THE LONDON DOCK STRIKE OF 1889: AN ANALYSIS

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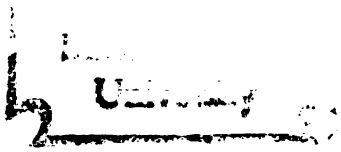

ABSTRACT

THE LONDON DOCK STRIKE OF 1889: AN ANALYSIS

By

Dennis W. Banas

The London Dock Strike of 1889 has never really been studied. Most historians have simply assumed that dock workers had every reason for staging a strike in 1889. This approach fails to explain why dockers did not stage a port-wide strike prior to 1889. It also fails to explain why a port-wide strike became an option for dock workers as 1889 approached. An investigation of the productive processes and relations into which dockers entered reveals a great deal of heterogeneity prior to 1889. This heterogeneity effectively inhibited dock workers from achieving the unity required for a port-wide strike. At the same time, however, various changes in the productive processes and relations which characterized the Port of London began to provide dock workers with a set of common experiences and antagonists. These changes, then, made a port-wide strike possible, although not inevitable.

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INTRODUCTION

In the Nineteenth Century, London dock workers were a particularly anonymous section of the British population. Few people, save for a number of reformists, knew anything about dock workers. Living in poverty and struggling to acquire the means of subsistence, dock workers rarely found enough time or energy to even think of improving their lives. Poverty also made it nearly impossible for dockers to sustain ameliorative institutions, such as trade unions. Consequently, when dockers did attempt to struggle against their conditions of existence, they traditionally staged short, spontaneous strikes. These strikes were usually limited to particular docks in isolation, and never threatened the operations of the entire Port of London or an entire dock company. They were usually also quite disastrous.

The London Dock Strike of 1889 changed these traditional patterns. In August 1889, dock workers taged their first port-wide strike, and threatened to bring the city of London to a halt through a series of sympathy strikes. After achieving a victory over the London dock companies in September 1889, dock workers

continued to use the port-wide strike as a weapon. More importantly, however, they also became involved in the effort to organize low-paid, unskilled and casual workers into viable industrial unions. Known as the "new unionism," this effort rapidly spread throughout Britain in the years 1889-1892. Dominated by socialists and using aggressive tactics, the "new unionism" antagonized employers who, in turn, mounted a counter-offensive in the years 1892-1911. All the "new unions," and many of the old, came under attack from employers. The union born of the London Dock Strike of 1889--the Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Labourers' Union--led by the socialists Tom Mann and Ben Tillett, met with the most determined resistance. The Shipping Federation, a national organization of merchant capitalists, mobilized blacklegs and employed money and police to break a series of dock strikes throughout Britain. The Federation also attempted to undermine the Dockers' Union by refusing to employ its members. These and related struggles provoked a number of court decisions which trade unionists, old and new, found unfavorable. Trade unionists, then, began to cooperate more closely. This cooperation was the foundation upon which the Labour Party was built.

The significance of these events seems obvious; even today the British are living with the results of the "new unionist" movement. This essay, however, will neither

attempt to narrate the history of the "new unions," nor present a detailed history of the Dockers' Union.[1] Instead, this essay will isolate and analyze dock workers. It will attempt to identify those working conditions in the Port of London which prevented dock workers from engaging in large-scale strike activity prior to 1889. It will also try to pinpoint those changes, if any, which made a port-wide strike possible in 1889. In this sense, we will not be looking for the "causes" of the London Dock Strike of 1889. As H. H. Champion, the socialist journalist and propagandist for the dock workers, observed: "That a strike should have taken place amongst the men employed at the docks on the Thames is not surprising. The wonder is that they should not before have revolted against the conditions of their servitude."[2] Like Champion, we will assume that dockers had every reason for striking: their wages were low; their work was irregular; and, finally, their housing and diet left much to be desired.[3] Once this assumption has been made, two questions remain: (1) What inhibited the development of port-wide unity among dock workers prior to 1889? (2) What made a port-wide strike a viable and attractive alternative for dock workers in 1889? These questions imply that we will be looking for the origins of solidarity among dock workers.

Since this essay will not deal directly with the Dock Strike of 1889, its title may seem a bit awkward.

How can one entitle a paper "The London Dock Strike of 1889: An Analysis" and never really discuss the strike itself? If it is remembered that the strike is the pivotal phenomenon, without which our questions and analyses would be quite irrelevant, the title will be less problematical. In this sense we are also trying to determine why a port-wide strike emerged at one specific historical point and not another.

Obviously, this essay will attempt to be highly analytical. Without trying to be pretentious, the only similar work available today is Charles Tilly's masterful The Vendée. In that book Professor Tilly describes and analyzes the social context which permitted and promoted the existence of a counter-revolutionary peasant movement in revolutionary France.[4] Although we are dealing with a different type of movement, we will try to do the same for dockers. We do not think that the strike was inevitable; nor do we think it was particularly evil or accidental. We do believe, however, that it emerged under very specific conditions which deserve analysis.

In order to analyze the conditions existing in the Port of London in the nineteenth century, this essay will adopt a theoretical and an empirical approach. Chapter I will assess and criticize the various theories of strike activity which scholars have offered over the past eighty-six years. It will also discuss the explanations of the

London Dock Strike which contemporaries and historians have left as their legacy. On the basis of this discussion, Chapter I will present the analytical model employed in the remainder of the essay. Chapter II will attempt to explain the absence of solidarity among dock workers prior to 1889. Chapter III will analyze those changes which contributed to the development of solidarity as 1889 approached. It will also attempt to assess why the first port-wide strike occurred in 1889 and not before or after. And, finally, Chapter IV will pull the essay together and indicate where further research is required. The overall objective, then, is not to provide a comprehensive view of either dock workers or the "new unionism," but rather to provide the foundations for such a view.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

[1]For the "new unionism" see: G. D. H. Cole, A Short History of the British Working-Class Movement, 1789-1947 (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1948), pp. 233-248, British Trade Unionism To-Day (London: Methuen, 1938), pp. 48-52, and British Working-Class Politics (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1941), pp. 126-137; and Sidney and Beatrice Webb, The History of Trade Unionism (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1920 edn.), pp. 358-407, and Industrial Democracy (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1920 edn.), pp. 755-759. For the Dock Strike of 1889 and the Dockers' Union see: H. H. Champion, The Great Dock Strike (London: Swan Sonnenschein and Co., 1890), passim; John Lovell, Stevedores and Dockers (London: Macmillan and Co., 1969), passim; Llewellyn Smith and Vaughn Nash, The Story of the Dockers' Strike (London: T. Fisher Unwin, n.d., but certainly 1890), passim; and Ann Stafford, A Match to Fire the Thames (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1961). For resistance to the "new unionism" and its consequences see: W. H. Abraham, "The Hull Strike," The Economic Review, 3, No. 3 (July, 1893); H. A. Clegg et al., A History of British Trade Unionism Since 1889 (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp. 55-96; Clem Edwards, "Labour Federations" pt. I, The Economic Journal, 3, No. 10 (June, 1893); Leslie H. Powell, The Shipping Federation (London: The Shipping Federation, 1950), chaps. I-IV; and John Saville, "Trade Unions and Free Labour: The Background to the Taff Vale Decision" in Asa Briggs and John Saville eds., Essays in Labour History (London: Macmillan and Co., 1960), pp. 317-350.

[2]H. H. Champion, The Great Dock Strike, p. 3.

