 1922, the lightermen seceded and formed with the dockers the nascent "Blue Union" in 1923.⁶⁸ They broke away from the "Blues" in 1927, the same year as the AMWU was broken by the NUS. The difference was that although the lightermen's union was never recognised by the T&G and docks committees, its hundred per cent membership and the amount of educated radicals that maintained its senior posts meant they could never be excluded from discussions affecting the life of the port.⁶⁹ The decline of the upper docks in London, the fall in membership, combined with the process of democratisation

within the T&G, saw them applying for amalgamation in 1970. Again Jack Jones played a central role in promoting an attitude to change within the idea of One Big Union of the waterside. Amalgamation of the "Blue Union" into the T&G followed some years later.⁷⁰

In the light of these developments, a seaman commented of the possibilities of a new maritime section within the larger union and the fact that, "Dockers were also declining in number and the expansion of containerisation gave us common interests". Another added at the 1970 Conference that, "our membership and income are both falling. This state of affairs would continue. In the light of these difficulties we should follow the example of the shipowners and merge. The fact must be faced that this union cannot continue to operate on its own."⁷¹

The idea of strength through unity was brought home by a case of victimisation of a seaman on a ship in Liverpool, which brought supportive action from both seamen and dockers and the comment that, "the whole situation clearly demonstrated to me that united we could achieve anything and made me think of the possibilities if we amalgamated".⁷² Amalgamation began to be seen as a movement that would take seamen out of the arena of "the uniqueness of the sea" and give them protection within a wider union structure. It was within the framework of greater liaisons and relationships of shipping companies to trans-national conglomerations that Jim Slater made his observation in 1970 that, "It is quite obvious that we at this stage could take a leaf out of the shipowners book, and it would take too much time to

start reading and going through the number of mergers that have taken place on that side of the fence but when you're dealing with the big boys, the really big boys, Shell BP Texaco and the big combines, not merged on a national basis but on an international basis, we - as a union - can be assumed as an insignificant or at least not as powerful a voice as what we would if we acted in our own interests and joined the larger Transport Union to form a single waterside union". Slater in the course of his contribution to this debate also touched on that old theme of identity constantly brought forward by a union leadership at certain crucial moments when the seamen questioned their own isolation - a theme beloved of Havelock Wilson and his heirs in their concern to keep seamen within the traditions of the sea: that all outsiders were crimps and sharks out to delude "the honest seaman". "All this business about reservations as to how the officials would stand, who would represent them? Would a docker or a bus man represent seamen? This of course is nonsense. The only people qualified to represent seamen are seamen and I'm assured that this union would not lose its identity. All we would get ... is the backing, if necessary of a far greater number of people and also the finance which might be necessary."⁷³

It was this that was the most important yet Sam Macluskey, proposing that the merger be negotiated said at the 1970 Conference: "do not support this motion if you think overnight that your conditions will jump from what you receive now to what a docker receives for his work. Don't support us on that. Support us on the basis of what

I have been trying to explain. The greater protection for the membership; the greater return that could come from the membership; the participation of the membership via the shop stewards system". Here was the old ideal of the ship's committee within a wider coalition of forces across the waterfront.⁷⁴ Was it only the irony of uneven development that had brought the idea to maturation?

It was of no great surprise that the clearest exposition for amalgamation came from the old Reform Movement. The battles within the union had been the most decisive element in breaking the hold of the coalition between the owner, the union and state agency. In the matters of the deployment and structure of capital, however, the owners would always have the whip hand. Seamen were replying to the deployment of that capital in ways that they thought would be of benefit to themselves by becoming part of a larger organisation, as part of the continuity that had come through efforts to change the union from within and then after the battle of 1966. It was the radicals that won in 1970 by first proposing talks with the Transport and General Workers, and then, at the conference of that year in the face of stiff opposition from the leadership of the union, winning the resolution that by, "seventy votes to sixty-three conference carried a motion authorising discussions between the National Union of Seamen and the Transport and General Workers Union in order to identify the terms upon which both organisations might amalgamate."⁷⁵

With the amalgamation talks proceeding there would be more scope to develop the seaman's place within

the wider realms of a larger organisation, not bound to "the uniqueness of the industry". This then was a measure of the radicals' achievement from the battles of 1960; the achievement of slowly changing an organisation in relation to the other agencies around it that had enclosed the seaman's life; and, what is more, attempting to bring that organisation back into recognised liaison with other groups of waterside workers. In doing this not only had 1960 - 1966 succeeded as a measure of dissent where all other movements had failed, but it challenged the whole assumption upon which other historical interpretations of the waterside had been based, that "sea and land transport met at the port but the bulk of their problems in labour relations lay for the most part elsewhere and their conditions of functioning were different. This is why such obvious strategic alliances as those between seamen and docker never lasted long and the occasional dreams of national or even international transport solidarity were never of more than momentary importance."⁷

In challenging their own union, the seamen came not only to challenge the financial powers of the shipowners but the very nature of the Shipping laws and the state and the assumptions that lay behind them to condition their existence within the industry. Yet on this question of identity the General Secretary was to maintain (and with him a substantial amount of the leadership) that "combining on the lines suggested could only mean loss of power and influence for seamen". He drew attention to the commission of enquiry which had stated that, "the NUS was and should be the only recognised bargaining agent for British seamen". This

quote when the proposition was raised again within the seamans union in 1970, brought forth the comment from the General Secretary that, "As long as I have breath in my body I'll always oppose it. I have always favoured one organisation for all seafarers on board a ship."⁷⁷ The State Commission of Inquiry agreed with him, while the Chairman of the Cunard company was quoted in the Economist as saying, "We would condemn any merger between the NUS and the Transport and General Workers Union. Above all the merger between the seamen and the transport workers would give Mr Jones and his successors in the union a pistol permanently pointed at the heart of the British Economy."⁷⁸ Between them these quotes brought back all the shadows of past relationships while the shipowners stamped into the future, driving themselves to the farthest corners of the globe.

On the other hand, opposition to amalgamation voiced by the union leadership at the time may have had its roots in less worthy concerns than might have been supposed; in rhetoric about "independence" and "sea-faring traditions" and the "place of seamen within such a maritime nation", union leaders may have feared amalgamation because it would undermine their own power base, given the disproportionate degree of influence officials had enjoyed within the union. Behind the claims for tradition and identity may have been the petty and parochial self-interest of the full-timer, scared for his job and still potent enough in many branches to have a great influence on the merger debate after the conference vote of 1970.

The power of these officials up to 1960 would merit a separate study in itself. After that date however more seamen with experience of grass roots activity began contesting union elections, organising and lobbying their own constituents on the dock roads. This was a trend that was not confined to the seaman's union alone but found a general expression within the trade unions in the latter 1960s. These new officials, arising out of the fusion of previous dissident groups to fight within the union, provide one of the clues of how change was effected within one organisation and between others at this time. Action at the waterside and within the union broke the easy flow of relationships such as those established by Havelock Wilson towards the seamen, the shipowners, the law and State.

Previously the defence of "his officials" as a separate caste of men was of the utmost priority to the "General President" during the union's isolation. As he noted to Sir Frederick Shadforth Watts, the Chairman of the Shipping Federation at the National Maritime Board on the occasion of the "voluntary" pay reduction in 1925, "I want the sympathy of your side in this. These are my colleagues. These are the men that have to face the ordinary seamen. I know what they have to go through. There will be abuse heaped on me in tons, I do not hear it. What does it matter to me if a fellow on a ship is cursing me and saying I ought to be shot, I do not hear it but we must look after them."⁷⁹

From the 1920s when two NSFU officials in London took up guns to defend their authority on the steps of their

Union office against "agitators", to the 1960s when a branch secretary at Tilbury admitted falsifying 6,000 ballot papers at the height of the "reform movement" challenge between 1960 - 1964, the power of the officials remained a closed circle and membership was based on patronage handed down from above.⁸⁰ By the end of the '60s the officials had diluted their strength in the attempt to contain demands from below. The transformations of the earlier period were being played in reverse and it is worth noting within this process the entrance since the reform movement, into the ranks of the full time officials, of men with a loyalty to grass roots activism and a desire for seamen to play a more active role within the wider reaches of the labour movement. The circle had turned since the Genoa conference of 1920 when Havelock Wilson had sneered at James Henson for daring to suggest that the seaman's existence and conditions were determined by wider conditions and not just bound up within the industry.⁸¹ The statement by the General Secretary in 1970 that, "As long as I have breath in my body I will fight for one Union of seafarers and seafarers only" whilst admitting all the petty jealousies and fear for jobs among the old guard, nevertheless reinforced all the old assumptions of the "unique force" which seamen came to represent after 1920, tied to a post-Imperial economy.

For all their oppositions the fighters for change could not perpetually win the battle over merger with the Transport workers union and the leadership in the interim period tried to isolate itself again, in particular over the signing of the Conservatives' Industrial Relations Act.⁸²

They did this notwithstanding the substance of Jack Jones' comments at the 1970 conference: "providing the right of the Seamen's Union members is secured, providing they have the right to determine industrial policy, a degree of autonomy if you like, it seems to me common sense to link up and have the solidarity that comes from that. This was the view I put in 1970 and it was very warmly received by rank-and-file seamen."⁸³ The seamen's urge to amalgamate with the transport workers was an attempt to break away from their "unique" position. Even as it failed to materialise in later years, the gaining of the principle at that year's conference with the winning of the vote was perhaps the most dramatic expression of union members attempting to shake off their past and give a more adequate expression to the concept of a fighting union.

The changes wrought after a near half century of acquiescence and control within a post-imperial economy was not confined to seamen alone, nor only of the waterside trades. Hywel Francis writing of the miners in 1921 and 1926 talks of them in South Wales caricaturing African tribesmen and singing in "Mammy" bands in order to raise money for the Union. He contrasts their position to 1972 when for the first time since those years, they left their villages, put on their pit boots and went out to picket the length and breadth of the country. The point he was making concerned not only practical success but the crumbling of ideological tutelage.⁸⁴

Britain might never have been a maritime state if it had not been for those hundreds of thousands that toiled,

sailed, sweated and occasionally danced around its river ports. To the people of those ports the returning cargoes of the Empire were perhaps closer and played a more important part of their mentality than the industrial products of their own hinterland. As the saying goes, Liverpool seamen and dockers knew more about Bombay, Baltimore and Barranquilla than they did of Burnley, Blackburn and Bolton. When the Empire went the way of Imperialism and there were threats to the Commonwealth trade, by a curious process the seamen within the Union were turning more towards a wider labour movement. This is not to suggest that the process was an easy one or that even seamen agreed with it, the rage against the European Common Market in 1963 was indicative of their feelings on that score, nevertheless this was what happened within the wider flux of social and economic changes wrought since the second war and culminating with the cultural expansion of the 1960s.

It is precisely here that Liverpool and the National Union came to figure in the totality of relationships that concluded the transformation period within the seamen's union. Since then both that city and the seamen and dockers themselves have remained at the centre of Britain's contradictions as she changed course towards Europe at one level and de-structured her industry towards the free tax zones beyond "the tattered outposts of the Empire" on another. From the different directions came Liverpool's revolt and beyond that the changes and "battle for the institutions" within most of the major unions that took place not only at the waterside. But there was another city, the City of

London, "the Capital of Capital" and great as these changes were the Seamen's Union could bear little upon the changes of market direction signified and enhanced by financial Barons, liaising through government and State with their trans-national companies, that reduced Britain's role as a shipping nation to one of a peripheral rather than central activity.⁸⁵

Within this constellation of events it has been the seaman's position as the meteor of the Empire movement that has come crashing down to tearth - the British Empire Union was founded in the same year as the National Maritime Board, its President Sir Thomas Royden was a Liverpool Shipowner and later chairman of the Cunard Company.⁸⁶ He sat as Conservative MP for Bootle, a northern Liverpool constituency between 1918 - 1922. Yet just as the market has no memory except for those who have to labour within its dictates the limits of the fusion constructed since those times between the State, the Shipping Federation and the Seaman's Union after the first war were not to be fully exposed until the middle 1960s. And as with all agreements, "its external dependence is correlated everywhere to internal asymmetries of class and region."⁸⁷ Liverpool was the centre of these contradictions.

In his book on Imagined Communities, Benedict Anderson has commented that, "the sheer size of the Global European Empires and the vast populations subjected meant that purely metropolitan bureaucracies were neither recruitable nor affordable. The Colonial State and somewhat later, corporate capital needed armies of clerks."⁸⁸ And

at another level there was a need for hundreds of ships and thousands of seamen to shift the produce of this Empire and ferry its administrators. Here was the basis for much of the seaman's employment; the need was all the greater as the specialised functions of the state everywhere multiplied after the turn of the century and more particularly in relation to the metropolitan economy between 1910 and 1920. Here was the source of the transformation of the union, the delta of the seaman's struggle.

