Contesting Globalization on the Waterfront

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Introduction

Ten years after the abolition of Britain’s National Dock Labour Scheme (NDLS), the right-wing Institute of Economic Affairs celebrated ‘A decade of unparalleled industrial peace … despite radical change and restructuring.’ In fact, strikes have virtually disappeared from Britain’s waterfront precisely because of radical change and restructuring, most notably the dismissal of more than 80 per cent of the former registered dock labour force, including virtually all trade union activists, the widespread return of casual and contract labor, and the withdrawal of trade union recognition for collective bargaining and even individual representation. In other ports around the world, however, the picture is very different. On the West Coast of the United States, for example, employers claim that over 135 illegal work stoppages occurred between July 1996 and July 1998, and further disputes accompanied the coastwise contract negotiations in 1999. Longshoremen at the port of Colombo in Sri Lanka have staged a succession of strikes over privatization, which are still on-going (July 1999), and similar disputes have recently hit ports in Bangladesh, Brazil, Chile, Greece, India, Pakistan, Portugal, Zaire and many other countries around the world. According to The Strike Club, the mutual insurer of shipowners, charterers and vessel operators against strikes and other causes of delay, the number of claims arising from strike action has increased significantly over the last 4 years, with a growing number of ‘politically motivated’ disputes directed towards government policy causing delays. In 1998, claims were received from over twenty countries and delays caused by cargo handling disputes were almost a third higher in 1997-98 than the five-year period from 1992-97. The Club’s latest policy year, to February 1999, saw the largest claims for nearly 10 years.

Waves of industrial conflict have characterised the world’s ports in the past. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, for example, the introduction of containers and other labor-saving methods of cargo handling led to

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widespread and often bitter strikes over job security, the allocation or assignment of workers to the new technology, and dockers’ exclusive ‘jurisdiction’ over cargo handling in ports. The latter had been established in many ports during an earlier wave of strikes to hit the industry when unions fought to establish hiring halls or statutory employment schemes to regulate the employment of dockers in a casual labor market. Strike waves, as Franzosi has argued, represent a radical challenge to constituted authority inside and outside the workplace, causing significant changes to the bargaining and organizational structure of particular industries, if not the entire economy. Strike waves are therefore motors of political change: ‘When successful, strike waves entail redistribution of political power in favor of the working class; when unsuccessful, they are met with repression.’ What makes strike waves special is their effect on the course of history, their ability to potentially transform those very structures that brought them to the fore of history in the first place. Earlier strikes waves on the waterfront are therefore discussed in the following section, drawing on evidence from several advanced capitalist economies, as these waves established very different patterns of labor regulation which in turn constitute very different resources that dockers are currently able to mobilise in defence of jobs and established terms and conditions of employment.

The most recent wave of strikes to engulf the world’s ports is essentially a response to globalization, which is precipitated by labor market deregulation, product market liberalization, and the commercialization or privatization of state-owned enterprises or state-run services. Current dock strikes are therefore part of a wider resurgence of labor militancy, as discussed by Jeremy Brecher in this volume, against austerity programs, privatization, the denial of labor and human rights, and the erosion of public services. In many industrial sectors throughout the world, private capital has been able to play off one group of workers against another and threaten a ‘capital strike’ (i.e. a refusal to invest or the transfer of production to another location) in order to cut labor costs and secure managerial control over the labor process. To be sure, capital is still ‘dependent’ on labor, and with just-in-time production and other modern systems of management the capitalist firm is potentially more vulnerable to disruption. But labor must develop new ‘repertoires’ to counter the globalization of capital. As Frances Fox Piven points out in this volume, labor is invariably slow(er) to develop such repertoires. Thus, in the eyes of many commentators, trade unions appear to ‘have become passive actors, responding to economic pressures and social forces, seemingly without independent capacity to shape events or determine outcomes.’
In ports, the immobility of capital and the costs of strike action to shipping lines, customers and wider economic interests, significantly increases the bargaining power of labor. As Knowles observed many years ago, ‘dockers largely regulate the pulse of external trade on the steadiness of which the country’s health, in terms of competitive power and living standards, so much depends.’ Moreover, dockers in most countries are renown as a well-organized and traditionally militant occupational group. The particular manifestation of globalization in the port transport sector, and the ensuing conflict between capital and labor, is therefore discussed in an historical and international context, recognising that international trends are not simply translated into common pressures in all national economies ‘but rather are mediated by national institutional arrangements and refracted into divergent struggles over particular national practices. Globalization has not only been contested on the waterfront, but these divergent struggles have delayed and in some ports diverted the ambitions of global capital.

**Strike Waves on the Waterfront**

Conditions of work on the waterfront at the turn of the century were notorious in all countries, ‘rarely anything but strenuous, always dirty, often unhealthy, and sometimes decidedly dangerous.’ From Sydney’s ‘hungry mile’ to the ‘stones’ outside the enclosed London docks, men gathered every day in anticipation of a few hours work. Ben Tillett, who organized the Great London Dock Strike of 1889, recalled his own experience of shaping up for work in front of the ‘grinning caller-on [who] walked up and down, protected [by] stout iron bars, facing [a] raging and shouting mass … he would pick and choose the slaves with wanton brutality, as one throwing scraps to hungry wolves, to delight in the exhibition of a savage struggle for existence.’ In all ports work was uncertain. On the US West Coast, labor was recruited to unload sailing vessels at the last minute by shore-side criers calling – ‘Men along the shore!’ (giving rise to the term longshoremen).

Without control over the inflow of workers to the docks a permanent oversupply of labor created chronic underemployment, with wages barely sufficient to support a family. For many commentators ‘it seemed incredible that the “degraded dockers” … would ever be capable of united action. But the nature of dockers’ work, and the uncertainty of their lives, helped to forge a common psychology of group loyalty. Outside work, ‘The stern reality of ever-pressing starvation draws all together. Communism is a necessity of their life: they
share all with one another. Inside work, ‘The common adage “one out, all out” was no ideological invention; it was a product of necessity if men were to hold any standards or preserve even the meagerest conditions of work. Dockers quickly learnt from bitter experience that only complete strikes would preserve or improve basic pay and other terms of employment on the waterfront.