[3]Henry Mayhew, London Labour and London Poor (London: Charles Griffin and Co., 1861), pp. 246-254, and Beatrice Potter (Webb), "The Docks," in Charles Booth, Life and Labour of the People in London, First Series: Poverty, Vol. 9 (London: Macmillan and Co., 1902), pp. 12-20.

[4]Charles Tilly, The Vendée: A Sociological Analysis of 1793 (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1967), Ch. I and passim.

CHAPTER I

A PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION OF STRIKE ACTIVITY AND THE LONDON DOCK STRIKE

Contemporaries were understandably partisan in their assessment of the "new unionism." Nevertheless, they generally agreed about the origins of both it and the London Dock Strike of 1889. Contemporaries considered dockers to be exceptionally oppressed: Dock workers rarely received more than a few hours of work in a day, a few days of work in a week, or a few months of work in a year. When they did find work, their wages were, by any imaginable standard, too low to provide even the necessities of life. The casual hiring practices of the London dock companies subjected dockers to the corrupt and avaricious exploitation of contractors and sub-contractors. Finally, intense competition among the various ports and dock companies exacerbated these general conditions of misery by creating a brutal pace of work and unsafe working conditions. According to the analysis of contemporaries, socialist agitation transformed the discontent of unskilled dockers into a strike of major proportions. The close proximity of previously successful

"new unionists," on the other hand, made dockers particularly attentive to this agitation. Matchmakers had won a stunning victory against the Bryant and May Company in July 1888; tramway workers followed suit and organized a union in June 1889; Gas-workers won concessions from the London Gas Companies in the winter and spring of 1889; and dock workers followed these encouraging examples. Moreover, contemporaries argued, an economic and seasonal upswing, after years of depressed activity, placed the dockers in a strategically advantageous position. Dock companies naturally wanted to enjoy the benefits of the upswing and were reluctant to suffer strikes; at the same time, the boom provided increased employment and diminished the potential pool of strike breakers. Many contemporaries added that working-class solidarity, sympathy strikes, trade union support and "public" sympathy reinforced the position of the dockers and produced the victory of September, 1889. The dockers' victory, in turn, induced similarly placed workers throughout Britain to organize. This expansion created an entirely new set of problems. The "new unions" struggled intensely with a group of hostile employers for recognition. Employer hostility, on the other hand, forced all trade unionists to cooperate more closely and organize national federations.[1]

Early labor historians added very little to the analysis provided by contemporaries. As historians, they

were primarily interested in presenting a narrative account of the "new unionism." Naturally, they were also very concerned with describing the differences between the old and "new" unionism. These concerns led the early labour historians to pass somewhat lightly over the "causes" and origins of the "new unionism." They tended to identify the deprivation suffered by dockers as one specific example of the general state of misery endured by all the workers attracted to the movement. Consequently, the early labour historians simply appropriated the analysis of contemporaries of the dock strike and the "new unionism," and used it to differentiate "new" from old unionism.[2]

More recent historians have expanded on the analysis of both contemporaries of the "new unionism" and the early labour historians. Influenced by sociology, one group of recent historians has argued that in 1889 the East End of London constituted a tightly knit and homogeneous community which pitted itself against the small group of employers operating in the district. According to this analysis matchmakers, gas-workers, tramway workers and dockers existed in similar circumstances, constantly interacted, and were rarely exposed to the moderating influences of individuals with broader experiences. These workers, then, possessed a unique form of consciousness which emphasized implacable hostility to the employers who imposed poverty and misery upon the community. The East

End, consequently, was strike-prone.[3] Other historians have attempted to approach the problem of solidarity within the "new unionist" movement somewhat differently. John Lovell, the historian of London's dock unions, has isolated dock workers in an attempt to understand their ability to act as a cohesive group in 1889. Lovell has argued that dockers became unified simply because the physical exertion required by dock work provided them with a common experience. Lovell has added that physical exertion became a basis for unity because of the geographic and occupational stability of dock workers. Dockers, despite contemporary myths to the contrary, constantly sought work at the Port of London. More specifically, since shipping was highly irregular, dockers could not afford to travel from dock to dock in search of work and risk missing a chance at a dock where they were known. Consequently, particular dockers identified their interests with particular docks. Lovell has also argued that dock workers were at a strategic advantage insofar as they possessed the skills and experiences required by dock work. Despite the accepted classification of dockers as unskilled, they had to have strength, manual dexterity, a decent sense of balance, and a broad knowledge of the weights and physical features of cargoes.[4] Henry Pelling, the social historian, has taken a much broader perspective on the problem of working-class solidarity in the period

of the "new unionism." He has argued that the expansion of the factory system narrowed skill differentials among workers. Highly skilled workers were threatened by machinery; technically unskilled workers, such as dockers, on the other hand, had a certain scarcity value since their knowledge and experience were not easily acquired by new-comers. Pelling has added that the expansion of industrialism also provided more efficient means of communication among workers and made national perspectives, as opposed to regional or local, possible. Finally, the Great Depression reduced prices, improved the living conditions of unskilled workers, and further closed the gap which separated skilled and unskilled workers. Thus, a more-or-less homogeneous working class movement emerged in Britain in the late Nineteenth Century.[5] Another line of recent historical thought has emphasized the influence of politics on the "new unionism." According to this view, the removal of legal obstacles to trade union activity in the 1870s provided materially underprivileged workers, such as dockers and matchmakers, with a favorable institutional context within which to organize. The Parliamentary Reforms of 1868 and 1886, on the other hand, made politicians sensitive to working-class demands and reluctant to use the repressive forces of the state against working-class movements.[6] Most historians agree, however, that

the misery experienced by dockers and other workers caused the strikes of 1888-1889.

Tentatively, we may criticize the analyses of contemporaries of the "new unionism" and labour historians alike. As far as they go, these analyses are interesting, provocative and probably correct; but they do not go far enough. Although it is difficult to measure the misery experienced by dock workers in the Nineteenth Century, in the hands of most of the analysts discussed above the concept of misery seems to have been reduced to a biological phenomenon. They assumed that since dockers received poor wages and worked irregularly, the resulting hunger pains made protest inevitable. Tom Mann was the only observer who avoided this type of determinism: he argued that the "new unionism" emerged from the contradiction between the poverty and hunger of the workers involved and the wealth and productive potential of the British nation.[7] In a sense, we may agree with Mann. Misery is a relative phenomenon determined by cultural traditions and social standards. Dockers, then, were not simply miserable; they were miserable in a specific historical context which at least deserves description. We would, for example, have to prove that dockers were experiencing declining living standards or alterations in dietary habits and housing patterns which they considered unfavorable (but which might not necessarily have been