The different departments of the state operated at a number of levels in its relationships to seamen. Whether Eleanor Rathbone petitioning the Board of Trade that seamen should be allowed to send home money or their wives and children through an increased allotment; to the summer of that same year when warships, troops and police were all active on the Mersey in the strike of 1911. By 1920 the circumstances of the war and the curtailing of the Trade Union revolt from below had led to the drawing up of a legislative and economic charter organised by the State and drawing in the Shipowners and the Seamen's Union. This drew upon an analysis of the earlier troubles when each change in the organisation of the workers had led to corresponding changes of tactics on the part of employers. G.R. Askwith denigrated the idea that the current difficulties were cyclical and could be allowed to pass away. He pointed to the growth in scale, organisation and coherence of the labour movement. Labour men, like others, had

learned from experience and he concluded that, "these being our views of the general situation, we are driven to the conclusion that some effort should be made to maintain control."⁸⁹ The drawing in of the seamen pre-figured by some seven years the corporatism of the Mond-Turner talks after the General Strike. These relationships were to last virtually unchanged until the middle years of the 1960s.

The key to change was the action of the seamen themselves which forced the State to redraw the relationships formed since that early period. Many different power structures remained yet this was the outcome of the seamen's rank and file revolt of 1960. It was a revolt that succeeded because it was fused from within the union. Shipowners previously had come to an agreement with the NSFU and sanctioned by the State for the necessity of a "closed shop" in 1922 simply because other unions were threatening to organise seamen. They had to be beaten; the same for the shop stewards movement, for union leaders to maintain control and agreements after 1920. At the same time there could not be said to exist a single unified policy for seamen from a single unified state simply because of the different levels of intervention from different departments into seamen's lives. J.R. Hay has remarked upon the level of welfare inaugurated by the State in this period following labour unrest⁹⁰ and Edward Higgs has noted in relation to leisure, the State in this time, "has not been a repressive or negative force ... although its efforts at creation have reflected its own estimation of what was 'good' for the masses. Indeed in some senses it is unhelpful to talk at all of the

State as a single indivisible body. Its unity lies in the common assumptions shared by its members and in the common relationship of departments to the public and parliament."⁹¹ Historically these departments had operated like large tailors outfitters. Instead of fitting the seaman to the suit, they within their own spheres of reference fitted the suit to the seaman. In this way, while it is pointless to ascribe to a State unified class interests and generalities which it does not possess, the overall effect of its actions over time was in its contribution to the social process in which seamen found themselves immersed.

In this connection, Gramsci might well have been mistaken when he asserted that, "it seems to me that the State does not punish but only struggles against social dangerousness. In reality the state must be conceived as an educator in as much as it tends precisely to create a new type or level of civilisation ... Of the education of the masses in accordance with the requirements of the goal to be achieved. This is precisely the function of the law in the State and in Society. Through law the State uses the ruling group and tends to create a social conformism which is useful to the ruling group's line of development."⁹² Yet if the State cannot be synonymous with law and property, nor indeed to a total reproduction of ideology in a monolithic way, it is nevertheless important to view the many sites of its power as a whole in their contribution to a social process. Law and legislation must be conceived in a similar way as processes within themselves, but not unconditionally free from the political forces, economic

issues and cultural questions of a specific time.⁹³

Since 1911 but more pertinently 1920 a materialisation of relationships with State involvement had secured the dominant forces within British shipping much in the way they were to span the wider industry, class and society between then and 1926 as Britain attempted to negotiate the chasms of a post Imperial world. It was then that the harnessing capacities of the State were most needed especially in relation to an increasingly homogenised working class. This took place not purely in a repressive manner, nor in a demand for ideological unity but with that class's representatives, the linking of all institutions in a conformative role within an overall conception of British Society. We have focused on the special place seamen were to play, as metaphors for the Empire, in this conformism from above. In this way it could be said that the State's main function between 1920 - 1970 was to contain and incorporate divergence and strife in such a class-based society as Britain.⁹⁴

It was not only seamen that came to effect fundamental changes in relations with their trade unions and in turn affect relationships with other organisations such as employers and the State in late 1960s Britain, but theirs was the first and the most bitter struggle. Of the government's role one commentator noted that, "the State has created its own monster. After the war it tried more and more to reach agreements at the top with right wing union leaders. The results were that there have been revolts within not just from the bottom but at the top itself."⁹⁵

Whilst the Commission to report on Trade Unions had as its brief to inquire into the failure of Trade Union leaders to exercise proper control over their members, its conclusions found the strength of rank and file activity built up into a latter day shop stewards movement difficult to ignore.⁹⁶

This was to fundamentally alter the previous social topography of the official dominated trade union. In this way, when from 1966 successive governments moved increasingly onto collision courses with the trade unions especially at the waterside and in the car factories, the leadership lost its initiative in a mediating role between Capital and Labour through its failure to restrain grass roots power. What was worse was when that leadership came to side with the agitators.⁹⁷ As Chapter Three showed, what had been the discordances of dissent in the bleak years of the 1930s had come to be harmonised and working within the Unions for change by the 1960s.

In this way the period had far reaching consequences for the relationships between the State, the employer and the Union. In Europe this was given added impetus with the events of 1968 and the jolt to the trans-national Ford Motor Company with the demands of women workers demanding equal pay with men,⁹⁸ a strike which led to the legislation on the question in Britain. As an overviewer of the period has commented, "it is impossible to say whether the system of corporate bias de-stabilised between 1966 - 1974 can be restored ... and on the doubtful ability of Cabinets to plan and achieve economic success commensurate both with the demands of public opinion and the constraints imposed by

state institutions. But even if it were to be restored, it could not be in the old form of creeping corporatism, because it is hard to see Trade Unions' collective power confined to the old, negative formulation."⁹⁹

If this picture of the period up to 1970 was one of breakdown, State-Employer and Trade Union uncertainty combined with a more assertive rank and file movement within the NUS and other waterside unions, then the outcome was to be of a two-fold nature.

For seamen it was an overcoming of particular circumstances that had borne them to the forefront of corporatism and "the company closed shop" by the time Lloyd George was forced to vacate his post-war coalition in 1922. Encircled by conditions and agreements which lasted to the 1960s, the seamen fought to close the gap between economic and cultural change and the social relationships that continued to distinguish them from other transport workers and those within the wider reaches of the labour movement. They achieved this by initiating the battles from below and continuing them within the Union hierarchy to fuse the two elements and to change that body fundamentally from the one which had existed scarcely a decade before. This had always been the dreams of radicals since the 1920s, when the union turned away from the labour movement and went its own way in isolation with the shipowners to the dreams of Empire.

But shipping itself, especially British shipping since 1970, has slipped in importance in relation to the national economy. This has led to a drastic decline in the numbers of dockers and seamen through changes effected

with new technology; increasingly trans-national companies operating in shipping and registering their ships in tax havens and with cheap malleable labour, "we find more foreign ships trading on our coast than you would British ships; now that is a scandal a national scandal that it should be allowed to take place."¹⁰⁰ This combined with the industrialisation of many parts of the third world since the 1960s and the operation with new fleets of their own labour, sanctioned at the United Nations yet broken at every turn by, "ten, twenty different flags employing cheaper labour, American owned flags of convenience shipping. You'll see all this."¹⁰¹ as the decline in numbers of the metropolitan country continues unabated. Finally the interests of the rentier sentiments of the English Ruling classes have moved beyond the ports and beyond the necessity of the constitution of the National Maritime Board. As Tom Nairn has commented in relation to a much wider break up of old alliances, "The decay inherent in this situation was unmistakable from the early 1960s onward ... yet it was not until the general economic recession of the 1970s that 'decline' started to disband the British Political consensus, that is, the underlying tacit acceptance of a post-Imperial State strategy."¹⁰²

The mass growth of seamen coincided with Industry and Empire, the de-structuring of those processes through the gauze of Imperialism came only to be worked out some half century later. The identity of the seamen's union had been moulded within that consensus of 1920 and now they had broken its hold another chasm opened up before them after

1970. But at least they had found their struggle and this was enough to confer some dignity upon all those lost fighters who had battled for so long in "the black silences of the night".

Footnotes to Chapter Five

1. L. Panitch, Social Democracy and Industrial Militancy, Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. 165.
2. A. Marwick, British Society Since 1945, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1982, p. 165.
3. Upon the opening of the new Shipping Federation offices in Liverpool in 1957, The Seaman saw fit to comment that there had only been four General Secretaries of the NUS and four General Managers of the Shipping Federation since they had come together in 1920, "a fact that led the late Ernest Bevin to comment that, 'industrial relations within the British shipping industry are a model for the rest of the world'." The Seaman, July-August 1957, p. 84.
4. AGM, No. 78, NUS, 1970. The Seaman, June/July 1970, p. 127.
5. C. Dixon, "Sailors and contracts: the British experience", MSS submitted to History Workshop Journal, No. 7, Spring 1979.
6. Final Report of the Court of Enquiry, Pearson, February 1967, Cmnd 3211, para 236.
7. Ibid., para 146.
8. G. Foulser: Unholy Alliance, "The 1966 Strike: An Analysis", Direct Action, No. 10, Syndicalist Workers Federation, London, 1970.
9. B. Moggridge, "Labour Relations and Labour Costs" in G.S. Sturmev, ed., British Shipping and World Competition, London, 1962.
10. J.J. Cadwallader, "The UK Mariners Contract", Western Australian Law Review, 1971, p. 269.
11. Pearson, op.cit., para 55.
12. Viscount Rochdale, Committee of Enquiry into the Shipping Industry, Cmnd 4337, 1970.
13. Pearson, op.cit., paras 112-114.
14. Lord Donovan, Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers Associations 1965-1968, Cmnd 3623, HMSO, 1968, Chapters 3 and 4.
15. J. McConville, The Shipping Industry in the UK, Research Series No. 26, International Institute for Labour Studies, Geneva, 1977.

16. G. Foulser, op.cit., p. 14.
17. G. Foulser, Seamans Voice, McGibbon and Kee, London, 1961, p. 71.
18. The great success of the pamphlet "Not Wanted on Voyage" which dealt with antiquated shipping laws was testimony to this. Published by the NUS during the strike it sold over 25,000 copies. Not Wanted on Voyage, C. Hodges and J. Prescott, NUS, Hull, 1966.
19. G. Norris, J. Slater and R. Logan, Contributions to debate on discipline and the Rochdale Commission, AGM No. 78, NUS, 1970, The Seaman, June/July 1970, pp. 126-28.
20. J. Bellini, Rule Britannia, Cape, London, 1981, pp. 59-79.
21. M. Leighton, Men at Work, Jill Norman, London, 1981, p. 153.
22. J. MacFarlane, "Our Seamen", Trade Union Register, ed. K. Coates, 1970, p. 149.
23. Interview with Jack Jones, Transport House, March 7, 1984.
24. H. Beynon, Working for Ford, E.P. Publishers, 1975. M. Barrat-Brown, From Labourism to Mocialism, Spokesman, Nottingham, 1972.
25. Tony Lane and K. Roberts, Strike at Pilkingtons, Collins, London, 1971.
26. K. Middlemass, Politics in Industrial Society, Andre Deutsch, London, 1979, pp. 441-443.
27. "Three months ago the President of the Chamber of Shipping stated that 1969 promised to be 'the most dramatic year since the war for British shipping'. I agree with him entirely." W. Brankley, Chairman, AGM No. 77, NUS, 1969.
28. It was at the same conference that Jack Jones had been invited to give his views on changes within industry and the Trade Unions: from here came the proposition of possible amalgamation with the T&GWU. The Seaman, 1969, p. 160.
29. J. Walker, British Economic and Social History, McDonald and Evans, London, 1968, p. 393.
30. NUS and TU Research Unit, British Shipping, NUS, 1982, p. 9.

31. In twenty major industries surveyed in 1969 three firms on average controlled between 50% and 90% of each market. M.A. Utton, Industrial Concentration, Penguin, 1970.
32. Report of Liverpool Portworkers to IV International Ports and Harbour Workers Conference. Chairman L. Hansen, Gothenburg, Sweden, 1980, p. 2.
33. M. Barrat-Brown, op.cit., p. 49.
34. Rochdale, op.cit., para 106.
35. W. Brankley - opening remarks from conference Chairman, AGM No. 78, NUS, 1970. The Seaman, June/July 1970, p. 125.
36. A. Christry, V&A Docks, and T. Yates, General Secretary, AGM No. 64, NUS, 1956, p. 26.
To the fact that "Britain now had just over 20% of world tonnage instead of the 50% it had not long ago, The Seaman, November/December 1954, p. 119.
37. Calculated from Statistical Abstract of the UK and quoted in B. Moggridge, "Labour Relations and Labour Costs" in G.S. Sturmev, ed., British Shipping and World Competition, London, 1962, p. 296.
38. International Transport Workers Federation - Comparative Table of Wages and Remarks, Amsterdam, June. 1933.
39. Flags of Convenience, The Unacceptable Face of Shipping, NUS, 1981, p. 4.
40. J. Walker, op.cit., p. 393.
41. Maritime Transport, OECD Report, Paris, 1957.
Flags of Convenience, op.cit.
42. W. Peover, E.C. Liverpool. Debate on the EEC which was redolent of references to Empire.
AGM No. 71, NUS, 1963.
How these attitudes carried over could have been seen some fifteen years earlier in the aftermath of Indian independence. The District Secretary of the NE Coast asserted that "In reply to the delegate who was supporting them so ardently, he would ask if the position was reversed where our unemployed ... now littering up the streets of Liverpool and causing so much discontent - the 1947 strike - ever given a chance to be employed on ships owned by Indian shipowners." Here was the classic feature of the 1920s of Empire and employment against disruption and Communism. AGM No. 56, NUS, August 1948, p. 3.
TUC Library.