Major strikes were fought in ports around the world to establish a system to regulate the vagaries of casual employment. In particular, unions sought to establish control over labor supply (via a scheme of statutory employment registration or union membership cards to identify bona fide dock workers), a system of job allocation to ensure a more equitable distribution of available work (via a centralised, state-run employment centre or union hiring hall), and provision for ‘maintenance’ payments or guaranteed wages when no work was available (via the payment of ‘attendance money’ and/or statutory unemployment benefits). The Great London Dock Strike of 1889 is usually remembered for the wage demand of 6d per hour (the ‘docker’s tanner’), but for Ben Tillett the objective ‘was, essentially, the system of dock employment.’ The strike secured a half day minimum ‘turn’ or shift, with just two turns per day, and a virtual closed shop via the transfer of hiring from inside to outside the dock gates where a union card inspection could be made. Similar demands lay at the heart of the 1934 US West Coast strike: a union-controlled hiring hall that would end all forms of discrimination and favoritism in hiring and equalize work opportunities, a 6 hour working day, a coastwise contract to eliminate port-by-port competition, and a definition of longshoring to establish work jurisdiction.

Employers, not surprisingly, resisted such demands. Tillett’s union, for example, was eased out of the London docks by an employer counter-offensive involving the extensive use of scab/non-union labor, orchestrated by the newly formed Shipping Federation. Employer interests were better served by an ‘unregulated’ (i.e. employer dominated) casual labor market, not least because it hamstrung union attempts to organize dock laborers and produced a high work rate at minimum cost. Thus, even when labor market regulation was firmly established, as in many countries after World War II when statutory ‘dock labour schemes’ were introduced, employers fought a rearguard action to undermine union control. The years that followed the establishment of the Australian Stevedoring Industry Board (ASIB) and the NDLS in Britain, for example, were marked by a wave of strikes. Employers contested the loss of managerial prerogative over hiring, allocation, discipline and dismissal under the new employment schemes and a succession of strikes were fought over the imposition of disciplinary penalties. In Australia, man-hours lost as a percentage of man-hours
worked over the period 1946/7 to 1956/7 were the highest of any decade in the post-war era. In Britain, the annual average number of working days lost from 1947-55 was 314,234, a figure only surpassed in the turbulent years of decasualization and modernization between 1967-72, and questions of managerial authority figured prominently in many disputes. In the face of such concerted rank-and-file opposition, employers in both countries, and ultimately the statutory authorities, eventually abandoned attempts to impose mass discipline on the workforce.

Employers in New Zealand also complained bitterly about discipline under the new ‘bureau’ system of employment established under the Waterfront Industry Commission (WIC) in 1947 (whereby employers had to accept men allocated from the statutory port bureau on the basis of accumulated hours, such that watersiders with the lowest hours worked were allocated first). In particular, employers contested the increase in ‘spelling’ or on/off working, where several members of the gang take a rest or ‘spell’ off, which they attributed to a decline in discipline. Shirking watersiders could be returned to the bureau and the WIC would impose disciplinary penalties, but this simply aggravated industrial relations. By 1951 the employers were keen to precipitate a final showdown on the waterfront, and the New Zealand Waterside Workers’ Union, one of the most industrially militant and radical trade unions in New Zealand, was defeated and derecognized after a bitter 151-day strike. Twenty-six port-based unions were established in place of the national union and non-union labor was hired to replace the striking watersiders. Likewise in France, even though dockers were now registered with a statutory employment office, the Bureau Central de la Main d’Oeuvre (BCMO), employers sought to break labor control on the waterfront. In Marseilles, for example, employers deployed troops and then made a general call for labor during a dispute in 1950. Thereafter, the employers rejected existing collective agreements and the unions, already fragmented along political lines, were not formally recognized again until 1963. In both countries, however, union organization was rebuilt from the grass roots and by the late 1960s dockers had secured de facto control over the statutory employment system.

Through their influence over the hiring and allocation of labor, longshore unions were able to establish jurisdiction over ‘dock work’ and thereby reduce and contain the chronic labor surpluses and competition for work that had so bedevilled union organization in the past and depressed rank-and-file militancy. In Franzosi’s terms, strikes on the waterfront had transformed the very structures that brought them to the fore of history. In Britain, for example, ‘dock work’ was now defined by statute and only registered employers who engaged
registered dockers were legally permitted to perform such work. In the event of a strike, therefore, it was illegal for employers to hire non-registered (scab) labor to perform 'dock work. For most dockers, however, the desideratum was a system of union-controlled work sharing, rather than a statutory labor scheme under the joint control of employers or the ultimate sanction of the state, or indeed an employer-managed labor pool as in Rotterdam and Hamburg. But only dockers in Italy and US West Coast longshoremen were able to establish a union-based system.

In Italy, the Compagnie Portuali (Dockers’ Companies) were guild-like organizations endowed with the exclusive right to carry out cargo handling operations under Ministerial Decree (no. 166/728, 1929) and the Marine Code of 1942. The Compagnie were responsible for training and sought to ensure an equalization of work and income through multi-skilling and job rotation, which provided a strong organizational base for rank-and-file solidarity. Likewise, the hiring halls established by the International Longshoremen’s and Warehousemen’s Union (ILWU) after the strike of 1934 created a solid foundation for future resistance and a space where a sense of community was experienced by longshoremen. Community was based on liberty, fraternity and equality, which were not just abstract principles but observable ILWU practices (e.g. ‘low-man out hiring’ and the right to refuse a job). As Wellman notes, ‘longshoremen on the West Coast came to say of their union, “the ILWU is the hiring hall.”’

As in other ports around the world at this time, employers on the West Coast ‘did their best to break the union’, and the years which followed the 1934 strike ‘were among the stormiest in US labor history.’ But this wave of strike activity eventually led to a new bargaining and organizational structure on the West Coast in the shape of the Mechanization and Modernization (M&M) Agreements of 1960 and 1966. As early as 1957 the ILWU and the Pacific Maritime Association (PMA) had agreed to the guiding principle that longshoremen should be guaranteed a share of the benefits from mechanization, which was already transforming work on the waterfront. The principal benefits of the M&M Agreements for longshoremen were employment security (no enforced layoffs) and a guaranteed wage based on the equivalent of 35 hours (straight-time) per week. In return, employers secured substantial freedom to (re)organize work, operate efficiently and utilize labor-saving devices. The M&M Agreements thus paved the way for containerization on the West Coast, but three issues came to the fore by the late 1960s which in 1971 sparked the first coastwise strike since 1948.
First, job security was threatened by containerization as the new technology could reduce labor requirements in the port by around 90 per cent on general cargo operations. Secondly, new technology disrupted established patterns of work distribution as employers preferred to employ ‘steady’ (permanent) workers on the new capital-intensive container operations, creating a situation where some longshoremen were regularly employed and highly paid while those allocated from the hall were frequently underemployed. Thirdly, dock work was relocated outside the port area, raising jurisdiction disputes with other unions and/or occupational groups.