"objectively" disadvantageous) before we could argue that misery somehow provoked the Strike of 1889. Of course, the concept of misery is problematical in relation to the Dock Strike of 1889 for a number of other reasons: since misery is assumed to have existed in the Port of London long before 1889, it is necessary to explain why dockers waited until that particular year to stage a port-wide strike. In the same vein, the argument that cyclical and seasonal booms placed dockers in a strategically advantageous position helps to explain why dockers went on strike in 1889, but it does not explain why they did not strike as a cohesive group before 1889. The sociological theory of a closed community, if it were a bit more historical, could help to explain why dockers and matchmakers became part of a cohesive social movement in 1889. If some correlation between the timing of the strikes of the "new unionism" and the emergence of a closed community could be proved, this theory would have validity. Of course, the existence and development of a closed community would have to be traced through marriage patterns, through geographic and occupational mobility indices, and through an analysis of the social activities of the East End. As it stands now, the theory of a closed community is an assertion of faith rather than an empirically solid analysis. Of course, even if it were more solidly based upon empirical evidence, the theory of a closed community could only explain why dockers

were strike-prone; it could neither explain what issues and problems dockers hoped to resolve by staging port-wide strikes, nor why the port-wide strike was adopted as a mode of struggle only in 1889. John Lovell's insistence that dock workers were more or less homogeneous and permanently tied to the Port of London is subject to similar criticisms. If homogeneity based upon physical exertion existed at all times, the absence of a port-wide strike prior to 1889 demands explanation; if it was a new element in the experience of dock workers, it must be historically pin-pointed and analyzed. Moreover, at what point did dockers come to be tied to the Port of London? Of a different nature is the argument that the political and institutional context was favorable to trade union expansion in late nineteenth-century Britain. As compelling and irrefutable as this interpretation is, it adopts an overly legalistic perspective and simply does not tell us why certain groups of workers, such as dockers, decided to take advantage of a reformed political order at a particular point in time. Finally, Henry Pelling's argument that the gap between skilled and unskilled workers was closing in the 1870s and 1880s definitely helps to account for the working-class solidarity which characterized the "new unionism," but it does not explain why certain groups of workers, such as dockers and gas-workers, became the focal point for this demonstration of unity.

Having said this much about the analyses of contemporaries and historians, we may now turn to the work of economists and sociologists.

Economists and sociologists involved in the field of industrial relations have been much more sensitive to the need for empirical evidence than many historians. Methodologically, however, they have not abstained from making some basic assumptions. The field of industrial relations assumes that strike activity is a unified phenomenon demonstrating similar characteristics at any given time or place and, therefore, subject to theoretical, statistical and institutional analysis. These analytical exercises have a number of objectives: to identify changing forms and patterns of strike activity; to comprehend different industrial settings; to gauge the influence of various forms of organization; and, finally, to delineate the general causes of industrial conflict. The results of these efforts have produced what amounts to a composite analysis. The constituent elements of this analysis have received varying degrees of emphasis from different scholars, but they emerge more-or-less explicitly in most of the work on collective activity in an industrial setting.

Economists and sociologists usually begin with the observation that strikes require cohesive groups capable of common objectives and acting in unity. Kenneth Knowles,

Clark Kerr and Abraham Siegel have analyzed the formation of such cohesive groups. Some workers, such as dockers and coal miners, they have argued, are strike-prone because they live in closed, isolated and homogeneous one-industry communities. These workers enjoy neither the moderating influences of occupational diversity, nor the benefit of mediating bodies. Instead, they confront an impersonal group of absentee employers directly. Since these workers cannot easily transfer their acquired skills to new occupations, they cannot escape from their community. Thus, the community develops a unique and primitive form of morality which emphasizes loyalty to itself and hostility to employers. This form of morality passes from generation to generation with little modification.[8]

Unlike Knowles, Kerr and Siegel, other social scientists have simply assumed the existence of cohesive groups, and have attempted to enumerate the causes of strike activity. Strikes, they have found, occur for a variety of reasons: questions of wages or existence, low occupational status, loose occupational restrictions, technological change, intense and monotonous work, attempts to preserve obsolete skills, and increasingly impersonal relations all contribute to the emergence of strikes. Seasonal fluctuations within particular industries and general cyclical fluctuations condition the timing of strikes. Albert Rees, for instance, has found

that strikes generally occur shortly before booms reach their peak and at the beginning of downswings.[9] In either case, the ideological rigidity of trade union leaders and employers usually determines the intensity and duration of any given strike. Rational, compromising individuals insure moderate strikes, whereas ideologues usually contribute to intense and sometimes violent strikes. Obviously, economists and sociologists have constructed a complex and sophisticated multi-causal model of strike activity.[10] This model is expressed schematically in Figure I.

Within the framework of this multi-causal model many industrial relations scholars have developed an explicit historical outline of the development of strike activity in the Western world. Clark Kerr and John Dunlap and their associates, for instance, have argued that the rapid technological change which characterized the early industrial revolution undermined older artisanal skills and occupational restrictions, intensified the pace of work, created monotonous work processes and heightened the workers' struggle for existence. At the same time, the industrial revolution destroyed most of the older institutions of social mediation and, therefore, disoriented workers. Under these conditions, early strikes tended to be sporadic, emotional, cathartic and violent.[11] The bitterness of the early strikes was exacerbated by the rigid ideological positions of both employers and workers:

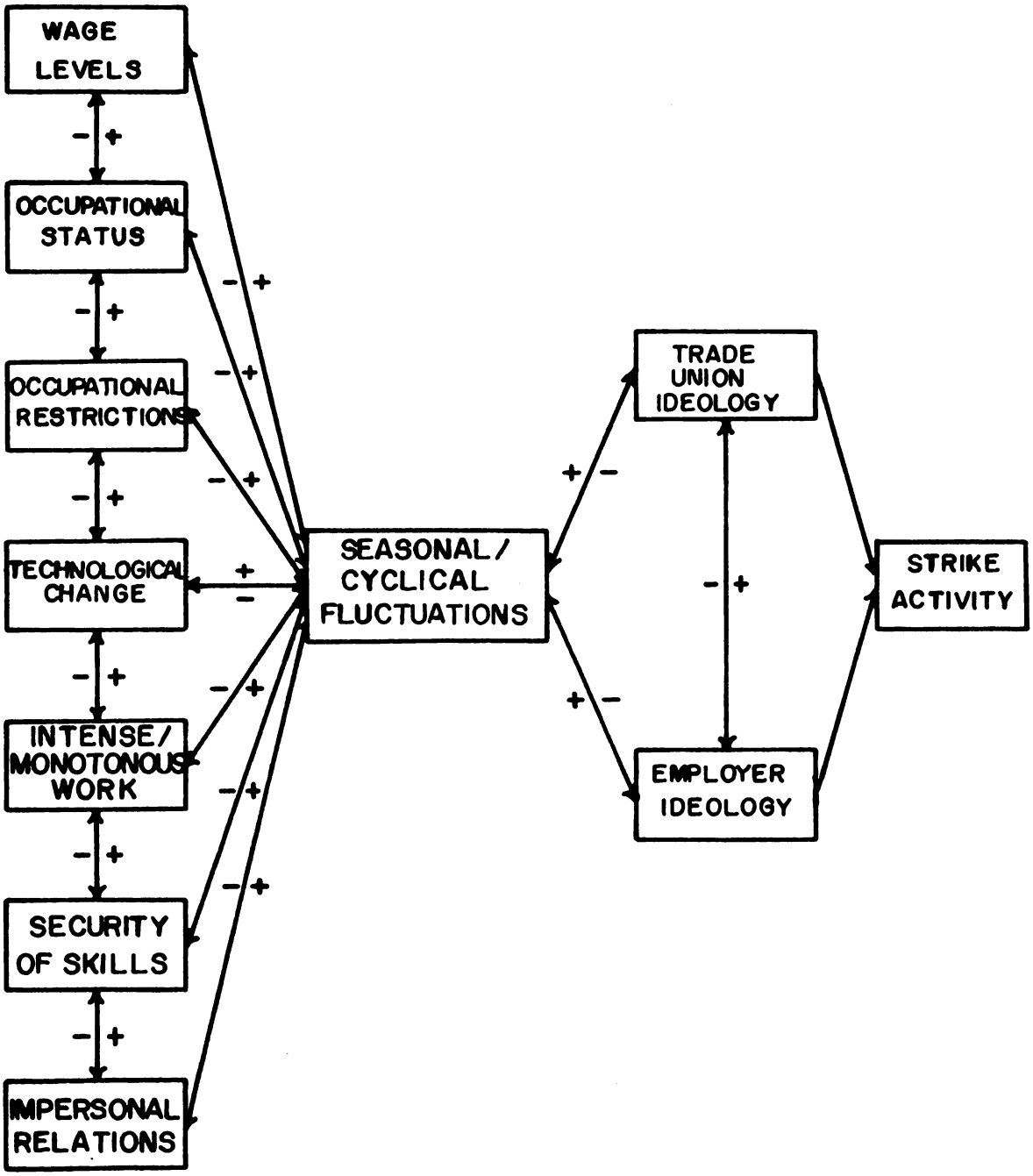

Fig. I.--A Multi-Causal Model of Strike Activity.