43. Flags of Convenience, op.cit., p. 14.
44. A point of information supplied by R. Grele, Reutgers University, New York, 1983.
45. T. Nairn, The Break-up of Britain, Verso, 1981, illustrates the difference between home-based industry, the mercantile overseas sector, and the traditional dominance of the latter: a point that is illustrated with the doubling of overseas investment between 1979 - 1984. The Sunday Times, February 5, 1984.
46. British Shipping, op.cit., p. 8.
47. M. Barrat-Brown, op.cit., p. 62.
48. The stockbroking firm of Phillips and Drew, quoted in British Shipping, op.cit., p. 8.
49. "Developing Attitudes to Flags of Convenience", in Flags of Convenience, op.cit., pp. 12-13.
50. "A complex act of reconciliation was being attempted after the war. It was hoped to preserve the sense of one nation that the war had created ... of which Commonwealth was the expression overseas and the Welfare State at home."
E. Wilson, Only Half-way to Paradise, Tavistock, London, 1980, p. 17.
51. MMSA Review, December 1937, TUC Library.
OECD, Maritime Transport, Paris, 1957.
Rochdale, Command 4337, London, 1970.
British Information Services, HMSO, London, 1974.
52. McConville, op.cit., pp. 86-7.
53. J. Kinahan, "Seaman and the Law", The Seaman, January 1972.
"Maritime Industrial Relations", Maritime Policy Management, No. 4, 1976, p. 104.
54. J. Kinahan, "Why Wait for Pearson", The Seaman, October 1966, p. 167.
55. AGM No. 76, NUS, 1968.
Six years earlier reformers had said that, "We are a democracy and I would like to believe we are a democratic union but while one person has four votes another has three, one has two and another person has only one, I think democracy is destroyed."
AGM No. 70, 1962, p. 183, TUC Library.
56. That all officials should be able to vote in gerontocratic manner had been the source of strength to H. Wilson's policy of consolidation and continuation.

57. AGM No. 77, NUS.
The Seaman, June/July 1969, p. 160.
58. In 1955 there were 97,000 British ratings,
OECD, Paris, 1957, p. 24.
In 1970 there were just over 50,000.
British Shipping, BIS Reports, HMSO, 1970, p. 4.
59. J. Lovell, Review of D. Wilson, Dockers, Fontana,
1972, Bulletin of the Society for the Study of
Labour History, No. 27, Autumn 1973, p. 49.
60. T. Chambers, NSFU, The Seaman, December 1911.
"By 1920 the constitution of the NMB stated that
no stoppage of work or lock-out shall take place
until any difference or dispute between shipowners
and seamen has been referred to and dealt with by
the Port Consultants, the District Panels and also
if necessary by the National Maritime Board."
Labour Research Department, An Analysis of the
Shipping Industry, London, 1923.
61. "The Seamen in History", Conference held at National
Maritime Museum, Greenwich, November 1969.
The Seaman, December 1969.
62. "Referred to conferenece by decision of AGM 1969,
Composite Motion No. 10", AGM No. 78, NUS, Hull,
1970, p. 120.
63. The Economist went further and stated that "Above all,
the merger between seamen and the T&G would give Mr
Jones and his successors at the T&G a pistol per-
manently pointed at the heart of the British economy."
Seamans Charter No. 8, Liverpool, 1972.
64. AGM No. 78, NUS, 1970, pp. 120-1929.
65. R. Arnold, Annual Accounts for 1969, ibid., p. 129.
66. Ibid. The comments of Gordon Nerris, Sam Macluskey
and Joe Kenny all of whom were EC members.
67. This was referred to in The Seamans Charter No. 3,
1971.
68. Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour
History, No. 27, 1973, p. 73. Review of Hikens, ed.
Studies of the growth of trade unions on Merseyside.
69. This was discussed at a conference debate between
Jack Jones and Jack Dash, "The Dockers and the T&GWU".
Tributes were paid to Bill Lindley last General
Secretary who was present at the conference and to
his predecessors, Harry Gosling and Harry Watson.
National Museum of Labour History, December 3, 1983.

70. Interview with Jack Jones, March 7, 1984.
71. J. Slater in The Seaman, June/July 1970, p. 128.
72. A.B. Liverpool, Seaman's Charter, No. 2, 1970.
73. J. Slater, AGM No. 78, 1970, Transcripts, p. 123.
74. S. Macluskey, ibid., who commented at the end of his speech, "Many of you as trade unionists are still adopting an attitude that belongs to the 1920s."
75. The Seaman, June/July 1970, p. 128.
76. E.J. Hobsbawm, Labouring Men, London, 1964, p. 222.
77. W. Hogarth, The Seaman, June-July 1970, p. 129.
78. Seaman's Charter No. 8, 1972.
79. NSFU Report, June 28, 1925.
Minutes of NMB, July 3, 1925.
Leaked to Amalgamated Marine Workers Union,
The Conspiracy Exposed, AMWU, London, September 1925.
80. This threat took place when "a mob of agitators" was inspired by an AMWU man, Mr Johnston, in 1925. Manny Shinwell was subsequently threatened though this took place mainly verbally in The Seaman, August-December 1925. Charles McVeigh also alleged attempts had been made to kill him when he incurred the wrath of the union in Liverpool during the general strike. Trades Council Transcripts, July 1925 - May 1926, Picton Library, Liverpool. T. Bishop, Tilbury Branch Secretary, who admitted falsifying 6,000 ballot papers against the reformers in the elections to General Secretary and Executive Committee between 1960 - 1964. News of the World, September 24, 1964.
81. This was fully expressed when Henson and McVeigh were to become the major officials, responsible for the T&GWU's seaman's section in 1929. The Seaman, January 5, 1929.
82. In relation to this point the General Secretary asked, "Who were the critics, mainly those who wanted dissolution and disorder. The union had made its position clear to the TUC, the Labour Party and the government itself. Some said to register was to scab, but what support had we got from the trade union movement in 1966. He was not going to stand quietly by and let the union fall to pieces."
The Seaman, June-July 1971, p. 99.

83. Interview with J. Jones, March 7, 1984.
84. H. Francis, "South Wales" in G. Skelly, ed., The General Strike, Lawrence and Wishart, Southampton, 1976, pp. 250-252.
85. T. Nairn, The Left Against Europe, Pelican, Harmondsworth, 1973, pp. 18-19.
86. R. Bean, "Liverpool Shipping Employers and the Anti-Communist Activities of J.M. Hughes 1920 - 1925", BSSLH No. 34, Spring 1977, pp. 22-23.
87. T. Nairn, The Break-up of Britain, Verso, 1981, p. 385.
88. B. Anderson, Imagined Communities, Verso, 1983, p. 127.
89. Sir G. Askwith, quoted in K. Middlemass, Politics in Industrial Society, op.cit., pp. 63-64.
90. J.R. Hay, "Employers Attitudes to Social Policy and the Concept of Social Control 1900 - 1920", in P. Thane, ed., The Origins of British Social Policy, London, 1978, pp. 107-122.
91. E. Higgs, "Leisure and the State", History Workshop Journal, No. 15, Spring 1983, p. 141.
92. A. Gramsci, The Prison Notebooks, ed. Q. Hoare and G. Nowell-Smith, Lawrence and Wishart, 1971, p. 247.
93. When introducing the Merchant Navy Act 1850, H. Labouchere as President of the Board of Trade stated, "It was contrary to all experience ... to the opinion of every man who had investigated the subject, to assert that the sailor could take care of himself, or that the contract between the sailor and his employer was of that description that it could safely be left to be determined by hazard: and that it was not the duty of the State to interfere for his protection."
The Seaman, September 1969, p. 200.
94. "Tony Benn: An Interview with Eric Hobsbawm", in E.J. Hobsbawm, The Forward March of Labour Halted, Verso, 1981, pp. 80-82.
95. Bert Ramellson, Industrial Organiser of the Communist Party, in P. Ferris, ed., The New Militants, Crisis in the Trade Unions, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1972, pp. 8-9.
96. Royal Commission on Trade Unions and Employers Federations 1965 - 1968 (Donovan), Command 3623, HMSO, 1968, p. 12.

97. Ferris, op.cit., pp. 50-57.
98. H. Friedman and S. Meredeem, The Dynamics of Industrial Conflict, Croom and Helm, London, 1980, Chapters 4 and 5.
99. Middlemass, op.cit., pp. 450-451.
100. Interview with J. Slater, General Secretary, NUS, Maritime House, March 21, 1984.
101. Ibid.
102. Nairn, op.cit., p. 384.

CONCLUSION

Sydney Pollard wrote at the end of his standard text that, "perhaps it has been the tragedy of the British economy that at least until the late 1960s, it was never in severe enough danger to permit a thorough revision of the policies tried and found wanting since the 1920s."¹ This tragedy extends to the seamen. If this thesis has been an attempt to record their long struggle with the union, the ship-owners and the state, then it has also been a study of power relationships and the ways in which control was mediated between the different bodies against the background of wider changes in Britain between 1920 - 1970.

Change within the labour movement during this period has led Michael Barrat-Brown to suggest that, "Between 1910 - 1926 and 1960 - 1970 was not just fifty years of increased education, public sector developments and growing self-confidence but partly a question of do it yourself politics in places where it mattered, in mines and docks, factories and shipyards."² These changes had come about with such force in the latter decade because rank and file movements within the unions had forced their leaderships, and this was not a one-way process, that they no longer could be ignored. Here in reality was a latter day shop stewards movement with all the experiences of the past half century.

This thesis has illustrated the nature of control, its transformation, assertion and breakdown between 1920 - 1970. It has at the same time questioned an assumption that consensus oriented collective bargaining is the salient

feature of British industrial relations during this period. Syndicalism, to a lesser extent Communism and movements of "workers control" have all represented substantial strands of thought within the labour movement. It is well to remember that while "consensus" is determined by what are understood as the "real" political and economic constraints and "realistic choices" the precise shape of that consensus is not rigidly determined; it is the product of situational choices.³ In other words the shape of "consensus" can vary according to the character of its architects and the small scale politics of the institutions in which they are embedded. Perhaps the point needs to be stressed that there are few universal givens in the relations between trade union leaders and their members.⁴ Decisions in relation to control are likely to be as much autonomous as determined in advance by social and economic conditions.

Keith Middlemass's excellent survey in The Politics of Industrial Society perhaps over-estimates the political choices that are consciously taken as if complete autonomy from the social-political-cultural and economic had been achieved; yet as he says by way of explanation: "This thesis depends on a study of the totality of the system not of its component parts, according to prior definitions of each one's functions ... normally the system has worked ... according to the harmonising activity of government and the governing institutions ... each in their own way mediating between state and nation."⁵ What he has done is to delimit an anchorage and describe a process whereby collective aspirations between trade union leaderships, employers

federations and state came to mediate between class consciousness and corporate bias in the development of British Society. The necessity of this arrangement came in the crisis ridden decade before 1920 and was not to be seriously challenged until half a century later.

Here in the consensus arranged by 1920 until the latter 1960s we have situated our problem; that it was those seamen on the bottom who experienced all the impositions and restrictions from above. This thesis has been specific in dealing with one union and the historic twists and turns of power within that organisation: the problem of extending individual and multiple aspirations in the extension of concepts of democracy within contrasting social and economic conditions.⁶ This thesis has demonstrated the clash between seamen, their union and that consensus. The major expressions of that dissension has had wider implications in the maintenance of British industrial society.

In 1920 the union had fitted in all too easily with the "needs and realities" of a maritime Imperial state that had entered into a period of crisis and required major re-adjustment. Little wonder that the effects of this imposed unity were always to be calculated from above. At one level we might say that the disentangling of the seamans union from the specific interests of the other institutions of the shipping world reflected the decline of that Maritime Imperial state. That would be correct but it would also be too easy a formulation and would ignore the many uneven and fragmented passages that had an influence on the seamen's existence and that seemed to oscillate between acquiescence

and rebellion.⁷

This has been the theme of the middle chapters of this thesis while Chapters One and Five have examined the establishment and breaking of relationships between the dominant institutions. What we can say is that by 1970 the consensus built so effectively since 1920 had crumbled. It had done so primarily by the actions of rank and file seamen who later won their case within the union. The consequences of that broken consensus are still with us today.⁸ Curiously enough, for ones so traditionally isolated, seamen have often been the weather vane of changes taking place within the wider Labour movement.