These issues lay at the heart of the strike wave that swept through the world’s ports in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In the UK, for example, employers had pledged that there would be no redundancies as a result of the introduction of permanent company-based employment in September 1967, but the first voluntary severance scheme was announced in London in October 1967 and the first National Voluntary Severance Scheme in June 1969. More importantly, employers assigned an increasing number of ‘surplus’ dockers to the Temporarily Unattached Register (TUR) which was supposed to be used solely for dockers awaiting a disciplinary case or pending reallocation to another employer in the event of a business closure. The employers’ (ab)use of the TUR as a ‘backdoor’ method to dismiss surplus labor precipitated a national strike in 1972. This was the second national dock strike in two years. The three week strike in July 1970 was the first national dock strike since 1926 and came just months after a twenty-seven month ban on handling containers in the port of London (Tilbury) was finally lifted. As Jensen noted at the time, however, the ban on new modernization agreements was not due to opposition to technological change: ‘Improvements were wanted but equally for all. In ports where dockers were employed by a comprehensive port authority responsible for all port operations, such as Liverpool, London and Southampton, dockers insisted on a system of rotation across different terminals to equalize work and earnings. In London, shop stewards pursued the work-sharing ethos to the ‘egalitarian extreme.’

Unlike the system of 100 per cent permanent employment introduced in Britain, both France and New Zealand retained a predominantly casual employment system, much to the chagrin of employers. In Marseilles, employers had previously experimented with the employment of permanent dockers but the venture was discouraged when the government held that the employers still had to pay the full levy (based on a percentage of the company’s wage bill) which financed the wage guarantee of ‘professionnel casual’ dockers and the
administration costs of the BCMO. This negated the potential cost savings of permanent labor and the employers abandoned the experiment. With the onset of containerization the employers tried again. After several major disputes a compromise was reached whereby ‘professionnel permanent’ dockers could be hired for up to six months and then returned to the BCMO, and the guarantee was raised from 200 to 300 shifts per annum. A similar system was introduced in New Zealand, whereby watersiders worked for just three to six months on container terminals before returning to the employment bureau. The major New Zealand employers had proposed permanent employment, with an employer managed ‘holding company’ to supply smaller companies and meet any peak labor requirements, but the watersiders defended the bureau system and demanded a guaranteed 40 hours pay per week instead of permanency. The retention of the bureau system, and many of the work practices associated with casualism, limited the productive potential of new technology and proved to be a persistent source of contention. As Figure 1 illustrates, there were five times as many strikes on the New Zealand waterfront in the 1970s compared to the 1960s, and twice as many man-hours lost in industrial disputes. As in Britain, strike action only abated when the New Zealand dock labor scheme was abolished in 1989.

FIGURE 1 HERE

Disputes over the allocation or distribution of work within the existing dock labor force were further exacerbated by the loss of work to other occupational groups. Crane drivers in both France and New Zealand, for example, were employed by the (public) port authorities whereas dockers were traditionally hired by (private) stevedoring companies or shipping lines. Containerization increased the work of the former to the detriment of the latter. More generally, in all ports around the world, the stuffing/loading and stripping/unloading of containers was relocated outside the port area, leading to questions of jurisdiction over ‘dock work’ and in many countries the very definition of ‘dock work.’ These ‘disputes of right’ frequently involved inter-port solidarity to preserve dockers’ exclusive jurisdiction over such work, and it was not uncommon for strikes in the late 1960s and early 1970s to be national or coastwise as well as port and company-based. In the 1968 US East Coast strike, for example, the International Longshoremen’s Association (ILA) sought not only exclusive rights to stuff and strip containers but identical container clauses for all ports on the eastern seaboard. In New Zealand there were just two multi-port disputes prior to the 1970s (in 1959 and 1967) but thereafter multi-port disputes occurred in every year except 1973, 1975 and 1986. In 1971, New
Zealand’s ports were hit by the first national strike since 1951. In Britain, as already indicated, containerization also heralded a number of multi-port disputes. This is illustrated in Figure 2 by the difference between ‘net’ and ‘gross’ disputes (a strike with the same cause or object that occurred simultaneously in ten ports would be counted as just one net strike but ten gross disputes).

FIGURE 2 HERE

Although dock worker solidarity came to the fore in the 1970s, containerization was rapidly undermining the traditional work culture on the waterfront and in many countries led to a reorientation in dockers’ outlook from the industry to the firm. On the US West Coast, for example, differences between steady men and longshoremen working out of the hiring hall were evident in both the work experience and daily discourse of these two groups. But these divisions within the workforce, and the decline of dockland communities, did not precipitate the demise of solidarity and conflict on the waterfront. As Finlay discovered, steady men would engage in individual ‘strikes’ and ‘deals’ to defend and improve working conditions and more formalized conflict was relocated to the Labor Relations Committee and arbitration hearings. More importantly, on a day-to-day basis, longshoremen continued to dispute managerial directives, despite contractual obligations to the contrary: ‘They use the contract as a weapon. It enables them to struggle with their employers for shopfloor control by being defensibly disobedient.

Even in Britain, where all dockers were now company employees, national and port-wide disputes continued to punctuate industrial relations in the industry, as Figure 2 clearly illustrates. To be sure, the NDLS had become the central, but an increasingly ethereal bond sustaining the dockers’ traditional occupational culture rooted in the system of casualism and break-bulk operations, but dockers still exercised considerable control over the labor process and were still willing to defend their individual and collective interests on the picket line. Abolition of the NDLS was therefore a necessary but not a sufficient condition for the changes demanded by (global) capital. Hence the mass dismissal of registered dock workers and their replacement by non-union, casual and contract labor, the selective dismissal of union activists and widespread trade union derecognition. Of course, this form of radical restructuring was contingent on a wider body of employment law and a political environment that condoned such action. But British ports, and to a similar extent New Zealand, now constitute the ‘benchmark’ for global capital in an international ‘race to the bottom.’
Globalization and Strikes on the Waterfront

If globalization is (narrowly) defined as the integration of spatially separate locations into a single international market, then ports and shipping are clearly central to this process. For example, more than 80 per cent of trade (by weight) with origins or destinations in developing countries is waterborne. Within Europe, ports handle over 90 per cent of European Union (EU) trade with third countries and over 30 per cent of intra-EU traffic. The trend towards more extensive and intensive cross-border integration of trade implies that physical geography is now less of a barrier to business. There are both political and economic dimensions to such integration. The former includes free trade agreements, privatization programs and the relaxation or abolition of capital controls in order to facilitate foreign direct investment. The principal economic dimension of integration is simply a reduction in the cost of international transport: freight rates have fallen dramatically in recent years, by over 40 per cent in less than a decade on most routes. According to Seok-Min Lim, ‘it is now possible to make almost anything anywhere and ship it to almost anywhere without affecting the price.’ Developments in the shipping industry, and in particular the relentless growth of containerized traffic, is therefore central to both restructuring on the waterfront and the more general globalization of capital.