workers were often influenced by highly politicized theorists; and employers, on the other hand, narrowly defined their liberalism and viewed all working-class activity as subversive. Consequently, neither workers nor employers were willing to reach rational compromises.[12] Paul Hartman and Arthur Ross have added that in the past century the strike has gone through an evolutionary process. The struggle for existence has been almost completely eliminated by rising standards of living and the development of the welfare state. Concurrently, business-like trade unions and various mediating bodies have reconciled workers to existing social and political structures. Finally, sophisticated workers' and employers' associations have emerged and established flexible, conciliatory policies. Strike activity, consequently, has declined and become subordinate to rational strategic considerations.[13]

Although much more elaborate, many of the formulations of the economists and sociologists closely resemble the analyses of the Dock Strike of 1889 which contemporaries and historians have offered us. As such, the economists and sociologists of strike activity are subject to many of the criticisms we have already levelled against the contemporaries and historians of the dock strike. The closed community of dockers may exist today, but Knowles, Kerr and Siegel do not give any indication of when this

community came into being, why and over what issues it decides to strike at a particular time, or why it did not stage any port-wide strikes before 1889. Rees' empirical correlation between cyclical fluctuations and strike activity does not indicate why dock workers staged their first port-wide strike during the boom of 1889 rather than during previous or following economic upswings. On the other hand, the argument that struggles over wages and standards of existence motivate strikes sounds very much like the argument that misery compelled the dock workers to go on strike in 1889. This analysis can be useful only if it is recognized that the need for wage increases may be socially and culturally determined. Moreover, as Knowles and a number of other analysts have pointed out, the demand for higher wages may often be nothing more than a tactical mechanism for uniting workers around a specific demand; strikes themselves may be caused by more serious grievances. The leaders of the dock workers seem to have been employing this particular tactic in 1889.[14]

Of course, economists and sociologists have posed a number of problems which the contemporaries and historians of the Dock Strike of 1889 did not really bother to deal with fully. The economists and sociologists, for instance, are probably correct to have emphasized the ability of technological innovation, intense and monotonous work and highly impersonal industrial relations to

antagonize workers. These problems, however, require specification and elaboration when analyzing particular strikes. We will see, for example, that dockers reacted to an intensification of their labour, and not simply to intense labour. This intensification of labour was related to a number of technological changes and to an attempt on the part of the London dock companies to increase their profit rates. At the same time, the dockers did not merely attack a group of impersonal companies; they attacked a unified body of employers whose representatives on the docks had managed to antagonize them.

In a sense, criticizing the economic and sociological analyses of strike activity in the way that we have is slightly dishonest. Neither the economists nor the sociologists have been, after all, concerned with the questions which this essay attempts to pose. This admission on our part, however, raises a number of questions about the basic approach to strike activity which the economists and sociologists have adopted. Although related to socio-historical conditions, the analyses of economists and sociologists have been largely ahistorical. By attempting to find the common denominator of all strikes, their analyses have failed to make some very important distinctions. Routine strikes and social movements which express themselves through strikes have been lumped together under the heading "strike activity." It

is obvious, however, that there is a large qualitative difference between the routine strikes of business unions and the strikes involved in the "new unionism," particularly the dock strike. Business unions emphasize cooperation with employers, mobilize limited numbers of workers, narrowly define their objectives as a "larger share of the pie," and explicitly accept the existing social and political structures. Routine strikes, then, are not only short and amiable, they are also motivated by grievances which are not deeply felt or dangerous. The dock workers and the "new unionism" as a whole, on the other hand, emphasized the antagonism of interests between capital and labour, mobilized large sections of the working class both inside and outside of the specific unions involved, and broadly defined their objectives as a substantive transformation of the conditions of the working class as a whole. The dock strike and other strikes of the "new unionism," then, were often bitter and usually challenged, implicitly and explicitly, the legitimacy of the existing social and political order. These differences are not simply matters of degree and intensity; they imply qualitatively different material conditions and social attitudes which cannot be explained away by reference to the ideological rigidities, or lack of the same, of employers and trade unions. The dock companies in London, for instance, operated in a complex competitive context which required

them to respond rapidly to changing market conditions. To the dock companies, then, trade unions threatened their control over the labour force, their ability to reduce labour costs when necessary, and their right to determine the technological and organizational structure of their enterprises. Dockers, on the other hand, turned to exceptionally dynamic leaders and sometimes used violence in order to create and insure unity among themselves and to overcome employer hostility.[15] In this sense, the uncompromising stand taken by both the London dock companies and the dockers in the years 1889-1914 is quite understandable. The economists and sociologists, however, would have us believe that the actions of both the companies and the dockers was quite foolish and unnecessary. But, of course, the economists and sociologists have merely imposed the experiences of the present on the past. They have assumed that since monopoly capitalism has laid the basis for amiable relations between unions and employers, cooperation between workers and employers could have always marked industrial relations. This assumption ignores the essential differences between monopoly and competitive capitalism. Under monopoly conditions, capitalists enjoy a certain amount of control over the market and are, consequently, in a position to make concessions to unions. The unions, in turn, assist the corporations by controlling workers and helping to plan market strategies. Needless to

say, monopolists normally pass the costs of concessions on to consumers through pricing mechanisms.[16] In contrast, as we have pointed out in our discussion of the London dock companies, capitalists who operated under the competitive conditions of the nineteenth century were subject to market conditions and attempted to maintain the viability of their enterprises by exercising absolute control over the work force and the decision making process.

Although the remainder of this essay will not attempt to compensate for all the deficiencies of other analyses, it will attempt to find out why dock workers could not achieve port-wide unity prior to 1889. It will also attempt to demonstrate why such unity became possible as 1889 approached. In order to achieve these ends, we will be looking at the productive processes and relations into which dockers entered in the Port of London. Of course, applying the term "productive" to the commercial enterprises of the Port of London may be problematical. Economists since Adam Smith have tried to determine exactly what productive and nonproductive labor is composed of. Marx claimed that since surplus-value and the surplus of use-values above and beyond society's basic biological needs are created only in the process of production proper--that is, in the process where commodities and use-values come into being, commercial enterprises are basically nonproductive. Commerce does not add to the social surplus

or surplus-value, it only performs services for productive enterprises and siphons off part of their surplus-value. Marx went on to add, however, that since many commercial services were socially necessary, they could be termed productive. In this sense, when a commercial enterprise preserves, prepares and efficiently distributes commodities, it is a productive enterprise. Commercial enterprises have a claim to being productive in another respect: many of their services, such as the preparation of commodities for the market, add value to the given commodities.[17] One senses that Marx would have agreed, perhaps with some qualifications, with one observer of the nineteenth century Port of London who argued that:

> Le principal agent de l'evolution commerciale moderne est incontestablement le developpement extraordinaire des transports. Si la production industrielle n'avait pas trouve ouverts devants elle less lareges debouches que la facilite des communications lui offrait, l'application des moteurs mecaniques a la fabrication n'aurait pas amene les resultats que nous voyons; la faculte de produire en grande quantite aurait ete vaine sans la possibilite de vendre en grande quantite.[18]

The London dock companies, then, were productive in a very broad sense. The cargo they handled, on the other hand, passed through a productive process. That is, cargo passed through a series of stages prior to market exchange proper: loading and unloading ships, landing goods on the quay, transporting goods to warehouses, preparing commodities for the market and, finally, transporting commodities to the market were the various stages

through which cargo entering the Port of London passed. At the same time, the processes of production absorbed workers who, consequently, entered into specific relations with the dock companies active in the Port of London. These relations contributed greatly to the social experiences of dockers and helped to determine their ability to stage effective strikes. By entering into a productive process and establishing a relation with the dock companies, dockers confronted specific structures of authority and particular modes of remuneration, worked in well defined ways, and acquired certain skills and "status" positions. These experiences, however, were not necessarily uniform in each dock company. Thus, in order to understand dock workers we must understand how the productive processes and relations into which they entered affected them. This approach differs from most other analyses in that it does not assume a cohesive group to exist. Instead, it tries to analyze how a cohesive group forms itself at a particular point in time.

NOTES

CHAPTER I

[1]W. H. Abraham, "The Hull Strike," The Economic History Review, 3, No. 3 (July, 1893), passim; H. H. Champion, The Great Dock Strike (London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1890), passim; Frederick Harrison, "The New Trades--Unionism," Nineteenth Century, 26, No. 153 (Nov., 1889), pp. 207-217; George Howell, Trade Unionism New and Old (London: Methuen & Co., 1900), pp. 129-170; Clem Edwards, "Labour Federations," pt. I, The Economic Journal, 3, No. 10 (June, 1893), pp. 207-217; Tom Mann, "The Development of the Labour Movement," Nineteenth Century, 27, No. 159 (May, 1890), pp. 709-712; Tom Mann and Ben Tillett, The "New" Trades Unionism (London: Green & McAllan, 1890), passim; H. W. Massingham, "The Trend of Trade Unionism," Fortnightly Review, 58 (1892); James Sexton, Agitator: The Life of the Dockers' M.P. (London: Faber & Faber, 1936), pp. 62-72; Ben Tillett, A Brief History of the Dockers' Union (London: Dock, Wharf, Riverside, and General Workers' Union and Twentieth Century Press Ltd., 1910), pp. 10-15; and Llewellyn Smith and Vaughn Nash, The Story of the Dockers' Strike (London: T. Fisher Unwin, n.d., but certainly 1890), pp. 1-30.

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CHAPTER II

PRODUCTIVE PROCESSES AND RELATIONS IN THE PORT OF LONDON

Solidarity is a much abused and maligned word.[1] Loosely, we may define solidarity as the identification and expression of mutual interests and objectives. Within the context of bourgeois society, solidarity usually assumes class forms; classes, or segments of classes, feel and articulate interests which tend to be antagonistic to those of other hostile classes.[2] The history of solidarity in the Port of London begins, for all intents and purposes, with the great strike of 1889. This section will attempt to analyze those elements which inhibited the development of solidarity among dock workers.

Prior to 1889 productive relations in the Port of London were anything but uniform; diversity, amorphousness and fluidity characterized them, and severely restricted the development of solidarity among dock workers.[3] The typical form of docker protest in the years before 1889 was a strike of limited duration affecting one or two particular docks. A closer look at the Port of London may illustrate why protest was so restricted.

In the nineteenth century four companies dominated the Port of London; they were: The London and St. Katharine's, the East and West India, the Millwall, and the Surrey Commercial Dock Companies. The two largest companies, London and St. Katharine's and East and West India, owned a number of docks which did not bear their names. The London and St. Katharine's Company operated the Royal Victoria and Royal Albert Docks, in addition to the London and St. Katharine's Docks; the East and West India Company possessed, in addition to the docks bearing the company's name, the South West India and Tilbury Docks.[4] Aside from the four major companies, there were also an indeterminable number of independent wharves operating in the Port. The two largest companies, and the wharves, were involved in a general, undifferentiated import and export trade; the Millwall and Surrey Commercial Companies, on the other hand, tended to specialize in the movement of grain and timber. Often the dock companies were also engaged to store the goods they handled in their warehouses.[5]

The simplicity of the processes which dock labor would suggest obscures a complexity of relations and functions. On the simplest level, the import trade involved merely discharging cargo from the hold, landing it on the quay, and, occasionally, warehousing certain goods; but these operations were only accomplished through

a division of labor between ship and quay workers.[6] Ship workers themselves were further divided between hold and hatch men. In the jargon of the docks, hold workers had to be capable of "slinging a set" and "loading-up;" that is, they had to have a certain amount of strength, and a knowledge of the uses and limits of the gear related to the hydraulic crane. These attributes they used to position and balance cargo on the lift; thus, they also intuitively measured the weight of a "set" so as not to tip it off balance. Like hold workers, hatch men required exceptional strength: they maintained the balance of the "sets" as they came up from the hold and went over the side; the safety of the cargo was their primary responsibility.

Generally, quay workers required less strength than ship workers. They saw to it that the "set" landed safely; they then stacked, weighed, marked and piled goods. Among quay workers, however, there were even more divisions than among ship workers. Truckers used hand trucks to transport the goods to sheds where weighers and markers, who usually constituted part of the companies' permanent clerical staff, performed their chores. In the meantime, a group of workers, usually permanent or preference men, busied themselves by marking off an area of the dock capable of supporting a given quantity or weight of goods.[7]

After an area of the dock had been designated, pilers organized and stacked the cargo.

If the companies held responsibility for the cargo, an entirely different process followed the quay work. Truckers transferred the received goods to "conveyance" vessels and vehicles; either company vans or independent barge and lightermen were used to transport the goods by land and water, respectively, to warehouses.[8] At the warehouse the goods were either stored or prepared for the market. If the shipment was to be stored, truckers and pilers were again mobilized. If the merchandise was to be prepared for sale, a miscellany of men were employed: sorters and samplers examined the goods for damage, spoilation, quality and saleability; others were engaged in bulking sugar, vatting rum, and diluting other spirits.[9] A number of artisans were also always busy in the warehouses; coopers, for instance, could be found mending casks.[10]

Most of this work was done in gangs.[11] The London and St. Katharine's Company distributed most of its work to contractors who, in turn, hired the gangs they required.[12] The contractors' hiring practices conformed to, and imposed, a hierarchical structure within the work force. The small staff of permanent laborers maintained by the London and St. Katharine's Company were often placed in gangs as leaders; these so-called "gangers"

administered discipline, regulated the pace of work and made minor decisions. Permanent men, whose work was as tedious and exhausting as any casual's, were willing to perform these somewhat odious duties only because they were guaranteed wages throughout the year. Occasionally, "ticket" or "preference" men acted as "gangers;" more often, however, they were simply workers who, for one reason or another, were known by the contractors, and who, consequently, received preference in hiring, within a particular department, over other casuals.[13] It was exceptionally rare for contractors themselves to work, although this did occur at times. When the contractors worked, they also served as "gangers," and appropriated many of the "superior" or easier tasks to themselves.[14]