If socialisation has, like consciousness, any number of avenues⁹ the seamen were more exposed to the dominant institutions of their world, yet less exposed in other ways. Who has read of their actions cannot see only a merely passive existence. The heritage they brought to the labour movement was the "rough" wandering, anarchic working class with tales of adventure from many places and whose importance has always been neglected while that of the skilled "respectable" aristocrats exalted.¹⁰ The paradox of their lives between being wanderers and casual workers yet subjected to a quasi-military discipline on board ship was also to be half reflected in their own union's authoritarianism.

Between the union and the membership in the inter-war period, it was as if two separate existences were being experienced; while the effect of other existences notably at the shipping office, the Board of Trade or within the

owners' great buildings were experienced on the ships as impositions.¹¹ The territory of impositions was not just the prerogative of a shipowning class. It could be distributed between union structure and the state as the experience of the seaman testifies. Yet it was evident that no one body could dispense these impositions with total autonomy, "the process must be two or three fold with the union acting as broker for the dominant tendency in each epoch".¹² This is always to return to the actions of seamen, the manner of their dissent and the effects of their actions in the period between 1920 and 1970.

From isolated acts of "angry despair" to the collective hopeless stoppages of 1921-1925/6 - 1933, different groups of seamen in different ways learnt the power of their union as it swung against them. In 1947 they were to experience it again. In 1955, stewards, relative newcomers to the NUS, were to experience it as their predecessors had done in 1921. It was only in 1960 that all wings of dissent came to fight within the organisation itself by fusing militancy at the waterside with a campaign for change within the union to challenge a framework more than four decades old.

Since that time seamen pursued a course which involved fighting primarily for positions within the union. Later this came to be reflected in battles with the shipowners and ultimately the state. Between 1960 - 1970 came the breaking of the easy fusion that had hitherto existed between shipowners, the state and the union.¹³ This study has therefore followed the culture of opposition, the

various forms it took and the strategies involved to combat control of the bodies that all purported to speak in the seaman's name. At one level such struggles outline the different demands for ships' representation and at another the mass desertion, the culture of "backing out". Between these oppositions the different tendencies of dissent played themselves out; the flags they had left flying were taken up by others and transformed into something different.¹⁴

Just as the period 1910 - 1920 had fused certain cultures between the rough and the respectable working class, it is important to note that changes in the period 1960 - 1970 were not confined to seamen. There was the significance of a wider rank and file popular resurgence within the trade unions notably, in mining, transport and engineering.¹⁵ If the resurgence of these groups of workers brought back the shadows of the earlier period then like the seaman's historic dream, it was within changed circumstances; workers control was the strand of thought that had replaced the ideas of the "one big union".¹⁶ Changes were experienced everywhere but because of the history of the seamen they were felt at their most bitter within the NUS in particular and the shipping industry in general.

That the state had added its blessing in the shape of agreements between Shipping Federation and union up to 1920 showed that within shipping there should be a quelling of discontent from below. The recognised "needs" of such a maritime state as Britain meant that, "fundamentally the

National Maritime Board reinforced the state's concern as reflected in law that ships must not be delayed because of strikes by seamen."¹⁷ This framework was to remain complete until discontent burst its barriers and the state-commissioned Pearson and Rochdale reports of 1967 - 1970 recognised that new sets of relationships were required. This was as much the case because of the change in perceptions by the grass roots towards the state; different, less deferential, refusing to be over-awed in the 1960s as it had in the tighter hierarchical decade between 1910 - 1920. This was the case when moving from their isolation the majority of those seamen who had campaigned for the reform movement and the great strike of 1966 now came to call for a one union waterside in 1970.¹⁸

If this amalgamation with the transport workers has not come about, there is little doubt that the seamen since 1970 have joined the ranks of the wider labour movement, uniting with other unions in many environmental and industrial campaigns. Replying to criticism that the leadership was trying to isolate itself again, the General Secretary wrote in the Communist newspaper, The Morning Star that, "I made it perfectly clear that unlike 1970 the union would not claim its closed shop was a special case and would fight new anti-trade union laws shoulder to shoulder with the rest of the labour movement."¹⁹

One of the many questions that future research could well consider would be the remarkable transformation of patterns of authority that had persisted throughout four decades of seamen's leadership. From the moralising of

Havelock Wilson, Edmund Cathery and Father Hopkins in the early 1920s to Sir Thomas Yates in 1960 - in retrospect the reigns of James Scott and William Hogarth were eras of transition - the views of salavation persisted to characterise seamen as "the problem" and to be constantly held in check.²⁰ Alongside this was the wielding of the internal machinery of the union which, as illustrated in the middle chapters of this study, made a substantial addition to their power. Through the categorisation of specific roles, standards of voting and the presentation of meetings, it was made extremely difficult for dissenting seamen to make an effective case.²¹

As an adjunct to this were the varying roles leaders played at different levels within the union. This is a question which needs further investigation both within the context of the NUS and more widely in trade unionism generally.²² All that can safely be said given the current level of knowledge is that in the NUS the leadership was so centralised that it had little difficulty in maintaining control of the branches and districts. This was the task Havelock Wilson set himself after 1894. Collective opposition within the hierarchy of officialdom was rare. An isolated case came only in 1926 from the centres of Liverpool and London and was speedily dealt with. Quay-side dissent went the same way. Experience gained in the post-war era and a new departure in opposition in 1960 brought more ports to rebel and also brought changes to the union. This affected the way the new leaders thought

about their role.²³

Jim Slater on accession to the highest office within the union had begun as unofficial strike leader at the north-eastern ports, had been suspended by the Shipping Federation and threatened by the union. Surrounded by hostility and red scares which only subsided after the exposure of vote rigging and corruption by officials on the other side; he noted on being elected General Secretary that, "the historically minded will see my election to this position as the culmination of events which began in 1960".²⁴ Increasingly his lieutenants were drawn from those other centres of local dissent. This was happening at many levels of industry throughout the latter 1960s and was another important factor in the breaking of consensus and the resurrection of rank and file movements supported by the unions. Union officials were being promoted, "with long experience of shop floor 'unofficial' trade unionism behind them, men whose political base lay not within the official lay committees of the unions but rather on the shop floor with the rank and file."²⁵

In this seamen's history from 1920 - 1970 we have witnessed how a fragmented and scattered group of workers came together; not always at the same time, to challenge, to rebel against and eventually change the organisation that spoke in their name. This in itself conferred no degree of security for the future, nevertheless it did check a long-lasting trend in leadership domination and bureaucratic manipulation. A major weakness in this study however has been precisely the lack of consideration given

over to theories of oligarchy and bureaucracy.

Robert Michels "iron law of oligarchy"²⁶ can be summarised as one by which organisation in its very structure creates oligarchic tendencies notably in political parties but more particularly in trade unions. Once a permanent bureaucratic organisation has been created then the leaders may emancipate themselves from the mass and become independent. Structural factors tend to create power in the hands of the officials. Control over the channels of communications enables leaders to manipulate information. In short, they produce themselves the conditions of their own continuation in power: "at the point where power returns into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and comes to insert itself into their gestures and attitudes, their discourses, apprenticeships and daily lives".²⁷ Once power is attained, leaderships reduce membership goals to their own and that of the organisation. The radicalism of early unionism and collective dissent is replaced by a bureaucratic conservatism.

At one level this is a profound analysis and accurately describes the history of most stages of development within the seaman's union. The problem with this generalisation, however, is that it too easily slips over the undercurrents of internal and environmental politics and rigidifies a history that was in fact far more malleable and open to interpretation. More specifically, the Michelsian generalisation is totally ahistorical and ignores the reality that in the world of social activity there is no natural necessity which decrees that leaders always manipulate the led.²⁸

While this thesis has been continually concerned with the historically specific parameters of each identified phase of the seaman's struggle from below, there has been no close examination of the internal politics of the leadership at national and local levels specifically between 1920 - 1960 when the seamen were "outsiders". This is plainly an area for future research and it seems appropriate at this point of weakness to recall Michel Foucault's comment that, "The mechanisms of power have never been much studied by historians. History has studied people who held power. In contrast to this has been the history of institutions, of what has been seen as a super structural level, relative to the economy. But power in its strategies at once general and detailed and its mechanisms has never been studied. Something which has been studied even less is the relations between power and knowledge, the articulation of each on the other."²⁹

In some cases however, this study has approached what Foucault has urged; for it has done nothing if not identify the spheres of control,³⁰ the manipulation of acquiescence and the attempted extermination of resistance as part of a wider territory of imposition in which the union engaged between the shipping federation and the state. The resistances however, were organised in ports which themselves had their own social, political-economic characteristics and traditions. One example which we have used concretely and historically has been to see the different aspects of a city/port like Liverpool in relation to the national organisation: a city with a predominantly high casual labour force, split by religion, the contrasting position of women

socially and their place in the economy; Liverpool as an Empire city, Liverpool as slum, "where everyone knew how to riot";³¹ Liverpool sailors, Liverpool stokers from the dock road; Liverpool bejewelled stewards of the liners, striding ashore, rings glittering in New York - how the position of this city and these phenomena came to change over the period of this study.

Liverpool is one historical example but there are clusters of other traditional ports that made their name in the reform movement of the 1960s and acted in unhitherto bursts of militancy. The ports of the north east coast with their drab tramps and coasters dedicated to the movement of coal generated none of that flash glamour of the liner trades. And then many other ports were merely harbours grafted on to major manufacturing sectors with stable workforces. Liverpool on the other hand was its port.³² It was a port or it was nothing in the same way as the East End of London used to be before 1920.

But what role now have these great, traditional ports, especially of the north, to play as the coal and liner trades have collapsed; industry de-structured and patterns of trade and methods of cargo handling have changed beyond all recognition. Just as it was important to focus on Liverpool in the period 1910 - 1920 to understand certain legacies in the development of the union from 1920; after 1970 and into the 1980s research would have to consider the developments of small southern ports, in closer relationship technologically and geographically with developments in European trade as the old Imperial connections have declined.³³

If as one commentator has noted, "the docks industry has all but been wiped out in Liverpool, Hull and London's East End",³⁴ and of 35,000 dockers nationally all but 13,000 were properly registered with the Docks Labour Board, where does this leave seamen? Like dockers their numbers have fallen from 100,000 in the mid 1950s to a little under 30,000 in the present and ferrymen, once despised as not proper seamen, are now the power in the NUS.³⁵ Indeed they now form almost a majority of the membership. Although everywhere there is ample evidence of other kinds, nothing could be more heavily symbolic of the decline of Empire than the growth of a port like Dover which now handles more cargo tonnage a year than Liverpool.

Lodged into these simple facts is the great tragedy for seamen. Just as they were coming to terms with changing their union, the terms upon which British shipowners were operating took on ever wider dimensions. An industry founded on Imperial connections and dependencies was going the same way as Empire. The process did not affect seamen alone but in many ways they were the primary source of the contradiction in British society.³⁶ The weather vane of the labour movement, the seamen now reflect the very transience of a traditional society.

If the centre of world ship-ownership has moved to the Far East and South East Asia, some of the countries which quickly acquired merchant fleets are already in decline as their anchorages and outer harbours fill up with ex-Liverpool and London ships - ships that once used to await cargo from "up country" as primary resources for, "the

workshop of the world". Now, after only some decades of their passing the Secretary-General of Singapore's TUC, "learned at a discussion with the Singapore Organisation of Seamen that shipowners preferred to employ Philipinos Indonesians and Sri Lankans. The main reason was that the Singapore seaman is too expensive to afford. Don't look to the sea for jobs, he told seamen."³⁷ It was a measure of the way shipping had internationalised itself through cutting rates - a Sri Lankan would work for a tenth of the Singapore man - and the mass use of flags of convenience out of reach from the old metropolitan heartlands.

When seamen came into their own to fight for the right of not being civilised from above, they found the flows of capital hung like limpets to the worse forms of wage cutting practices and racism that proclaimed innocently that they were victims of market forces outside their control. That the old and familiar practices were no longer done under the protection of the British Empire was of no comfort to seamen who were accustomed to being reassured that even if their conditions were bad they at least had the consolation of knowing they were the "nation's lifeline".³⁸ The brutal fact was that they had now served their purpose and could, along with their ships, be scrapped. The Empire had gone and they were to follow it.

Just as the state was crucial in the coming together of all sides of the industry in 1920, so in the turbulent years between 1966 - 1970 it was to play an equally prominent role in seamen's lives.³⁹ Its effect however was in consolidating the awareness of seamen themselves of the

stringency of their conditions. In 1966 seamen, after fighting to change their organisation, suddenly found the stage empty, the Shipping Federation had forgotten its lines and was instead marching in from the wings, the 1960s version of Hegel, complete with Gannex raincoat and pipe, the Minister of Labour and Prime Minister himself, Harold Wilson.