Workers on the waterfront are confronted by globalization in their daily lives: vessels owned by multinational corporations (MNCs), invariably registered under a ‘flag of convenience’ and typically crewed by cheap labor from developing countries, bring a multitude of goods from around the world into their port. These goods are increasingly carried on container rather than general cargo (break-bulk) vessels, and container vessels grow ever larger in order to realise economies of scale. A 6,000 Twenty-foot Equivalent Units (TEUs) container vessel, for example, can give a 21 per cent cost advantage over a 4,000 TEU ship on a typical transpacific rotation. However, the immediate effect of mega-ship building is over-tonnage on the world’s major liner routes and a further decline in freight rates initiated in the first instance by competition from shipping lines outside the established liner conferences (e.g. ZIM and COSCO) and aggressive new market entrants from Asia (e.g. Evergreen, Hanjin and Yangming). Moreover, the cost advantage of a 6,000 TEU container vessel evaporates at less than 80 per cent utilisation, which results in further discounting in order to gain more traffic, secure cash flow and knock out competition.
The principal effects of the globalization of shipping on ports are twofold. First, increasing ship size forces ports to invest in deeper maritime access channels, larger cranes, more extensive stacking areas, and more sophisticated logistic control systems. In many ports around the world, local or national government has traditionally funded such investment, but the scale of investment is now beyond public finances in many countries. Secondly, in a trading environment plagued by over-capacity in the shipping industry and low(er) freight rates, cutting cost is everything. However, ship related costs represent only 30 per cent of the total inter-modal logistics costs from origin to destination. Attention has therefore focused on ports and in particular cargo handling where labor costs typically account for around 60 per cent of total operating costs, even on capital-intensive container terminals.

A common response to limited public sector funds for port investment, especially in developing countries where structural adjustment programs have been imposed by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, is privatization. A recent survey reported that around 150 countries world-wide had either introduced, or were actively considering, some form of port privatization. A World Bank review of the top 100 container ports in 1997 revealed that eighty-eight conformed to the ‘landlord’ model under which the public port authority retains ultimate property rights over port land and regulatory authority over navigation, conservancy and the like, but cargo handling operations are now provided on a commercial basis by the private sector. International shipping lines, in an attempt to secure control over the entire logistics chain and provide a door-to-door service to customers, are increasingly active in container handling. The most notable examples are P&O and Maersk/Sea-Land. Recent years have also witnessed the emergence of global port operating companies such as Hutchinson Whampoa (Hong Kong), Port of Singapore Authority (PSA) Corporation, International Container Terminal Services Inc. (Philippines) and Stevedoring Services of America (SSA). These companies wield significant economic and political influence and their interests, along with other MNCs, now dominate the agenda of national governments.

It is often noted that MNCs have greater potential to divide labor and draw on sophisticated techniques of labor control, thereby precipitating an international ‘race to the bottom’ in terms of pay and conditions of employment. An equally common retort, however, is that such a process is not inevitable: instead of simply cutting (labor) costs, international competitiveness might be constructed on the basis of high levels of
investment in physical and human capital, high wages and high productivity. Under this interpretation the
impact of globalization on workers’ terms and conditions of employment is an empirical rather than a theoretical
question, but it is often noted that there is a dearth of such empirical data. In ports, however, detailed research
from both individual countries and global surveys suggests that a race to the bottom is very much is evidence,
and the leaders in this race are the international shipping lines and the new global port operators.

Evidence of the deleterious effects of port reform in Britain and New Zealand has already been cited
(notes 2 and 43). Recent years have witnessed a relentless squeeze on labor costs in both countries, with global
shipping lines exerting pressure on ports to reduce rates and (global) port operators, in turn, putting the squeeze
on labor. Watersiders employed by New Zealand Stevedores (NZS), for example, were forced to accept new
terms and conditions of employment when the company was bought by SSA. Many of the NZS network
companies were placed in receivership, only to re-open in several ports under a new name with a much reduced
workforce, inferior conditions, and extensive use of casual and contract labor. The port of Felixstowe, Britain’s
largest container port, recently sought to cut dockers’ basic pay by over 40 per cent, insisting that the port
should pay local labor market rates rather than industry wage rates. Felixstowe is now owned by Hutchinson
Whampoa, along with the British ports of Harwich and Thamesport, and all negotiations are co-ordinated
through the company’s Hong Kong office. Another Hutchinson subsidiary, Panama Ports, sacked almost three-
quarters of the dockers at Cristóbal and Balboa ahead of privatization in 1997. Further examples abound. In
Taiwan, for example, dockers previously employed by Kaohsiung Harbour Bureau were transferred to the direct
employment of private terminal operators in January 1998 and the new Kaohsiung International Shipowners
Association, established to co-ordinate pay and conditions of employment in the port, forced a 40 per cent cut in
dockers’ pay. Employment ‘security’ for the existing workforce was only guaranteed for 6 months and over
1,000 dockers have been dismissed since July 1998.

More systematic evidence on the race to the bottom in the port transport industry is provided by a 1994
survey of thirty-six port unions affiliated to the International Transport Workers’ Federation (ITF), representing
two-thirds of all dock workers affiliated to the ITF. This survey found that deregulation of the labor market,
liberalization of the product market, and the privatization of port services led to a marked deterioration in terms
and conditions of employment in the world’s ports, most notably in terms of employment levels, job security,
social conditions and career prospects. The deleterious effects of ‘structural adjustment’, another euphemism
for globalization, have been especially marked in developing countries and the Asia-Pacific region.