Piece-rates had been introduced with the contract system in 1865, and individual contractors were free to determine the wage levels of a particular gang.[15] The piece-rate was usually tied in some way to the difficulty of the work. In the mid-seventies and early eighties, the London and St. Katharine's Company attempted to regularize wage levels by imposing a six pence an hour minimum on contractors; the result was a diversification of the methods of remuneration.[16] By 1888, the contractors of the Royal Albert Docks paid day wages only; that is, they paid a strict hourly wage of six pence. At the Royal Victoria Docks piecework was retained, although the six

pence per hour was guaranteed. In the London and St. Katharine's complex a part of the work was undertaken by the company directly. Under these circumstances, quay and warehouse foremen hired the necessary complement of workers and organized gangs; these gang workers received a straight day wage of five pence an hour.[17] Since the company generally hired two or three extra men per gang, and exhibited a marked reluctance to undertake work directly, except when specifically requested to do so by a customer, contractors did not seem to be particularly upset by the company's competitive wage rate.[18]

In contrast with the import trade, the export trade required considerably more skill. Stevedores were the workers in the Port of London who possessed this skill. The assets of the stevedores were dexterity and strength, initiative and a supervisory capacity, an ability to make independent decisions and broad experience.[19] For, as Booth recognized:[20]

> . . . to stow cargo to the best advantage for the ship as well as the merchandise, demands science as well as care; no space must be wasted if she is to receive her full complement of cargo; with the result that packages of all shapes and sizes are put together by the stevedore's art as neatly as cyclopean masonry. The weights must be properly adjusted if the ship is to be buoyant. Packages containing liquids must not be placed over goods which might be damaged by leakage, nor heavy pieces upon others which might be crushed by the weight. Goods liable to sweat in the warmth of the holds, or to give off noxious vapors, must be kept apart. Risk of heating must be avoided by ventilation, which though mainly a matter of construction of the ship has to be seconded in the stowage. And finally every piece and package must be

> placed and "chocked" off that no possible rolling or pitching of the ship at sea can dislodge it . . . .

Stevedores were independent of the Dock Companies. Shippers contracted directly with master-stevedores, who then hired foremen and engaged gangs. Since master-stevedores had no established or permanent structure, such as a company or trade organization, to bolster their individual authority, their bargaining position was exceptionally weak; combined with the strategic advantages afforded to the stevedores by their skill, this weakness allowed stevedores to establish relatively strong unions.[21] The Laborer Protection League, dating from 1872, and the Amalgamated Society of Stevedores, founded in 1887, provided the stevedores with a certain amount of security. Since their skill was not dependent upon any standardized qualifications, and could easily be transferred, stevedores were not completely unassailable.[22]

Aside from the stevedores, the export trade was not an entirely skilled affair. An independent gang of quay workers, many of whom were "rented" from the companies by the shippers, "trucked" and "set" the cargo before it went into the hold.[23] Hatchmen, who guided the "set" on ship and down the hold, also required less skill than the stevedores; however, they were considered to be part of the gang of stevedores, and paid the standard eight pence an hour.[24]

A number of other specialized workers existed in the Port. Henry Mayhew has left an exceptionally detailed description of the working and living conditions of the coal-porters, for instance.[25] Coal-porters entered the nineteenth century with most of their traditional corporate ambitions frustrated and their position as "skilled" workers endangered;[26] the rapid expansion of the Port, and the introduction of hydraulic lifts and steam vessels created simpler processes, and lessened the need for highly developed skills.[27] Vestiges of many of the older skills found their way into the twentieth century, however, and coal-porters remained a distinct section of waterside labor.

Basically, the coal trade was divided into seaborne and inland work. The seaborne trade consisted of discharging coal into barges and hoppers: a coaler would anchor at a discharging station, where a gang of twenty-six men entered its hold. After the gang shoveled the coal into tanks, a hydraulic crane lowered the tanks into a barge or lighter. A man operating a simple lever then emptied the bucket. The tanks of the inland trade were swung to the upper floor of the discharging station; there they were hauled in by two men, and emptied into trollies. Attendants pushed the trollies to the mouth of a hopper where it was discharged through a trap door. At the bottom of the hopper a gang sacked the coal, and loaded it into

vans. Loaders worked in gangs of three: one man held the sack open and weighed the coal falling in; above him stood a screener who raked the coals, and directed the larger coals into the sack; when the sack reached the proper weight, it was lifted by a coal-backer and placed on a van. The process of loading a ship with coal was much more primitive than unloading. A loaded barge would rest on one side of a ship, which was usually being discharged on the other side. The coal was loaded by means of a hand winch: two men filled, and three others lifted buckets; a final member of the gang caught the buckets and whipped, or emptied them into the hold.

A third group of coal-porters worked for wharfingers, and were engaged in a somewhat different process. Barges were moored to the wharf, and a gang was found. Two fillers separated the coals according to size, and filled sacks which were held open by backers. Once the sacks registered the proper weight, the backers lifted them on to their backs and carried them over to a van, where it was necessary to mount a platform and pile the sacks.[28]

Obviously, the skill of the coal-porters was similar in nature to that of the stevedores. Great physical strength, dexterity, balance, and a decision making ability were all required. The porters, however, were a bit less secure than stevedores, since their skill was easily

undermined by technological innovation.[29] Moreover, as a result of the innovations which had occurred in the Port of London, the skill of the coal-porters was less than homogeneous.

We may now turn to the lightermen and bargemen who transported coal and other commodities to and from ships, wharves, docks and up-town warehouses. In Marxian terms, lightermen and bargemen, like master-stevedores, constituted the Port's petty bourgeoisie; unlike master-stevedores, however, the independence of lightermen and bargemen was solidly based upon the ownership of their vessels, and not simply the mediation between laborers and customers. The exception to this general rule were those coal-barges owned and operated by shippers. Lightermen and bargemen were usually hired by shippers; and they, in turn, took on a few licensed, but casually employed, watermen known as "jobbers."[30] "Jobbers" were required to have skill and experience, since they guided, with sheer physical strength, their vehicles through the dangerous and crowded Thames.

The general processes and relations which characterized the East and West India Company were very similar to those described above; there were, however, some other significant differences. Rather than putting the work out to contractors, the East and West India Company directly handled the goods which passed through its docks.[31]

Foremen, acting as representatives of the Company, engaged laborers, and supervised the work of a number of gangs.[32] The laborers themselves were again divided into permanent, preference, or royal, and casual groups. The group of permanent men was numerically larger than its counterpart at the London and St. Katharine's Company; like the permanent group at London and St. Katharine's, however, the permanent group at East and West India functioned as a pool of potential "gangers."[33] Royals sometimes acted as gangers; but their specialty was, at least at the West India Docks, hold work. The specialization of royals was a result of their experience and strength.[34] Quay and warehouse work was reserved for casual gangs; only when trade was slack would permanent and preference men form gangs for miscellaneous work.