He began by attempting to reduce the power seamen had built up within their own organisation since the early 1960s. He did this in the classic manner of the union leadership throughout its earlier history. He depicted dissent as Communist inspired and alien to the traditions of the industry and that of the British Isles.⁴⁰ In short the state attempted to play the union leadership's traditional role. It was a measure of change wrought within that institution that it should be forced to borrow a Labour prime minister, a measure also of the state's increased role in the economy and changes in civil society since 1920.⁴¹

In making this dramatic intervention in what was probably the most bitter national dispute since the General Strike of 1926, the state had played its authoritative hand and in return was pressured to make concessions in relation to shipping law. An outcome of this was a decisive loosening of the archaic assumptions that had hitherto bound the three dominant institutions of the industry together. Wilson himself, furious at having had to play such a heavy hand of state and having all his accusations of Communism challenged, alleged that the fault lay in the history of the union. "A child of the companies"⁴² he maintained as the consensus crumbled all around him.

Yet the premier's comments to the TUC in 1968 bore an uncanny resemblance to Lloyd George's some half century earlier: the necessity of raising up representative institutions or estates capable of resolving major industrial problems through the activities of tough and moderate trade union leaders, he said, "The TUC has arrived. It is an estate of the realm. As real, as potent, as essentially part of our national life as any of the historic estates."⁴³ The difference in this half century was that Lloyd George was successfully building an authoritative consensus while Harold Wilson found that consensus crumbling.

It was not only increased education, public sector developments and growing self-confidence that brought the above to pass but a popular resurgence of rank and file revolts. In terms of relationships between trade unions and other institutions it again returns us to the educative and formative role of the state echoed in Gramsci's words with which we began this essay. "The massive structures of the modern democracies, both as state organisations and as complexes of associations in civil society, constitute for the art of politics as it were the 'trenches' and the permanent fortifications of the front in the war of position. They render merely 'partial' the element of movement which before used to be the whole war."⁴⁴

It was almost 1980, more than a decade after the direct battle with the state, that the advent of a further shipping Act removed the last of the old control mechanisms, notably the powers of the masters to "log" seamen of wages, and remove more boundaries between ship and shore. Jim

Slater noted the change in perceptions between controllers and controlled when he stated that, "It is fitting that some of the industries age old problems, and the state's role in maintaining shipboard discipline is one of them, should mark the end of years of frustration and resentment as well as the end of a struggle for the improvement of the seaman's legal status, which in contemporary terms began with our strike in 1966."⁴⁵

Trade unions were changing in this period. More responsive to the demands formulated from below and then articulating them into union policy which often spanned areas of "workers control" that thin band of ideology with which all movements come accompanied. As Jack Jones stated, "A union executive can guide, it can lead, it can persuade, it can co-ordinate. What it cannot do is bully or instruct. The movement to give workers a voice in their affairs shades into the movement to acquire power through every twist and turn of the local situation."⁴⁶ This was a very different philosophy from the Webbs' conception of a trade union leader in 1920.⁴⁷ This statement by the leader of the largest union in the country, a union that wanted the seamen to join with it, in a one union waterside, was returning to a position that had characterised its movements before 1922. The difference now was that officials should be capable of articulating demands from the localities into national and even international perspectives. This remains a problem. Yet the days were also numbered when the packaging of "grand deals" would merely emanate from above.⁴⁸

From Whitleyism in 1918 to the Donovan Commission in

1968 the state was present in trying to establish frameworks and stabilise agreements between trade unions and employers.⁴⁹ What was no longer present in the latter period was the cushion of the Empire for resolving social contradictions. A persistent paradox of the seaman's movement was that no other group of workers were so closely connected and legally bound to the state. The decline of the state as a maritime and imperial power could be seen in the fragmentation of the institutions governing the shipping industry, in the massive loss of ships from the registers - and the ways in which the union was at last reformed and able to join the mainstream of organised labour.

The "consensus" established in the shipping industry in 1920 and broken by 1970 has not been re-established and nor is it likely to be. But this is due less to the power of seamen and their union and more to the fact that state and shipping no longer has an imperial role. There is a massive and tragic irony at the heart of this thesis; that when the seamen had at last freed themselves from the grosser subordinations there were no longer the ships for them to sail. In this particular case it must seem that when seamen at last have come to see what a positive force trade unionism can be, the opportunities for exploring and developing its potential have been whisked away - taken away as surely as the state's relationship as a facilitator of that framework for the dominant institutions and the Empire that went with them. The whole flow of the labour process suggests that seamen will not be alone with their experience but it is felt the more keenly there because it

is at the heart of a contradiction; a maritime imperial state that no longer exists but still pervades the imagination. Communism may indeed be the hope of the world but it ignores at its peril all the clusters of myopic relationships that characterised the seaman's existence between 1920 - 1970 and upon which this essay has been based.

Footnotes to Conclusion

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APPENDIX I

OBITUARIES AND CELEBRATIONS:

1. The Seamans Strike, Liverpool 1966¹
2. The Connections of Billy Donaghie*²
3. The Balance of Strange Times

The purpose of these pieces is to follow from the Conclusion and broadly suggested within the Introduction that there are many ways of writing history. In attempting to capture social formations in which people find themselves enclosed these pieces attempt to broaden their characters' actions against a wider domain, much in the way oral history has come to the problem with another set of perspectives. If this sense of writing history is wary of notions of inevitable cause and effect implicit in the Marxist version of "stages" of historical development and older evolutionary schemes such as the Whig interpretation of history as progress, to the present structuralism which cannot be a study of man but only of determinate structures of social relations of which men and women are bearers, it nevertheless is "informed" by all these three schools and others. Rather than this being a hopeless eclecticism it attempts to illustrate the diversity of human action in its endeavour for social justice. As Albert Camus suggested at the end of his great book, "In History considered as an absolute, violence finds itself legitimized; as a relative risk it is the cause of a rupture in communication. It must therefore preserve for the rebel its provisional character of effraction and must always be bound, if it cannot be avoided to an immediate risk."³ Approximate thought with all its paradoxes, contrasts and contradictions, is finally the only creator of reality.

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1. History Workshop Journal, No. 5, 1978.
 2. A. Camus, The Rebel, Peregrine, Harmondsworth, 1962, p. 255.
 3. *The Record, TGWU, March 1981.

The Seamen's Strike, Liverpool 1966

So you've come to stand on the stones of the dock road, the warehouses shimmering in the sunlight and throwing shadows across the water where the rubble of the Wirral rises out beyond the locks and you hold up the placard in your hand as an odd lorry goes by and kicks up the dust. And you look over at the ships all laid up in their berths and think of how dead they look, no more than iron hulks without the men. And the coppers watch you from their hut as you stroll up and down and try to remember how it all started and it's funny that you can't, can't remember anything except walking up and down on the picket line each Friday as though you'd been doing it all your bloody life. Then you remember the song, the only bloody song he ever knew and you picture him that night with his hair blowing and his fists up and him saying don't let them fool you and the song of the 'Saints' going rolling around the deck and getting lost on the wind. And now it's a quiet afternoon in late May and no-one goes down to the ships any more and the strike is two weeks old and still the song keeps dancing in your head.

And you mind that time the year gone by, homeward bound and two weeks from Liverpool and the football on the wireless and the mess room below deck where the lads had gathered with their mugs of tea and tins of baccy and the smoke drifting up surrounding the bulwarks and being cut by the plum voice of the world news that tell you all seamen are to get a big rise within a few weeks. And Joe Conlan smiled that funny way he had of crinkling up his big face and turned to his donkeyman mate and you hear him say they'll want something back for that. And Wally Jolly nodded the way he did when he'd finished telling you anything important, like the way donkey men got their name for having to lug their own mattresses down to the ships in the old days, and nodded again. You look out beyond the deck and see the sun flitting across the crests as the after end dips and rises in the late afternoon and the masthead a moving shadow along

the water and inside the swirl of voices and shouts as Liverpool go one up and you thought about the extra few bob and what Conlan meant about them wanting something back.

You soon found out. You had to work seven days a week now before overtime. Then the union bloke took some papers out of his briefcase and showed you what the agreement had been and a couple of lads told him that ever since they'd gone to bloody sea the story had been to fight for less hours not more and didn't they have us enough by the balls already? The union bloke shrugged and you got the feeling he wasn't so happy either but he didn't say anything. Mates and Masters could now turn you out any time they wanted to, weekends away were to be just the same as any other day, the big rise had taken care of that.

Months passed. Eddy Judge would sit in his cabin and stare at the radio that gleamed back at him from the small alcove. The radio with all its little buttons and switches and smell of leather meant more than anything when he was away. When his watch was finished he'd sit and fiddle with the dials, listening to the different bursts of music and snatches of foreign voices that kept him in touch somehow. The Yankee services station was the best when you touched the Caribbean. Eddy had a girl once in Granada who'd play the same tunes. She used to call for him on Sundays down at the Quay and off he'd go, showered and shoes shining, running down the plank and waving to those bastards spending their lives doing overtime out on the deck. Magic. The radio played on, Eddy wondered why she didn't come any more and why he had so little time free, he felt his hands go tense as he fiddled with the dials and the music came roaring out. It wasn't enough for them to have you on their bloody ships all of your life, they wanted all your days to boot. He switched the set down and, suddenly still, thought about the little bit more they were chiselling out of him.

You'd sit there with Eddy and Sid Fletcher on cold nights when you were all on the same watch and listen to the wireless or when with a few bevies you got Sid going and he'd tell you about times when he was a boxer and poor Sid

you knew by the way his face would twitch that he'd been knocked around. Sometimes he'd bunch up his big hand until you saw the broken knuckles white against the skin and pound it down on the table so the whole cabin shook and only the radio would be playing soft and Eddy would say take it easy mate and Sid would just give a little shrug of the shoulders.

The big hours started the trouble. Bloody Sunday in Durban harbour where you can look over and see the waves crashing on the bluffs and people out on the beach surfing and having a good time and there's a shout from the far end of the companionway and you can see the mate and the skipper grabbing hold of Sid. Poor Sid with his shoulders giving that little twitch and a vacant look in his eyes you sometimes see in people that are deaf. And Paddy Hayes comes running from out of the galley and tells you he's just given the chief engineer a clout. And the firemen come up in their clean clothes saying the second had knocked them off for the afternoon but the chief had changed his mind. They were all off to the beach when he calls them back and tells them there's a job below. It was after that that Sid went up to see him and the engineer starts shouting about him being in the officers' mess and Sid starts twitching and it was all over in a couple of seconds.

And they put Sid in jail for that and kept him there a month until another homeward bounder could take him back to England and it wasn't worth the trouble by the time the skipper had logged him for every penny he was worth and blacked him down on the federation so that he couldn't sail again. The lads called a union meeting next day and you heard the chief steward had told his lads not to go and one of the pantry boys was going to be made into a rating next trip and the steward called him to one side and told him if he wanted the job he'd better not make that meeting; but they were all there when the time came.

The South African union bloke said there was nothing we could do. Sid had committed a mutinous offence and was in jail; the best we could claim for was to change him from

the nigger to the white jail. And some of the lads thought that was terrible Sid being jail with all the blacks but then Mattie Hynes got up and said what the fuck jail does it matter he's still there. And you thought of the dockers, who were brought to the ports, digging in the waste bins for bits of scraps and bones covered with custard and tea leaves and alive with flies and you thought those bastards weren't having such a time of it either. Then Eddy gets up and starts on about them being able to make you work Saturdays and Sundays and what's happened with Sid was all because of that. And you wonder whether he was thinking of the woman when he goes on about how we're all wasting our lives in this bloody game and even Joe Conlan starts to nod, then a couple of lads tell him to calm down because all his shouting won't do Sid any good.

And you got wiser after what had happened and as the weekends came and went, you didn't expect any time off any more but the buggers weren't going to get any more out of you than you could help. The lads loaded up with rum from Barbados that next trip and Saturdays and Sundays you'd always have a few. And you'd put down your cloth or brush and roll a smoke and get your mate to keep nooky while you dipped down below for another wee glass and they couldn't touch you as long as you were there on the deck between the twine and the boom and the creaking winches.

Back at sea you took it easy and thought about what had happened to Sid and all the others and on the way home as you crossed into the Atlantic and the swell got bigger and the days turned grey you sat down in Eddy's cabin and talked about different things and the people you'd known, and listened to his radio as the wind blew outside. One time when he turned to the World Service you heard that the union weren't too happy with the way we had to work weekends without overtime or any choice. And Joe Conlan shrugged and said if they felt like that why had the bastards agreed to it in the first place. And Eddy shook his head and got out the last of the bottle.

At home you got the drift of the way things were moving down in the union. And you heard that most of the Liverpool lads wanted to get back to the original demand of the forty-hour week and Conlan raised his face out from his glass and wiped the Guinness away from his whiskers and said they'd been talking about that since the time he was away. And you kept quiet, what with everything that had happened the last year and because you were still the youngest and knocked about when the others went home to their wives and you bore it in mind without really knowing what way you were thinking except that it didn't pay to crawl.