Although dock labor schemes and conditions of employment vary substantially from one port to the next, the demands of international shipping lines and the new global port operators are almost everywhere uniform. Most notably, these companies demand direct employment for at least a significant core of their workforce, especially crane drivers and other operators of heavy plant and equipment, and their preference is to recruit non-union or at least non-traditional dock labor. When P&O established the Qasim International Container Terminal in Pakistan, for example, the company hired 190 workers of its own and refused to utilize the services of dockers already working at the port. Likewise, European Combined Terminals (Rotterdam) sought to recruit non-union labor for the new high-tech Delta Terminal on the Maasvlakte. In ports all around the world, such initiatives constitute a direct challenge to union-controlled and statutory dock labor schemes, especially those based on non-permanent or indirect forms of employment.

Permanent employment was a key objective for employers in both France and New Zealand, for example, resulting in the abolition of the BCMO and WIC respectively in 1989. In both countries, however, workforce resistance crucially shaped the subsequent reform process. In New Zealand, union control at the port level, and the union’s capacity to organize national strike action, initially remained intact after the abolition of the WIC. The willingness and ability of the Waterfront Workers’ Union (WWU) to engage in strike action resulted in the WWU securing important protections for its members. In France, strikes and other forms of industrial disruption not only delayed agreement on the new system of employment post-1989 but also delayed the full implementation of agreed reform by at least two years (1992-94). Nationally, French ports experienced more than fifty days of strike action in 1992. Marseilles was hit by over 100 days of strike action. National and local strikes, go-slows and other forms of disruption continued throughout 1993-94.

The restructuring of Italian ports over the period 1991-94 was equally fractious. In 1991 the dockers’ monopoly over labor supply was successfully challenged in the European Court of Justice. Private operators, including PSA Corporation, Hutchinson, P&O and Evergreen now operate, or plan to operate, private terminals with their own dedicated, permanently employed labor force recruited from outside the ranks of the Compagnie. The dockers’ guilds were legally obliged to become ‘commercial’ companies in 1994, but the Compagnie in Genoa, Italy’s major general cargo port, has still not fully transformed itself. Moreover, the dockers in Genoa
have not only secured the concession to operate one of the port’s major terminals, but exclusive rights to supply any supplementary labor to other operators in the port. Employers conceded this right following a prolonged period of industrial disruption that included, according to one employer, arson attacks and other forms of sabotage.

Although they prefer, and invariably demand, permanent company-based employment as a condition of investing in a private terminal, shipping lines and global terminal operators still require numerical flexibility. In particular, operators need supplementary labor to meet peak operational demand and many prefer to hire contract labor for less skilled jobs such as container un/lashing and driving prime movers from the quay crane to the container stack, and vice versa. The provision of such services has traditionally been the preserve of port-based (statutory) labor pools or union hiring halls, but MNCs are far less willing to tolerate union control or state regulation of daily labor allocation. In Britain, employers have effectively ‘privatized’ the supply of labor, utilizing their own lists of casual workers, including former registered dockers, engaging the services of private employment agencies, or simply recruiting labor from the unemployment register. In New Zealand, as already noted, the WWU was initially able to regulate labor supply on the New Zealand waterfront after the abolition of the WIC, but restrictions on strike action embodied in the Employment Contracts Act 1991 resulted in a shift from casuals being employed by agreement to the assertion of managerial prerogative over hiring and firing decisions.

French employers sought rather different arrangements, again reflecting struggles over particular national practices. Although there is still provision for employers to call on occasionnel dockers, French ports have effectively moved to a 100 per cent permanent/company-based system. Many employers admit that this system limits numerical flexibility, but their over-riding concern was to finally rid the ports of professionnel casual dockers and break the unions’ control over labor supply and the daily allocation of dockers to specific jobs. These issues continue to animate management-labor relations in French ports.

The militancy and solidarity of Spanish dockers also played a key role in the country’s port reform program initiated in the mid 1980s. Port employers are now allowed to hire permanent dockers from the ranks of the existing labor force but, in contrast to France, the majority of dockers are still allocated from the (reconstituted) labor pool, Sociedad Estatal De Estiba. Although the government retained a 51 per cent stake in the Estiba, the labor pool is now run by employers on a commercial (but non-profit making) basis, illustrating yet again the desire of capital to free itself from state regulation of the labor market.

Even in Rotterdam where
the employers have always (formally) controlled the labor pool, the government withdrew financial support for unemployment (maintenance payments) in 1995 and the pool, Strichting Samenwerkende Havenbedrijven (SHB), now operates on a fully commercial basis. The recent bankruptcy of the labor pool in Amsterdam, also ‘privatized’ in 1995, and the substitution of contract and casual workers for pool labor demonstrated the significance of this change. The latter now constitute the ‘benchmark’ for SHB in Rotterdam where a more flexible shift working system was recently introduced to appease the major operators and stave off a similar financial crisis.

In order to effect these fundamental changes to labor market regulation the international shipping lines and global port operating companies have sought to extricate themselves from national or even port-based collective agreements. In Britain, government officials believed that employers would sign a national agreement with the Transport & General Workers Union (TGWU) in 1989 when the NDLS was abolished. Instead, employers derecognized the union and dismissed union activists, exploiting British employment laws that allow managers to sack strikers and unilaterally impose new contracts of employment. This strategy proved to be successful in most ports, with the notable exception of Liverpool. In all British ports, managers were keen to rid themselves of union and workforce control of the labor process, but they did not want to lose valuable skills and experience. In Liverpool, union membership and rank-and-file solidarity was synonymous with the continued employment of (former) registered dockers. To counter union organization, and to end the system of work rotation in the port, Mersey Docks & Harbour Company (MDHC) sub-divided the port into six separate operating companies, each with progressively different terms and conditions of employment. The significance of this form of restructuring was twofold. First, peaks and troughs in labor demand within the port were exacerbated as labor was no longer transferred between different operations on a daily basis. As a result, some companies experienced a shortage of work and instigated further redundancies while other companies in the port used extensive overtime hours and hired contract labor to meet operating peaks. Secondly, under British employment law, any strike action at one company could not legally be supported by dockers at another company in the port, even if MDHC was still the beneficial owner. Thus, when dockers employed by a labor agency called Torside struck work in September 1995 and MDHC dockers refused to cross the picket line, the Harbour Company was legally entitled to dismiss the entire workforce. This action sparked a 28 month dispute which culminated in defeat for the Liverpool dockers.
Where collective bargaining is more firmly established in national law and the extant industrial relations system, however, as in most continental European countries, port unions have been far more successful in defending members’ terms and conditions of employment. In Spain, for example, provisions exist for national and/or regional collective bargaining at the industry level with works councils at the workplace, creating the potential for ‘rich bargaining’ through co-ordination or ‘articulation’ between the industry and workplace levels. The ‘dual system’ in Spain is not fully exploited in most industries owing to a combination of trade union policy and employer opposition. In particular, most Spanish unions have used their institutional involvement to compensate for organizational weakness at the workplace. On the waterfront, in contrast, the Coordinadora, the principal dockers’ union, sought to utilize this system when faced with port privatization and state-sponsored reform of the labor pool. By sustaining the democratic involvement and mobilization of rank-and-file dockers the Coordinadora has been able to consolidate its formal position at both the industry and workplace levels through collective bargaining and the works councils. Informal control of the labor process is still vigorously defended by individual workers, dock gangs and workplace union representatives. Likewise, the ambitions of capital in France and Italy have been mediated by national institutional arrangements and in particular the ability of dock workers, through solidarity, to mobilize these arrangements in the defence of jobs, informal work practices and established terms and conditions of employment.