The East and West India Company's methods of remuneration differed radically from those practiced by the London and St. Katharine's Company. A complicated piecework system was used by the East and West India Company: since 1872, casual and preference men were guaranteed a base pay of five pence an hour and offered the opportunity to share in a "plus." The "plus" was based upon a cost calculation for a given job: each job was assigned a "price," based upon a calculation of the approximate time it would take to complete the job; if the job was completed before the allotted time, the excess of

the "price" over the total of the hourly wages was, hypothetically, divided among the men of the gang. Problems arose when permanent laborers, who received a weekly wage of twenty to thirty shillings, were permitted to share in the "plus." They, of course, attempted to appropriate ever larger shares of the "plus," in order to supplement their weekly wages; and the company promoted this arrangement by placing the responsibility for distributing the "plus" in the hands of the permanent men, in order to maintain the loyalty of its disciplinary agents without increasing its labor costs.[35] The methods and rates of remuneration were not uniform throughout all the docks of the East and West India Company, however. The Tilbury Dock, for example, paid preference men the standard five pence an hour, and casuals only four pence.[36]

Insofar as their general processes--loading, discharging, warehousing and preparation--were concerned, the Millwall and Surrey Commercial Companies closely resembled the other two companies of the Port of London.[37] The Millwall and Surrey Commercial Docks differed in that they were highly specialized: both dealt primarily in the timber and grain trade.[38] Since it was much newer, however, Millwall was better equipped than Surrey Commercial to handle steamers.[39] Millwall's contract system was also unique compared to London and St. Katharine's. Since 1883 Millwall permitted shippers to discharge their own cargo:

the shipper hired a contractor who then provided the required gangs. Thus, the corn and deal porters of Millwall worked indirectly for the shippers.[40]

Corn and deal porters themselves closely resembled stevedores. Physical strength was needed to carry sacked grain or fresh lumber to a stack or warehouse; and a certain amount of balance and dexterity was required to climb the twenty foot planks to the top of the grain and lumber stacks. Since a misplaced load was a perpetual threat to the precariously balanced stacks, good judgment was the final requirement. Naturally, all of these skills were based upon broad experience.[41]

According to the harshness of the work, the porters were paid either by day or piece-rates. Day rates were established at nine pence an hour; piece-rates averaged between seven and ten shillings a day.[42] A small group of permanent corn-porters, retained by Millwall, were paid one guinea a week. This group had been imported from the countryside during a previous dispute, and was isolated on the Isle of Dogs; its major function was to do whatever discharging the company had forced upon it. Since the permanent porters enjoyed a relatively privileged position, and retained many provincial characteristics, they tended to be suspect among dock laborers.[43]

A small force of stevedores and casuals supplemented the work of the porters. This force primarily

satisfied Millwall's insignificant general trade. Since the stevedores were not unionized, they were involved in both loading and discharging, and their wages fluctuated madly. The casual laborers, on the other hand, received anywhere from four and a half to five pence an hour.[44]

Having completed a survey of the laborers and processes on and around the docks, we may now look at the structures of authority which perpetuated their existence. As we have already seen, at the nadir of the authoritarian relations were, depending upon the particular company's policy, either contractors or foremen, both of whom were aided by gangers. At the zenith were the Secretaries of the companies who, as the representatives of the various boards of directors, established and implemented policy. Between these two extremes complex hierarchies existed. General managers, who mediated between the docks and the Secretaries, were the second highest officials. Superintendents represented individual docks, and were responsible for the work done on the docks; they also represented the companies before shippers and merchants. Deputy-superintendents, however, were the individuals who actually oversaw the operations of the docks proper. Below the deputy-superintendents were the labour-masters. Labour-masters negotiated directly with contractors; and they were supposed to guarantee that contractors and foremen did not work short of labourers. Following the

labour-masters were the dock-masters, who were responsible for docking ships. Warehousekeepers were in charge of the warehouses, and all the work within them. Warehousekeepers had deputies who assisted in record keeping and the employment of foremen and contractors.[45] When limited disputes arose, dock laborers were, in a typically bureaucratic manner, channelled up and down the structures of authority; the result was severe demoralization.

Now that we have looked closely at the major dock companies we may elaborate on our original statement.[46] The relatively simple nature of the productive forces which were characteristic of the Port of London made the processes into which the dockers entered dependent, for the most part, upon sheer physical exertion.[47] A lack of concentration and primitive forms of cooperation typified the processes of the Port; that is, dockers performed a variety of distinct tasks in small, isolated and unrelated groups. Since "occupational" boundaries were somewhat fluid within the port, these groups, and their constituent human elements, were basically interchangeable. Thus, there existed no stable core around which the processes revolved and through which discontent could be focused. The absence of a trade union nucleus was supplemented by divisive distinctions in skill, function, and degrees of security and specialization. Permanent men enjoyed employment throughout the year, and were, often, responsible for the

administration of discipline; preference men sometimes performed "semi-skilled" tasks and received employment throughout a good portion of the year; and, finally, porters performed a variety of specialized tasks which provided them with a scarcity-value and security. Of course, the specialization and security of these workers were general conditions which did not afford them the opportunity of acting as a trade unionist center: despite their privileges, they still worked in isolated and fluid groups, and, individually, moved from gang to gang and job to job. Stevedores and lightermen, on the other hand, seem to have been outside the pale of "dock-labour" because of their distinctive skills and their relative independence of the Dock Companies. Casual laborers proper enjoyed little security; but they were, nevertheless, divided into relatively distinct segments based upon strength: stronger men tended to find themselves in the hold, and weaker men gravitated toward quay-work. The problems created by these distinctions were intensified by the variety of the methods and rates of remuneration, and the disparate ways of organizing work. Depending upon the nature of a given job, and the policy on a given dock, contract and company systems may have been combined with either day or piecework. Of course, each system also implied a variety of antagonists. The different companies forced the laborers to contend with either "independent" contractors or company foremen, both

of whom focused discontent on "gangers" by delegating authority to them. Beyond these "functionaries" stood either the Dock Companies or an array of independent shippers. If labourers identified the companies as the source of their troubles, they found it difficult to fix responsibility within the corporate body: warehousekeepers, deputy warehousekeepers, labor-masters, superintendents, general managers and company secretaries collectively imposed distinct conditions of existence on dock workers; individually, however, they were quite willing to focus discontent on superiors and inferiors alike. At the same time, the very existence of a number of independent companies limited the scope and magnitude of antagonisms; that is, a fragmented body of employers did not, and could not, act simultaneously or to the same degree against dockers.[48] All the companies, however, did formulate a suppressive policy aimed at unionists, agitators and other obstreperous elements. The relatively large private police force at the docks was instrumental in implementing this policy.[49] This suppressive policy further contributed to the atomization of dock workers.

We may conclude, then, that productive relations at the different docks were ill-defined, amorphous and highly variable. Consequently, the development of solidarity among dockers was severely inhibited. A common experience, a set of common problems and a common antagonist

were all absent; thus, prior to 1889, hostilities peaked at the various docks at different times, and remained limited to particular docks, in isolation, rather than the entire Port of London.

NOTES

CHAPTER II

[1]W. J. Ringer, for instance, has denied the existence of solidarity in his book Life in Victorian England (London: B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1964), pp. 92-93.

[2]This definition has borrowed much from E. P. Thompson, The Making of the English Working Class (New York: Random House, Inc., 1963), pp. 9-10.

[3]The following analysis borrows a great deal from Eric Hobsbawm's stimulating essay, "National Unions on the Waterside," in Labouring Men (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., 1967), pp. 241-264.

[4]Llewellyn Smith and Vaughn Nash, The Story of the Docker's Strike (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1890), p. 17; and The Select Committee: Sweating System (Parl. Papers, 1888, XXI), q. 12524.

[5]Beatrice Potter, "The Docks," in Charles Booth, Life and Labour of the People in London. 1st Series: Poverty, Vol. 9 (London: Macmillan and Co., 1902), pp. 16-17; Smith and Nash, The Story of the Dockers' Strike, pp. 18-19; Select Committee: Sweating System, q. 12533; and Charles Booth, Life and Labour of the People in London. 2nd Series: Industry, Vol. 3 (London: Macmillan and Co., 1903), pp. 391-393.