Then you were sailing wide down the Caribbean and the days passed in song and the nights a blurr of music and drink and you forgot about yourself and your thoughts and the skipper hadn't turned out so bad and Saint Lucia and Saint Kitts and Antigua and Barbados passed like a dream. Then into the blue harbour of Granada and Eddys' girlfriend came down one night in her car and took a crowd of you away up beyond the scrub, the water glistening below and you with your bottles of rum, dancing in the whirl of the clubs. And someone gave you something to smoke which made your head go light and you felt good by god and looked in the mirror to see if your face was twisting up the way it felt and you didn't want to know about anything except nights like these with dancers swirling in long dresses and flowers in their hair; and you got up and sang and did your little piece and people laughed, you saw their faces in the dark and Eddy's girl had her eyes closed and was dancing with him slowly and the rum kept flowing and you didn't know what you were smoking any more. And the next morning with your head like a bell and a stomach that seemed to stretch to your knees. Paddy Hayes calls you in for breakfast and as you tram down the deck your little hat askew and sweat streaming everywhere he tells you the union have called a strike.

Homeward bound you hear that the Prime Minister is going to speak to all of you on the radio and you go down to the mess room with the crowd and sit next to Cavanagh and Hayes who's come from the galley and tells you that the

officers' mess is full and every bugger there that a strike wouldn't affect anyway.

The voice, rich and deep, of the World Service man announces the broadcast and at that instant the room goes quiet and blokes pull up their chairs and some clear their throats as if they are going to do the talking and next thing you know Wilson's slow Yorkshire accent comes filtering out over the room in such a tone that you think the sea is going to turn back or something. And it goes on and on telling you what good fellows you all are and how the nation is in debt to you and at this time of crisis you are more than valuable. You can see some of the lads nodding and others just sitting there quiet and then the voice tells of the harm a strike could do and the margin of the balance of payments and that the seamen of this country don't want to hold the nation and a Labour Government to ransom by their action; and the voice trails on and on until it fills the room and seems to come out of every stitch of wood on the bulwarks and has everyone rooted until its presence slowly fades and there is a silence in the mess.

No-one said a word and blokes if they looked at you simply raised their eyes or give a little smile and it was hard to know what anyone was thinking. Some scraped their chairs against the deck and others started to roll smokes and one by one they started to drift away; you got the feeling somehow the message had sunk in and no-one knew what to do so they smiled or smoked to hide their silence.

Then a funny thing happened some days later; Eddy sang his song. There was a party for the pantryboy's birthday and everyone had brought their cases of ale until they spilled over and filled the deck of the spare cabin. Blokes were perched on the double bunks and others brought in stools and one, searching for an opener, pulled the locker doors ajar and there stood on the top shelf were half a dozen bottles of bacardi some bugger had filched away. Someone said it was a good omen and you sat there chasing the spirits with cans of Tennant's lager watching the smoke get thicker and the songs louder until the bosun came knocking that he can't get to sleep. Then someone has got hold of a

box and fixed a brush pole to it with cord and is playing the bass and another's brought out the spoons and everyone breaks into 'the sash' and you all go trooping down the alleyways, limping and laughing and blowing on imaginary flutes the way they do for the orange parade. And out on the after end with the wind blowing and clouds riding like mountains across the moon you start up again and the lads coming off watch join in and cabins are ransacked for any last drop. Then when the heads are rolling and the bass has gone quiet and the only sound is the ocean roaring down the runnels and the odd clink of the spoons, Eddy weaves himself up onto the hatch, his hair blowing wild and hands dangling by his wide like you see in the movies, and he's mumbling something about all us poor bastards throwing our lives away and then starts singing the only rebel song he every knew and his head's shaking as the 'Saints Go Marching' billows around the deck; and you're all up on your feet giving it the last turn and he's balled that big hand up into a fist before you and as the strains glide off into the night he's waving it above his head and shouting over the wind, don't let them fool you, don't let the bastards fool you.

The song kept dancing around in your head all the way home and come the middle of May, Liverpool had rolled in from where you anchored on the river and you could tell even in those early days there was a strike on by the way unloaded ships were being laid up in the berths. And after you'd come through the locks and been paid off you went up through the gates, your bags in hand and passed the lads on the picket with bloody stupid banners in their hands and you thought they wouldn't have you doing that; then you were up in the union a week later and they said they needed someone for the MacAndrews gates down in the south end and before you knew where you were you were standing with the board by the quiet dock; the coppers watching you from their hut and the odd lorry passing and the driver sometimes waving as he kicked up the dust.

The days went by slowly broken up by returning ships and you'd meander along to see if you knew anyone paying off and maybe get a drink and a few smokes. And you knew the union was organised; every day they'd have a crowd up there and have them registered and have the pickets out and while you still had a few bob you'd hang around. And sometimes you'd cross Canning Place and have a drink in the 'Customs House' that Cavanagh's Auntie Nell used to run and when the money ran short she'd let you have a few and pay her when you could. And the days dragged by into weeks and you kept on doing your turn, stood down on the gates, watching the ships strung side by side across the water and you'd never seen so many in the docks before, it made you wonder how many blokes were just like you with the sun pouring down and the dust getting into your eyes as it blew the length of the miles from the north to the south end of the docks.

And you met Ronnie Ferguson one day and the two little kids he had with him were whining until you felt like kicking them and you bought them ice cream if only to keep the little buggers quiet and thought, pan lids, who'd have them. You went back with them for a cup of tea and as you walked in you knew something was up, the curtains drawn even as the sun was shining and three other children sitting in the gloom, the smallest on the wife's knee. The baby made little whimpering noises and her little body seemed to shake all over, you looked at the woman's hand red and furrowed as she brushed her lank hair away from her face and saw her look quiet like as Ronnie went out to make the tea and called after him there was none, and no supplement till Thursday. He looks as if he's going to shout, you see the red come up in his face but then he drops his eyes and the wife turns away, tired and strokes the kids as another starts whining and Ronnie shoos them out onto the street.

You get the eldest to bring some tea from the corner shop and the wife takes a smoke and it's rising round the stinking room with the sun cracking the flags

outside and she asks how long will it last and you say you don't know and Jesus you han't reckoned on anything like this, and look from the linseed cloth on the table to the worn lino and the fuggy smell of the bedrooms and the clothes the kids were wearing. You could imagine at night in this heat with the kids whimpering and moving and scratching on the mattresses and Ronnie next to his worn woman and her thinking what to feed them all with, the lousy few bob from the union and the odd shillings from the supplement. Him with his kids down on the picket anything to get them from under her feet and it was bad enough when he was away but at least she had the nights to herself then. Ronnie with his brothers coming home drunk with a few groceries wrapped up in newspaper and Jesus she'd be better off dead than on strike. What would happen if women went on strike? You make your move and leave your fags and go through the door and take big breaths in the street with the houses knocked down both ends and the kids on the brickfield and you thought bugger that for a game, who'd have kids. You thought of a few others things as well.

One day you hear that there's an investigation been made about the seamen. And the papers are full of it and this Justice Pearson is doing such and such and the government shared his view yet the hours weren't going to drop much; and you read about the way seamen shouldn't be sent to prison for missing their ship any more and you remembered poor old Sid. And a few of the lads are saying they can put their reports where they like and Joe Kenny of the executive tells you the same when he comes down on the gates and you know he's all right and a few others join in. And up in the 'Woodhouse' you sit there and have the crack and get the feeling you're going somewhere and not let the bastards down on the pool forget it. Then Joe gets up and tells you we're going to win this one and they're not going to have us by the bollocks anymore and the 'hear hears' ring around the walls and some of the dockers out for their dinner-time pint stick a couple of quid down for the next round and a lad that's with Joe looks as pleased as punch

and starts on about solidarity and all that crap and you think back to the Ferguson's house and how solid they were; so solid they were driving each other crazy and it made you wonder.

And another week went by and they still gave you a few free rides on the buses and some of the dockers that worked your berth might give you the entrance fee to the pub; and every now and then Nellie Flanagan would pull one for you and you thought this was going on all over the town and maybe on the docks all over the country and Jesus, wasn't that a game and you remembered the lad from the pub with his words of solidarity and and you knew they were a lot of crap but it was funny the way they kept coming back.

That week you read in the papers that Secretary Hogarth has said that seamen could take jobs ashore while the strike was on. You went into the union and they said it was a tactic to hold out longer, many of the lads were on the bones of their arse now and if you could get a start bloody well take it. And Cavanagh said the funds couldn't last forever even though they were only giving us three quid a week strike money; Eddy's cousin was a gangerman for Lloyds and had got him and Hayes a start and Eddy says 'do you want to give it a whirl and you say dead right and that Monday you were winding your way out of town and passing bits and pieces of the countryside and seeing old churches standing in the villages beyond Sefton and Ormskirk and there was a hell of a difference between that and the quiet docks.

Each Friday you went down the union and signed the register and put your strike pay in the contributions box and you heard a lot of the lads did the same and the bloke behind the desk asked how it was going and you said not too bad and then you'd take your board and stand on the docks for the day. Come the Monday you'd be in the country again and change your broad for a spade and the days passed slow and the sun shone and dinner times you'd sit and play cards in the hut or boot a ball about in massive football games on the back field and the lads when they found out you were a seaman wanted to know all about it and was it true what

the papers were saying.

One pay day Eddy went around with a hat to take down to the union and a couple of the moaners wouldn't put anything in but the rest came good and there were a few quid by the time you took it down. And the union was fair pleased and you knew they were bloody organised the way they'd spread it about. And you'd go in for a pint before heading down the docks and maybe give some of the others a drink and many a time you saw Eddy slip a few bob and pay Nell something for the good turns. Those days were fine with something in your pocket and a bit of time at home and you didn't mind the sites too much and when the moaners started on about holding the country to ransom you just told them to stuff it.

Down on the docks one time a gang of engineers passed you and it must have been the chief of the second said something because all the others laughed, not real somehow but kind of sniggering the way crawlers always laugh with their hands up by their faces. And Eddy shouted something back about them being sorry one day and gave them a mouthful and the big fellow came over and said we'd never sail on their company and Eddy said you'd have no bloody company without us and a smile came over the big one's face and he said we'll see, we'll see and Eddy shouted it was hard luck on his mother as he walked away.

And the feeling was strong through those June days. Hardly any ships were docking now and there were hundreds more strung up side by side along the quays. And you thought they couldn't go anywhere without us. And the days passed by and the sun poured down and you were one of the lucky ones going home and having a hot tea every night and a few drinks with your mates and then on Fridays putting your good clothes on and strolling down to the union and clacking the paper against your leg onto the docks. And even the lads that weren't working, cheesed off and sick of it, you could see they weren't going to give way to those bastards on the 'pool'* either.

* The Merchant Navy Shipping Establishment, home of the Federation of ship owners has always been referred to as the pool. It is from there that ships are allocated to seamen.

And the feeling stayed with you each time you walked down the stones and passed the quiet offices and the ships hovering above you, idle in the dock as much like iron ghosts with no men to work them, and passed the clutches of lads on the gates; no creak of winches or derricks swinging to and fro to disturb the sun on the water or pull out cargo for the long sheds with their tarped roofs peeling in the heat.

And you rode in the works' bus each morning and watched as the town gave way to the fields and the villages and the kids playing; kids that spoke in funny ooh aye accents and you sat there and rolled your smoke and watched. And one day in late June you opened your paper and there on the banners ran the line 'Communists and Seamen' and underneath was what Wilson had said about a tightly knit group of politically motivated men playing with the country's fortune for their own ends. And you asked Eddy what the hell was going on and he shook his head and shrugged and Cavanagh said it was a load of shit but he said that about everything.

And you got to work and everyone was talking about it the moaners were going a mile a minute every break and even the good lads weren't speaking up. And the crawlers laughed about whip rounds just to support the commies and who wanted to have them buggers here; all they wanted was to wreck the country, holding their bloody meetings and screaming and bawling for all the workers to join together and all that nonsense when there'd be no work for any of us; and all day it was communist this and communist that. You looked over the hut and Eddy had his face stuck in a newspaper and he still told them to get stuffed but his voice wasn't so big, so Cavanagh gets up and shouts the creeps down and Eddy looks up and laughs then one of the creeps turns quick and says why doesn't he go back to bloody Russia and there's damn near a fight and the ganger comes in and even if he's Eddy's cousin he's not looking too pleased. And its strange the way everything was all right up until Wilson made his comments.

And it's the same on the picket lines; people are shouting down at you from buses and you couldn't remember that before. And you swear you see and hear that bloody word communism more times in the next few days than you've every done in your life. They've told Eddy to get back to Russia like he was a bloody tink himself; now they're on about it in the workshops and on the docks and it makes you wonder with Nelly giving you a drink now and then and a free bus ride off the lads if you're not all bloody communists.