Many of the strikes that have been fought on the waterfront in recent years are, of course, defensive. In general, the impact of defensive strikes in an era of global capital, especially when only a single group of workers withdraw their labor, is arguably much diminished. On the waterfront, however, even localised strikes can impose significant costs on operators, port users, importers, exporters, and ultimately the consumer. The recent (1996-98) unauthorized work stoppages on the US West Coast, for example, are estimated to have cost shipping lines and their customers around US$150 million. Professor Stephen Cohen and John Oliver Wilson have estimated that a 5 day shutdown of US West Coast ports would cost the national economy $3.8 billion, result in the loss of nearly 12,000 jobs, and reduce federal, state and local tax revenues by nearly $90 million. The cumulative effects of a coastwise strike are quite startling: a 10 day strike would cost the US economy $15.3 billion, 70,000 jobs, and $540 million in federal, state and local tax revenue.

Even what might be regarded as ‘conservative unionism’ can therefore pose a very real challenge to the interests of global capital in the maritime and port transport industries. Unions are, of course, most comfortable
with ‘reactive conservatism’ which reflects a long-standing ‘Maginot-line consciousness - what we have we hold.’

International solidarity, for most workers, is rarely considered, let alone practised. But dockers have always displayed a willingness to initiate international boycotts and offer solidarity to their fellow workers in other countries. The recent Liverpool dispute (1995-98) and the strike against Patrick Stevedores in Australia (1998), discussed by Stuart MacIntyre in this volume, are the latest examples of international solidarity on the waterfront. Thus, the dilemma facing (global) capital in the world’s ports is that the employment arrangements that companies are seeking to dismantle continue to sustain a work culture and patterns of group loyalty that are not only antithetical to the interests of capital but predispose dockers towards solidarity and militancy on a company, port, national and even international basis.

Conclusions

Globalization often invokes the image of an increasingly homogeneous world economy dominated by footloose capital, and workers are often portrayed as being powerless in the face of capital mobility unless they can themselves develop a global strategy in response. But international labor co-operation is in no way ‘inevitable’ and is unlikely to follow simply from a realisation of economic interdependence. In fact, globalization is arguably more likely to produce economic nationalism rather than international co-operation. This is also true on the waterfront, but on numerous occasions dockers have been able to transcend their immediate economic interests and their dependence on national opportunity structures and mount successful campaigns of international solidarity. In fact, waterfront trade unions display many of the characteristics deemed essential for international solidarity and effective international trade unionism, namely organizational comprehensiveness and inclusiveness (i.e. high levels of union membership/density and extensive affiliation to an international trade secretariat), internal authority within individual unions and the relevant international trade secretariat, and external recognition by employers, governments and international agencies.

Moreover, ports are fixed assets. This is not to deny increasing inter-port competition or the impact of larger vessels that tend to call at fewer ports. Nonetheless, the range of ports that actively compete with each other is often limited which makes international union strategies more viable. In Europe, for example,
international union co-operation can be focused around the key port zones of the northern range (Le Havre to
Hamburg), Baltic Sea ports and the Mediterranean. More importantly, even national responses pose a major
challenge to the ambitions of global capital. Waterfront unions have been able to mobilize significant power
resources to defend their members’ interests, not least the regulatory institutions or dock labor schemes that
(global) capital has sought to dismantle. To be sure, these resources differ from one port to the next, and this is
reflected in the divergent struggles taking place around the world over specific national practices. But it is hard
to find a port where globalization is not being contested by dock labor and the disruptive capacity of dock
strikes should not be underestimated.

Notes

2. Even if the long-running dispute at the Port of Liverpool is included in the statistics, the average number of
days lost per annum would be less than half the total for the period 1980-89. However, as the dockers at
Liverpool were legally dismissed by the Mersey Docks & Harbour Company the dispute did not constitute a
’strike’ or ‘lock-out’ according to the definition of work stoppages used by the UK Office for National
Statistics. There have been fewer than ten recorded disputes in Britain’s ports over the past decade.
2 See, inter alia, Neil Evans, Donald MacKay, Mike Garratt and Philip Sutcliffe, The Abolition of the Dock
Labour Scheme, Research Series no.14 (London: Employment Department, 1993); Richard Sandusky and Peter
Turnbull, ‘Mêlée on the Mersey: Contracts, Competition and Labour Relations on the Docks’, Industrial
Relations Journal, 27, no.4 (1996), 275-88; Peter Turnbull and Victoria Wass, ‘The Greatest Game No More -
Peter Turnbull and Victoria Wass, “The Great Dock and Dole Swindle”: Accounting for the Costs and Benefits
of Port Transport Deregulation and the Dock Labour Compensation Scheme’, Public Administration, 73, no.4
Strike Club has 460 members representing forty-nine different nationalities and over eighty different flags.
5 Strike Club News, no.7 (Monaco: The Strike Club, Spring 1999).
6 Roberto Franzosi, The Puzzle of Strikes: Class and State Strategies in Postwar Italy (Cambridge: Cambridge
University Press, 1995), 17.
7 Roberto Franzosi, ‘Strike Data in Search of a Theory: The Italian Case in the Postwar Period’, Politics &
Society, 17, no.4 (1989), 472.
8 Franzosi, The Puzzle of Strikes, 338.
9 Richard Locke, Thomas Kochan and Michael Piore, editors, Employment Relations in a Changing World
10 Kenneth Knowles, ‘The Post-War Dock Strikes’, Political Quarterly, 22, no.3 (1951), 266.
11 See, inter alia, Frank Broeze, Militancy and Pragmatism: An International Perspective on Maritime Labour,
1870-1914’, International Review of Social History, 36, no.2 (1991), 165-200; Clark Kerr and Abraham Siegel,
‘The Inter-Industry Propensity to Strike - An International Comparison’, in Industrial Conflict edited by Arthur
Miller, ‘The Dockworker Subculture and Some Problems in Cross-Cultural and Cross-Time Generalizations’,
Comparative Studies in Society & History, 11 (1969), 302-14; Peter Turnbull and David Sapsford, ‘Hitting the
Bricks: An International Comparative Study of Labor Regulation and Industrial Conflict on the Waterfront’,
Industrial Relations (forthcoming); Peter Turnbull, Charles Woolfson and John Kelly, Dock Strike: Conflict and
12 Richard Locke and Kathleen Thelen, ‘Apples and Oranges Revisited: Contextualized Comparisons and the
13 John Morrison, Stories of the Waterfront (Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin, 1984), viii. See also Vernon H.