You went down to the pub that last Friday and saw Joe Conlan and a couple of others. Eddy had his back to you but you could tell by the way his head was bobbing up and down he was all tensed up about something. Joe had that same crooked smile running down his face the way you see in people who never believe in anything and you heard him say they're all the same, the politicians, the union, the bloody lot of them. And there was Eddy shaking his head, bringing it backwards and forwards and scratching it and saying what about these communists then, when Conlan picks up his mug and starts slowly to talk about Wilson and his boys and how with time passing for the government and bankers up in arms he'll do anything to get us back and wouldn't care what sort of shit he threw. Joe looked up into Eddy's eyes and shook his head; you don't have to be in this game all your life to know that.

And it was the same on the Sunday with the papers full of it and one even had a special couple of pages devoted to the strike with little pictures of the executive lined up side by side the way they photograph convicts and showed the ones who were supposed to be communists. There were even pictures of Secretary Hogarth but he wasn't saying anything the bastard and a couple of lads said he wanted us back after that Pearson report. And all that week Hogarth is on the telly and the wireless and you can see he isn't scared any more and everyone is nice and respectable to him and look like they even feel sorry for him having to deal with those other buggers in the union.

Then you were humping timber and having the joists laid out ready for the carpenters when one of the moaners passes by and he's laughing and makes a sign like to pick up your cards and shouts over that the strike has been called off. And you find the others and take an early bus home to catch the news and your old lady gives Eddy a drink of tea and your old man is sat in the chair and Hogarth comes on and he's looking serious with his little face and eyes peering over his glasses and a faint Scottish accent and says the executive have taken a decision to end the dispute. And no-one asks him what made the seamen change their minds so suddenly before the General Secretary drones on about the Prime Minister's speech and how talk of communism didn't affect the executive's decision and your old man starts to laugh. And you don't know what to think and sit looking at the bastard and wonder about all the good lads that have watched the days and weeks go by with fluff in their pockets and you look over at Eddy and he says nothing. Then your old man mutters that they're all the bloody same anyway.

So you went back and it was as simple as that. It had all happened so fast. You went down the union the next morning still not knowing what was going on and it didn't look like many others knew either, when you heard there was going to be a meeting down on the pier head. And you walked down the stones and saw the warehouses and the workshops all getting ready for the return and a queue of wagons stretched the length of the dock road. Skippers and mates were flooding back to the ships in taxis and suddenly you thought of Ronnie Ferguson's house and you thought of a few other things as you carried on down.

And it wasn't the same feller that you'd seen that time with Billy Cook laughing and talking and shaking hands down on the gates. He was quieter and his face looked under strain and he was telling you to go back lads, the union had decided. And Billy was now saying we'd always been solid and how our strike committee had been one of the best and the lads up there with him gave a few sad little smiles but we all had to go back now. He knew we hadn't got all we

came out for but no-one was going to have to work nearly sixty hours a week any more and there was this Pearson report. And you remembered it was this same feller said the report wasn't worth a bag of crisps only a little while back and he'd let Wilson know when the union went to Downing Street. And even as he was telling you to return you knew he didn't mean it. He was only doing what Hogarth and those other bastards up there in London were telling him and Conlan's words came rushing back and you thought this bloke was just another one of them, but listening to the unsure ring of his words you didn't really believe that. He was only a feller doing what he could.

And oh, they were as nice as pie to you down on the 'pool'; mister this and mister that and would you like to come this way and you knew that would change soon enough when they'd all their ships away. And you felt lousy as you rode down on the bus with Eddy and Cavanagh to the Harrison yards and you thought, forget it, you'll be sailing out before the end of the week and so you tried not to bother.

Then that night after you'd signed on you went down the pub and drank pint after pint and Eddy started on again about his freedom and Hayes told him to give it a miss it was all over now wasn't it. And you bought more and more drink and took a taxi up to Nelly Flanagan's and gave her a few for all the good turns, and woman that she was she bought a few back off the top shelf and the rum and the whisky was going down. Then Nelly closed up and drew the curtains and you drank some more until there were only shillings left from the advance notes; and you were whirling down past the docks and even at this time ships were moving out through the locks and you could see the lights and hear the tugs on the water and you fell laughing up the gangplank and a mate looked down from the bridge and gave a sad little smile. And Hayes hammered his feet against the deck and roared up into the night and kicked a cardboard box that went spinning through the air and landed on the water below, the black water unruffled by any ships' passage these last six weeks.

And on the deck the middle of the morning, the sun sprinkling on the water and glistening on the winches and twine and loading booms and the mates nice as pie and you standing there and not doing much and no-one seeming to care; the engineers coming up from below tell you how much they'd enjoyed the rest and the subsistence money and had we had a nice holiday and they stop smiling when they see Eddy's face. Then the third mate comes up and tells you a bit curt to do something and the chief sees him and weaves down the companionway and pulls him to one side and you can see he's putting a fly in his ear. The dockers are just coming back from their tea and there's a few lads hanging around the galley to see what's on for the dinner and the winches haven't started up yet and suddenly there's a moment of great quietness on the dock with the ships resting in the haze and a faint drone of sound from the city and the smell of tarpaulin and oil in the air.

And you hear Eddy's voice mumbling something and grow louder and you look up and see him there with the hair falling down his face and he flings aside his painting rag and puts his hand up to his head and your mind goes racing back to the time when he sang the 'Saints' out on the deck so long ago. And he's cursing the mates and the engineers and the owners and every bastard, on again about freedom and wasted lives and what it's doing to us; and a couple of the lads start smiling and this sets him off worse and you stand there looking at him and feel his eyes on you calling you up and you think of all the times you've spent together, the drinking and the laughter and the waiting down on the docks, the work and the whip-rounds and poor Sid Fletcher and then the union's sad voice telling us to go back.

Well we are back; back in the same old game and sailing out on the night tide and it rises up inside you until you feel you're going to choke and Eddy's working his tongue around communism and roaring it out till it rings down the stones and people are looking now. The moment of

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quietness has passed and Eddy stands within it his hands balled up and the words, torrents of them, floating down the docks and people aren't laughing any more and the bosun comes up to get a grip of him but he's having none of it. Then suddenly you're with him and the pair of you are shouting and carrying on and you can see the skipper peering down from the bridge and you don't care because no bastards can sail the ships without us and you stand there and curse and shout communist right back in their faces and watch them blink; and it's a sunny morning in Liverpool and the strike is finished but the voice is yours and you know things can never be the same; and when you've said your piece the two of you make a smoke and go back to work and no-one says a word and Joe Conlan looks over and smiles that smile of his and shakes his head as if you'll never learn.

THE CONNECTIONS OF BILLY DONAGHIE

A couple of days before John Lennon was shot to death in New York, someone told me that Billy Donaghie had died. The only connection is that they both came from the South End of Liverpool, one closer to the water than the other, if you know what I mean. And Lennon was not the first, and won't be the last Liverpudlian, to be killed in the Big Apple. Plenty have died there, but they have generally been seamen, and no-one writes much about them, except a few lines about how they died near the waterfront; many lines will be written about Lennon and who could argue. Anyone who could write songs like 'Imagine' and 'Working-Class Hero' deserves to be written about, but I wonder how many lines will be written about Billy Donaghie. He wanted to write a few himself, but died before he had the chance. He was in New York once upon a time, but you have to go back a few years for that. It was in 1927 that he first started going away to sea, and one of the first things his father told him was to stay clear of the union. Not that his old man was prejudiced against organisation, but he saw the seamen's union as just being a company shop. Not many would have disagreed with him at that time; any grass root action or campaign was invariably smashed and it was only a year since the General Strike when alone the seamen were instructed to remain at work by their autocratic President General Secretary. Indeed, the Liverpool officials were all suspended from office for heeding the call of the TUC.

There was another reason as well. Billy was born in the heart of the 'Orange' area of Liverpool and there was a long tradition there of local control. It originated from the small docks of the South End, with the little streets winding down on to the dock itself. Parochial wasn't the word. Billy remembered many twelfths of July, when Catholic shops would have windows broken and 'the old woman who sold fruit would have her barrow overturned by the mob'. Catholics were the 'coggers' and he was told to keep

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clear. He remembered these divisions when he first went away to sea, how his friend was a Catholic, how when he had an accident Billy went to see him in Sussex Street, only a few hundred yards from his own household, yet being scared stiff someone was going to set upon him. And later, sat in the parlour with a bottle of brown, still thought of what awaited him outside. He spoke often of the way people were segregated and fenced off, and he witnessed it again in many different ways on the ships that sailed out of Liverpool in the 1920s.

They were days when North and South Ends of Liverpool were almost separate enclaves, and then again, enclaves within that often isolated and split by tensions as they all bowed beneath the weight of the Depression. Times when Southern men still regarded the Barrison boats as their own, and kept up a bitterness towards other sailors from the North End. The docks were worse, with casual labour the overwhelming insecurity of existence resulted in a language of 'what school did you attend?' as the most important arbiter of work.

It was these barriers that made Donaghie rebel. But like so many others he had to go beyond Liverpool to do it and make it stick. He did what many other seamen before and since have attempted, in ways to express their freedom and their resentment with the lack of any say in the running of the ships, and the lousy conditions. He jumped ship. The first time was in the States, and used to this phenomenon, they sent him straight back to Liverpool. After a period of time he sailed again, and this time had more about him. He 'backed out' of his ship in Canada, then rode around a bit on the trains before 'beating the border'. He stayed in the States some years this time, and eventually married there.

It was in the States that he first actively tested politics, joining the last of the Wobbly meetings and talking with others about how the movement had broken. He himself had worked in timber mills from where much of the radicalism had come. Dangerous to be seen too much on the

streets in New York, an illegal immigrant and political activist, he would talk in caffs on the Lower East Side with others, communists and anarchists of every political dimension and nationality. They would meet at the harbour, hold meetings, talk and drink with the seamen whom they knew as there were always ships coming in from Liverpool. Fond of saying that others thought of him as a born rebel 'it was circumstances that made me rebel, kid', he would state in as firm a tone as you would ever hear from him. Circumstances brought him home to Liverpool and the Dingle in the middle of the 1930s. No picnic that; but he'd left the States because the going was even tougher; no streets of gold there, with a wife and two small children.

Hanging around Liverpool; no ships to join, not with his record. He haunted the South Docks looking for pick-up work. One or perhaps two days a week scattered here and there. Twelve bob a shift and the rest on the UAB.

It was a relative who was 'a boss' in ship-repair works and lived in the same street that brought him his first regular job after he had been on the dole 16 months. 'Me uncle was on for Harland and Wolfe, a good bloke, but like all of them, he took the ale for getting you on. Me, I didn't have to pay but others did, good like, but a stooge in the system.' Work was in the Harlow Street area of the Southern Dock, a noted Orange thoroughfare. Billy was soon shop steward in the local General and Municipal Workers, yet he could remember Houseman, the Tory MP and Orange, coming around these streets in the same Depression years and being cheered to the echo as he went by in the car. 'Only a few people put Labour posters up, and they got murder for it.'

Discriminated against for not working overtime, through the night after a full day's shift, he was warned that next time would be the last when he urged workers to leave their night work to vote in the local council elections. Voting was more important than working day and night just to fill the order book and then be laid off, but the employer didn't think so and neither unfortunately

did many workers.

When the War came he was working intermittently for the Ellerman and Papayani shore gang. He left to join the army and serve with the artillery overseas, lucky in this case not to still be a seaman and sailing the convoy ships. His mates in the merchant navy suffered death more than any other workers in these years when Liverpool was the heart of the Western Approaches.

After the War, he continued his long career on the waterfront with work on the salvage boats, shore gangs and the docks themselves. He remembered the salvage work on the 'Thesis' sunk in Liverpool Bay; about how the money was so good, the best he'd had, but what conditions they had to accept in return. As ever, he wouldn't pay the price. In 1948 the year he began work as a registered docker, he was recruited into the Communist Party by Jack Coward, a fellow seaman and Spanish War veteran. It was with that Party that he stayed up until his death.

He fought on many campaigns, notably the one around the 'Dockers' Trial' of 1951, where many past antagonisms in the port were settled and although sacked the following year, returned in 1957 to help heal breaches opened up in the bitter warfare of the Liverpool union in the 'blues' and 'whites' of the mid-fifties.

In between times, there was work on the shore gangs and even the tug-boats though an officious superintendent and an order to paint the funnel on the afternoon of Christmas Eve soon put paid to that. After many months without work he again returned to salvage work on the 'Ranger' and as he came to join the ship a group of workers took hold of a red flag and waved him aboard with it, singing and shouting as he came up the gangway. They knew him as a 'commo' but they knew him even better as a fighter and that was always to be respected.