17 Ben Tillett, Memories and Reflections (London: John Long, 1931), 76.


21 Peter Turnbull and Sapsford, 'Hitting the Bricks'.


25 See Dick Scott, 151 Days: History of the Great Waterfront Lockout and Supporting Strikes, February 15 - July 15, 1951 (Auckland: Southern Cross Books, 1954); and Michael Bassett, Confrontation '51: The 1951 Waterfront Dispute (Wellington: Reed, 1972). Less than 5 per cent of former watersiders were re-hired in Auckland but in Wellington the old union remained virtually intact due to local labor shortages and the consequent problems of recruiting scabs.

26 See Jensen, Hiring of Dock Workers, 262-5. Employer, union and state policy was strongly influenced by institutional constraints and the national industrial relations 'system' of the country in question. Employers in France, for example, have generally adopted an autocratic management style, which has played a significant role in the general scarcity of collective bargaining. See Christel Lane, Management and Labour in Europe: The Industrial Enterprise in Germany, Britain and France (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1989).


28 As a result, Emergency Powers legislation was invoked in several major disputes in the early post-war period, with troops deployed to handle cargo. See Peter Hain, Political Strikes: The State and Trade Unionism in Britain (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1986); Gillian Morris, Strikes in Essential Services (London: Mansell, 1986), 100-3; and Peter Weiler, 'British Labour and the Cold War: The London Dock Strike of 1949', in Social Conflict and the Political Order in Modern Britain, edited by James E. Cronin and Jonathan Schneer (London: Croom Helm, 1982), 146-78.


30 David Wellman, The Union Makes Us Strong: Radical Unionism on the San Francisco Waterfront (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 61-3. Under low-man out hiring the longshoreman with the lowest number of accumulated hours worked is allocated first. Although longshoremen can refuse a job they are demoted to the bottom of the roster.

31 Ibid., 60.


33 Ibid. See also Gordon Betcherman and Douglas Rebne, 'Technology and Control of the Labor Process: Fifty Years of Longshoring on the U.S. West Coast', in Workers, Managers and Technological Change: Emerging
Patterns of Labor Relations, edited by Daniel B. Cornfield (New York: Plenum Press, 1987), 73-89; Lincoln
Fairley, Facing Mechanization: The West Coast Longshore Plan, Monograph no.23 (Los Angeles: Institute
of Industrial Relations, University of California, 1979); William Finlay, Work on the Waterfront: Worker Power
and Technological Change in a West Coast Port (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988); and Wellman,
The Union Makes Us Strong.

See, for example, McKinsey & Co., Containerization: The Key to Low-Cost Transport (London: McKinsey &
Co., 1967), 68; and A.A. Evans, Technical and Social Changes in the World’s Ports (Geneva: International

Permanently employed workers tend to be more productive on container operations than casual workers due
to the development, and retention, of job-specific skills (e.g. familiarity with equipment, working procedures

See Turnbull et al, Dock Strike. 25. The 1972 strike was resolved by an agreement that established the
principle of no compulsory redundancies and affirmed the appropriate use of the TUR.

Vernon Jensen, Decasualization and Modernization of Dock Work in London (ILR Paperback no.9, New
York: Cornell University, 1971), 65; see also Jack Dash, Good Morning Brothers! (London: Lawrence &
Wishart, 1969), 159-60. Under the London modernization agreement of 1970, dockers at the container berths
earned double (£55 for a 35 hour week on shifts) that of the London riverside workers (£27.50 for a 40 hour
week). See Turnbull et al, ‘Persistent Militants’, for a discussion of similar problems at the port of Liverpool
and other major British ports at the time.

many small stevedoring companies could not afford the costs of permanent employment and went out of
business. In many ports the public port authority assumed the role of stevedore, taking over the business of these
companies (the Port of London Authority, for example, became a stevedore in 1972). By the late 1980s the port
authorities employed over two-thirds of all registered dockers.

See Jensen, Hiring of Dock Workers. 270. Professionsel dockers were entitled to a guaranteed number of
shifts per annum (or the equivalent pay). During periods of peak demand employers could hire occasionnel
dockers, but these men were not entitled to any maintenance pay when no work was available.

The levy paid by employers was reduced to 2 per cent of gross wages for permanent dockers compared to 7
per cent for casuals. The number of permanent dockers varied from port to port but the vast majority retained
their ‘professionnel casual’ status, much to the disappointment of the stevedoring companies, and the system of
‘professionnel permanent’ dockers was effectively abandoned in 1981.

See James Reveley, ‘Registering Interest’. The employers’ proposal in New Zealand was based on the system
introduced in Australia in 1967 where the majority of wharfies were now permanently employed by the
operating companies and the remaining 35-40 per cent of the workforce were employed by Stevedoring
Employers of Australia Ltd (SEAL), a supplementary labor pool financed collectively by the employers. A
sharp wage disparity developed between permanent wharfies and SEAL labor and this proved to be a major
source of discontent in the 1970s. SEAL was abolished, along with other statutory regulations, in 1977. For a
discussion of this period, see Stephen Deery, ‘The Impact of the National Stevedoring Industry Conference
(1965-67) on Industrial Relations on the Australian Waterfront’, Journal of Industrial Relations, 20, no.2 (1978),
202-22.