Reinstated again to the docks, he again became involved in the ever-present and consistent fight against the system of casual labour which had led so many times to his own dismissal. Throughout these campaigns he was known

not only as a good speaker but a most meticulous organisation man. Too honest for his own good, noted Frank Deegan, in his autobiography 'No Other Way' about a lifetime of struggle on the Liverpool docks, 'In 1959 I had been elected treasurer of the Port Workers Committee, the previous treasurer had been victimised over a paltry dispute and sacked from the industry. Billy Donaghie had performed this task with much zeal. He was as honest as the day is long; so straight was he that he wouldn't even fool the employers which was something I had no qualms in doing. He would never expend any money unless he gave or received receipts and he regularly issued statements of accounts. I decided to follow his example.'

It was ironic that after he had fought yet again against his dismissal and had come back to speak at the 1960 meetings concerning relations between the Liverpool and London dockers, that he should have to retire prematurely from the docks some months later. The doctor informed him he had chronic bronchitis, a disease well recognised by those who have worked within the dockers trades, but scarce acknowledged beyond. The last years of his working life were kept up with the union and the Party as he worked as a lift-man in the Cunard Buildings down by the Pier Head. When he retired, he put all his efforts into the Transport and General idea of having regular trade unionist and retired workers' meetings. For many years he was secretary of the Merseyside Trade Unionists' and Pensioners' Association and fought and publicised on all the issues, of a better deal for those who had worked all their lives and now were suddenly alone. He was still secretary of this organisation when he died.

At a personal level, his last years, instead of being easy, were harder than most. His son, who had not been able to find work for many years, was still living at home after an unhappy marriage, and was in Billy's terms, 'An early victim of the system and of the doctors who do the clearing up with their easy giving of drugs.' He himself was suffering increasingly with his lungs, especially

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in the winter, and their flat in the Dingle almost on the waterfront itself, had to be constantly kept warm, especially the front room where he worked.

Then came the time when I went to visit and found the flat all boarded up. There had been an explosion; a gas pipe that ran beneath the floor and of which they had often complained, so much so that they had changed to all-electric, had exploded, severely injuring his wife and making them move out. He wrote to me apologising for my wasted visit, in his usual meticulous and polite way. The shock of the explosion, however, combined with the earlier run-down of his wife's health, which had left her partially paralysed, and concern about his son, all took their toll. When I next saw him, they were living in one of the high-rise blocks, that gaze over Sefton Park, which the council had temporarily allocated to them. The rent was as high as the floor on which they lived and his lungs were worse; it took him a long time to open the door, yet still stood in the corner was the old typewriter and the bundle of correspondence and literature concerning the pensioners' struggle. It was the last time I was to see him, and he still had the fire in his eyes; what he wanted most now was to write a book, a good book about his time as he talked over the travels and the struggles that had framed his life. Unfortunately death wouldn't allow him that, just as it denied John Lennon on the eve of his new beginning. Lennon once said that 'They knocked me for saying Power to the People and that no one section should have the power. Rubbish. The people aren't a section. The People means everything. I think that everyone should own everything equally and that the People should own part of the factories and they should have say in who is the boss and who does what. Students should be able to select teachers, it might be like communism but I don't really know what real communism is.' Billy would have agreed with these sentiments and although he fought for communism all his life, life had also taught him the art of struggle within organisations and that really was his true strength.

His early years with the seamen had taught him that necessity and most of all, the way angry shouting could become just as many words broken on the wind if not channelled in a constructive way.

John Lennon had to go to the States just as Billy Donaghie had done in his different way and as so many others from Liverpool have done before and since, most of them not living in plush apartments, but that's by-the-by, for in the end, it guarantees no safety. The waterfront is not such a different world after all, and it has been the source of Liverpool's strength in more ways than one; whether Lennon would have come back to it cannot matter now and his death brings sadness to us all, but Billy Donaghie is also dead and the many who knew him will be all the poorer for his passing.

POSTSCRIPT TO A NOVEL: THE BALANCE OF STRANGE TIMES

Is that then the finish? Jackie walking away in the shadow of the warehouses? Red and Black Liverpool nights with the late gangs working under derricks and Jackie walking out of the pool of light that surrounds each ship, wanting to be away. Away under his own steam, carrying his own bag. But isn't there another possibility, another story that brought him to this? Another outcome that ventures alongside his time and sends him scurrying back to the dockside. To certain decisions and a slow critical acceptance of his realities rather than the hopes of unlimited possibilities tumbling down from the wires and television aerials and crumbling tiles of the Liverpool dockside as he moves beyond. To every moment there is always a structure; for every structure always the momentary break. From Aristotle to Einstein always a question of where to place the emphasis; the plotting of the evidence. The constraints of every choice. Maybe Jackie turned to Jack in later years. Consider this.

Jack Last had risen from dreams to gaze upon accounts. Before opening his office door he looked out; across the deck the sky was dull and heavy and looked like rain. Five past seven on a Sunday morning. No breath of wind came across the sea. The Chief Steward took a heavily bound pair of books out of the drawer and laid them across the table. The cost of keeping a ship made its dread appearance each time there was a turn for home.

A tall spare man, Last seemed to affect a certain look, a feigned absence as if one of life's greater concerns had somehow escaped him but when the books were arranged before him with their familiar sets of figures his face took on a more determined appearance. The pencil moved methodically down the page as if possessed of a mind of its own.

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After seven bells he paused to look at the sea. The sun behind grey blankets of cloud shone down in sulphur coloured rays of light. Far across the ocean the surface was a glassy yellow. He thought it would rain soon. The voice of the cabin boy drew him from his abstraction.

"Hey Boss."

"What?"

"The Captain wants you to take his tooth out."

"Tell him to see the second mate." He lit a cigarette.

A long timer to these parts; he traced his finger down the columns to see what costs corresponded with previous trips. Calculations had to be within limits. Going home was always a balancing act. Outside in the alleyway the boy's voice cut through any concentration.

"Captain says you have the experience."

The steward acted as if he had not heard. His lips moved silently in time with his pencil. Only when the page was checked did he look towards the door.

"Chief."

"What?"

"He said to tell you about your mate."

"What about him?" a quickening of the look.

"He said he could help, swear he was mistaken."

The steward paused in his work. The morning was still the same, dull and humid. He could feel already the dampness spreading beneath his shirt.

"Tell the Captain I'll see him after breakfast."

He picked up a pen and began rewriting his figures over the faint pencilled markings. When the boy brought his coffee, breakfast did not bother him, he was leaning back in the chair, a cigarette in his mouth. The boy set the cup down.

"Where's that bloke now Boss?" He looked quickly away.

Last fixed him with a glare.

"You ask too many questions."

"He's inside Boss?"

Pots were banging down the alleyway. He glanced in disapproval at the galley. The cook had been talking again. He rose then stopped. It was not worth the trouble. Besides, he had visions of a side of meat suddenly missing and all the accounts to square. A cook could do that.

"Okay he's in Jail", the flow of breath that accompanied this statement betrayed his wishes. And seeing the lad's look felt moved to grind his cigarette in the bucket and state again as if for his own reference.

"When we were on strike he was found with a woman on this ship." The strike had been before Last's promotion.

"Is that all?" The boy appeared doubtful.

"That's all; it's still enough, now fuck off."

He reached down for the bottle he kept in a drawer beneath the desk and after seeing the light through it, poured himself a good drink. Let the lad find out himself about which woman. The news had been around. There was even a protest. The whisky soothed him and he lit another cigarette. He would learn about that sooner than Communism.

There was a knock and the Captain appeared in the doorway. Jack saw the pain in his eyes, a watery light that cut a path to the source of his misery. He had not shaved.

"Sit down Captain," he said.

The Captain didn't reply.

The steward called the boy for boiling water from the galley. When he came back he splashed some into a stainless steel basin. The Captain watched detached as he began to sterilise his instruments and the light caught on the steel. Slowly he rested his head and leant far back in the chair. The office was very small, little more than a square nipped off from the wider cabin where the steward slept. Besides the desk and the chair only a tiny settee was wedged between the baulkheads and beneath the open port.

The steward went into his cabin to wash. When he returned the Captain looked up and set his chin at an angle for examination. A slight whisper of a breeze broke the morning's stillness. As yet it had not rained.

Jack Last turned the Captain's face towards the light. He felt gently along the bone with careful pressure. His fingers brought forth a low groan. Satisfied he stood back.

"You have an abscess" he said.

The Captain nodded as if he had known all along. He knew the position with the drugs. Gonorrhoea had taken most of the penicillin; broken legs and arms, the morphine.

When the Steward told him of the situation he tried to smile.

"Worse things happen at sea," then his mouth suddenly felt clutted.

Last did not respond. Using a pair of tweezers he fished the sterilised instruments out of the water and laid them on the towel that was spread across the settee. He placed a glass of water and a plastic bowl beside them.

"You can use that to spit," he motioned.

The tooth was on the lower left side. The type dentists call number six. The steward paused then bent forward. He quickly took hold of the pincers and inserted them into the Captain's mouth. They were still warm. Placing his free hand on the Captain's shoulder he pushed him back deeper into the chair. Beneath him the master was almost numb with fear. A cold relentless feeling that swept like a tide of adrenalin across him and left his hair mangled and damp.

"Are you comfortable enough?" the steward asked.

From below came a strange gargled sound of assent.

The steward's fingers tightened and his wrist tried to perform an action that barely described a half turn but the pincers had moved on the tooth. It wasn't enough. The sweat glistened and dripped from both their faces. On one there was the expression of fear, the fear of past failure that caught and nagged worse than any nerve.

words escaped him. Not for the first time that morning did he feel nervous and this time hid the hand that held the cigarette.

The Captain did not look back. As the door closed behind him the Steward heard his voice through the ventilation.

"He should have got ten years for what he has done to me."

Jack poured himself a drink. There was nothing else he could do. He lounged in his chair, feet up on the desk when the boy came with the coffee.

"Tell the Captain to wash his mouth out with salt water," he said.

He put the bottle away and did not look at the sea. The morning was clearing after the rain. Light spread through the cabin and caught on the chair, the polished wood, the accountant's books propped against the baulkhead where he had left them. He heard the lad whistling as he walked outside to the sunshine of the deck. He frowned and the movement itself seemed to blind him like an old, forgotten about sunlight.

Would years have to pass before the dream returned? The vividness of thousands of nights stored away and the days so slowly turning upon the water rose within him. Moments is that all they were these times that at once passed so slow and then a decade flashed like a knife. A knife in the sunlight. He turned his gaze to the books on the table. The opened pages stared back at him diminished without his attention the hieroglyphics that he had chiselled for the company strangely lifeless, priests of Rome without their pope; the Captain's tooth on the same path to Communion. The communion for which he ached. He smiled his own wry smile and conscious of his action, struck a match and lit a cigarette and feeling an unsought stream of energy flow through him reached over and closed the books in a manner of strange celebration.

On the other the light of immediate and desperate terror. Then the pincer gripped again and turned and the captain felt his jaw bone cracking and his eyes filling with tears until with a tearing at the roots his tooth was pulled upwards through the inflamed gums and came out and passed before him. The metallic taste of blood trickled from what appeared a cavern in his mouth. He slumped back exhausted. He inclined his head towards the bowl and spat. A release sudden in its own bitterness. He fumbled with the jacket of his uniform and sought a handkerchief. The steward handed him a clean flannel.

"Dry your face Captain" he said.

The Captain did so in a jaded sort of manner. He found it difficult to stop trembling. Trying to control himself made it worse; whilst the steward was washing he pictured his wife and again experienced that nauseousness common for those under sudden stress or with unhappy memory.

The mosquitoes on the brown flypaper spun slowly as a puff of wind entered the cabin. Across the ocean there was a peal of muffled thunder. The clouds grew blacker and the rain that had threatened began to fall in long oblique drops across the water. The steward was standing over him, a towel still in his hands.

"Get some rest Captain" he said.

The Captain stood and arranged himself. Jack watched him as he brushed himself down and began again to resume the mannerisms of power, the straightening of the uniform, a fresh handkerchief held to his mouth, cap firmly under arm like a telescope to complete the gesture of authority. With a final glance at his tooth that still lay clamped with pincers on the desk he made for the door. It seemed to bear little relation to the torture of his nights.

The steward looked up, took a fresh smoke from the dwindling pack and called the boy for more coffee. Again the vacant expression shrouded his face.

"What about my mate Captain?" Too late, the

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A possibility to consider. Another Jack. Another figure from the millions of serried existences that the sea surrounds. As far removed from the Noble Savage toiling against a background of sun and blue water as that of the rolling, roistering Jack so beloved of the forgotten Doxies, Pariahs and Pimps. Jack in need of saviour that all manner of Philanthropists had to allow, to separate the saved from the fallen; a path the union followed in the early years, peering from curtained windows upon the seaman's long march from the wharves and the quaysides. Time passes but can we finish here? Jack as hero, Jack as cynic. And where no empire exists does the world turn for ships? No way, nor hope springs like ashes from the night. Unlimited possibilities are no substitute for the wallet of snaps, the fold of memory. The thought of decisions. Those who go away fashion their story, continue their existence and in sudden moments feel, from bell to watch to bell, time passing maybe perhaps it dancing before their eyes across the water.