For a discussion of recent port reforms in New Zealand see James Reveley, ‘Waterfront Labour Reform in
New Zealand: Pressures, Processes and Outcomes’, Journal of Industrial Relations, 39, no.3 (1997), 369-87; and
James Reveley, ‘From “Supplementary Seagulls” to “Cut Price Casuals”: Changing Patterns of Casual

Philip Ross, ‘Waterfront Labor Response to Technological Change: A Tale of Two Unions’, Labor Law

For a discussion of British dock strikes see Turnbull et al, ‘Persistent Militants’; and Peter Turnbull and David
Sapsford, ‘Why Did Devlin Fail? Casualism and Conflict on the Docks’, British Journal of Industrial Relations,

See, for example, Wellman, The Union Makes Us Strong, 175; and Finlay, Work on the Waterfront, 168-77.

Ibid., 175-8. For a discussion of similar developments in British ports, see Peter Turnbull and David Sapsford,
‘A Sea of Discontent: The Tides of Organised and “Unorganised” Conflict on the Docks’, Sociology, 26, no.2
(1992), 291-309.

Wellman, The Union Makes Us Strong, 254. As Finlay argues, one reason why there were so few strikes on
the West Coast in the 1970s and 1980s was precisely because longshoremen were able to retain considerable
control over the work process and the dockland labor market.


52 Researchers at the Institute of Shipping and Logistics in Bremen have estimated that for every 2.5 per cent increase in GDP there is a 7.5 per cent increase in containerized traffic. With a GDP growth rate of 3.5 per cent the increase in container traffic is estimated to be 10.5 per cent.

53 At the start of the 1990s, containerized traffic constituted less than two-thirds of all general cargo in major European ports such as Bremen and Rotterdam. By the late 1990s the proportion exceeded three-quarters. In Hong Kong the figure is over 80 per cent and in Singapore over 90 per cent. World port container traffic doubled between 1990-98 to reach 175 million TEUs. The World Bank estimates that total port container throughput will reach 270 million TEU by 2005.


58 P&O Ports (a division of P&O Australia), for example, operates in over thirty ports in Australia and New Zealand and fifteen other countries world-wide (including Argentina, Britain, China, India, Indonesia, Italy, Malaysia, Mozambique, Pakistan, Philippines, Russia, Sri Lanka and Thailand).

59 These four companies handle around 20-25 per cent of all container boxes world-wide. Hutchinson now dominates the ‘northern range’ of Europe as a result of the purchase of Felixstowe and Thamesport in the UK and the company’s 50 per cent shareholding in European Combined Terminals (Rotterdam). A major factor behind the ‘corporatization’ of PSA in 1997 was to allow the company to ‘globalize’. PSA Corporation now runs port operations in Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Italy, Mauritius, Oman, South Korea, Thailand, Vietnam and Yemen.

60 See, for example, Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello, Global Village or Global Pillage: Economic Reconstruction From the Bottom Up (Boston, Mass: South End Press, 1994).


62 Only a strike threat, backed by 87 per cent of the workforce in a secret ballot, forced a compromise by Hutchinson.


65 See Reveley, ‘Waterfront Labour Reform’, 378-80; and Reveley, ‘From “Supplementary Seagulls”’.


67 Interview notes, port of Genoa (January 1999).

68 See, for example, Turnbull and Wass, ‘The Greatest Game No More’.

69 See Reveley, ‘From “Supplementary Seagulls”’.

70 By June 1992, almost three years after the abolition of BCMO, 3,353 professionnel dockers had retired or accepted voluntary severance, 3,282 were company employees, but 1,539 dockers (almost a third of the remaining workforce) still retained their professionnel casual status. Only twenty-nine new dockers had been recruited (any new permanent recruits in major ports such as Marseilles and Le Havre are hired from the ranks of occasionnel dockers and the relatives of existing dockers, by agreement with the unions). In the latest agreements signed in French ports in 1998 the remaining professionnel casually will be transferred to salaried company status, but the majority of dockers have retained their professionnel registration cards, insisting that they should still be recognized as industry and not just company employees. Likewise, dockers in Portugal
threatened strike action in September 1997 to ensure the recognition and retention of their ‘professional’ industry status and skills in response to government restructuring and privatization plans for the ports.


72 Finney, ‘Editorial’, 2. The National Association of Port Employers was dissolved in 1989 so there was no longer any possibility of a national agreement.

73 Even then, MDHC did not want to divest valuable human capital and offered new individual contracts to around 200 ex-registered dockers (of course, none of the shop stewards or union activists were offered new contracts). But only a handful of Liverpool dockers signed the contracts and returned to work, illustrating yet again the solidarity that MDHC sought to destroy. The Company therefore hired former dockers supplied by a labor co-operative and Drake Port Distribution Services (a subsidiary of Drake International) which already supplied labor to the port of Tilbury and London riverside wharves. See Saundry and Turnbull, ‘Mêlée on the Mersey’.


76 See Saundry and Turnbull, ‘Contractual (In)Security’.

77 See Jeremy Brecher, this volume.

78 http://www.maripay.com/html/press_releases (28 July, 1998). It is often remarked that when in port a ship is simply a ‘floating warehouse’ accumulating costs and earning no revenue. As the cost per hour in port for a large container vessel is around US$6,000 even short strikes or go-slows can be effective in securing concessions from port employers and shipping lines.


81 International solidarity in the Australian dispute was co-ordinated by the ITF, regarded by Breitenfeller and many other commentators as one of the more effective international trade secretariats. Different facets of the Australian strike are discussed in a special issue of Economic & Labour Relations Review, 9, no.2 (1998). In the Liverpool case the ITF refused to be drawn into the dispute because the TGWU would not make the dispute ‘official’ (as to do so would result in the TGWU being vicariously liable for illegal strike action and subjecting the Union to severe financial penalties if challenged by MDHC or customers of the port of Liverpool).


85 Britain can be considered ‘exceptional’ among the developed economies of the world as it is the only country that, to date, has transferred port ownership, operations and regulatory authority to the private sector (in most countries only port operations have been privatized). Moreover, Britain has more restrictive employment and trade union laws than any other EU country. It is these specific national conditions that largely account for the defeat and demoralisation of dock workers in Britain. In other developed countries, national responses to global capital, based on well-established repertoires of collective action, have been far more effective.