[6]Booth, Life and Labour. 2nd Series, p. 400; and Sweating System, q. 12562 and 13341.

[7]Sweating System, q. 13340.

[8]Sweating System, q. 12543.

[9]Potter, "The Docks," p. 16.

[10]Ibid. Most warehouses in the vicinity of the docks and drew their labor from the same source, see Booth, Life and Labour. 2nd Series, p. 461.

[11]Sweating System, q. 12566.

[12]Sweating System, q. 12545, 13023, 13304, 13079, 13941-42 and 15634.

[13]Sweating System, q. 13078-79. The East and West India Docks were similar, see q. 13126-13131, 13788, 15660-61 and 16884.

[14]Sweating System, q. 13025; Potter, "The Docks," pp. 19-22; and Smith and Nash, The Story of the Dockers' Strike, pp. 20-21.

[15]Potter, "The Docks," p. 15.

[16]Sweating System, q. 12580-83, 13945; and Potter, "The Docks," p. 14.

[17]Sweating System, p. 15642, 15680, 16885, 16900-01.

[18]Sweating System, q. 13300-04, 13079, 15732.

[19]Sweating System, p. 13077, 14041-42; and Hobsbawm, "National Unions," pp. 244-45.

[20]Booth, Life and Labour, 2nd Series, p. 428.

[21]Sweating System, q. 14045; and Booth, Life and Labour. 2nd Series, pp. 428-29.

[22]Hobsbawm, "National Unions," pp. 248-249.

[23]Sweating System, q. 13405-13410. For East and West India see q. 13968.

[24]Sweating System, q. 14057, 14097.

[25]Henry Mayhew, London Labour and London Poor (London: Charles Griffin and Co., 1861), p. 246-254.

[26]H. Llewellyn Smith, "Chapters in the History of London Waterside Labour," The Economic Journal, Vol. 8, No. 2, 1892, pp. 593-605; M. Dorothy George, "The London Coal-Heavers," The Economic Journal, May 1927, pp. 229-248; and Mayhew, London Labour and London Poor, p. 246.

[27]Peter Stern, The Porters of London, pp. 136-151 and 246-254.

[28]Booth, Life and Labour, pp. 434-438; and Mayhew, London Labour and London Poor, pp. 246-254.

[29]Hobsbawm, "National Unions," pp. 248-249.

[30]Mayhew, London Labour and London Poor, pp. 342-43.

[31]Sweating System, q. 12545 and 13892; and Mayhew, London Labour and London Poor, p. 320.

[32]Sweating System, q. 12685, 12698, 13146, 13767, and 13991-95.

[33]Sweating System, p. 13972-977, 13980 and 15264-66.

[34]Sweating System, q. 12700, 13113, 13161-66, 13204-205, 1377, 13380, 13788, 13983-985, 15268.

[35]Sweating System, q. 12580, 12682, 12732, 13300-13304, 13955-956, 13951.

[36]Sweating System, q. 13775 and 13952.

[37]Sweating System, q. 14246-14248, 14771, 14778, 15493.

[38]Sweating System, q. 14278-14279; Smith and Nash, The Story of the Dockers' Strike, p. 17; and Potter, "The Docks," p. 16.

[39]Sweating System, q. 14375.

[40]Sweating System, q. 14235-236, 14240-243, 14253.

[41]Sweating System, q. 14280-284; Booth, Life and Labour, 2nd Series, p. 418; Mayhew, London Labour and London Poor, p. 307; and Potter, "The Docks," p. 16.

[42]Sweating System, q. 14261-64, 14280-284, 15505-506.

[43]Sweating System, q. 14298-14304.

[44]Sweating System, q. 14449, 14668-670, 15236 and 15612.

[45]Sweating System, q. 13324-13340, and 13959-966.

[46]See p. 1.

[47]Booth, Life and Labour, 2nd Series, pp. 411-12; and Eric Hobsbawm, The Age of Revolution (New York: New American Library, 1962), p. 46, and "National Unions," p. 244.

[48]This analysis, of course, is a variation of Lenin's theory of uneven development. See, V. I. Lenin, Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism (New York: International Publishers, 1970), pp. 76-87.

[49]Sweating System, q. 12990, 13016, 13095-99, 13154, 13293-94, 13298, 13772-773.

CHAPTER III

THE DEVELOPMENT OF SOLIDARITY AMONG LONDON DOCK WORKERS

Thus far, we have encountered dockers in one capacity: as workers who experienced fluid and diverse productive relations. This analysis has permitted us to understand the inability of dock workers to act in unity prior to 1889. We must now ask what made the Dock Strike of 1889 possible. Basically, the productive processes and relations into which dockers entered underwent a number of subtle changes in the years before 1889: first, dock workers experienced an intensification of their labour; second, the two largest dock companies in the Port of London initiated a process of economic and managerial rationalization which provided a focal point for antagonisms; third, labour intensification and rationalization were accompanied by a shift from task-work to time-work; and, finally, hydraulic machinery was increasingly used to dispatch cargo. Together, these changes help to explain the dock strike and its specific timing.

In order to illustrate these changes, we must look more closely at the Port of London. Various perspectives

can help us assess the physical and phychological roots of these changes. Since the Port of London was a business enterprise dependent upon servicing cargo, the absolute growth of the total tonnage entering and leaving the Port is one indicator of its viability. By looking at the Port of London's share of the total volume of trade in the United Kingdom, we may see if there were any shifts in trade away from London; again we will obtain a sense of the Port's position as a business enterprise. Comparing London to other ports, on the other hand, will allow us to identify its entrepreneurial strengths and weaknesses. Finally, by looking at the net earnings and profit rates of the London dock companies, we will be able to measure the success of the enterprises operating in the Port of London. Once we have looked at the Port of London from these various points of view, we will be able to turn to the dock workers and analyze how they were affected by the economic trends and tendencies of the Port of London in the late Nineteenth Century. We will also have to see how dockers responded to other developments in the Port of London which were not strictly economic.

Table I expresses the absolute growth of the total tonnage which entered and left the Port of London in the years 1868-1889. In the column labeled "Relative Activity," the Port of London's share of the volume of trade of the United Kingdom, measured in terms of total

Table I.--The Position of London in Relation to a Number of Selected Ports, and the Trade of the United Kingdom, 1868-1889.*

Year	Total Tonnage (U.K.)[a]	Tonnage	Growth (%)	Relative Activity[b]
			LONDON	
1868	33,680,979	6,520,767	--	--
1869	34,910,281	6,921,855	6.15	.198
1870	36,640,182	7,118,782	2.85	.194
1871	41,547,878	7,648,425	7.44	.184
1872	42,501,025	7,628,001	-0.27	.179
1873	44,439,986	8,244,947	8.09	.185
1874	45,428,957	8,711,338	5.66	.192
1875	46,276,838	8,825,715	1.31	.191
1876	50,784,902	9,553,096	8.24	.188
1877	51,531,077	10,106,573	5.79	.196
1878	51,595,079	9,777,152	-3.26	.189
1879	52,715,450	10,122,210	3.53	.192
1880	58,736,063	10,576,982	4.49	.180
1881	57,949,545	10,288,243	-2.73	.178
1882	61,491,255	10,775,678	4.74	.175
1883	64,961,753	11,400,274	5.80	.175
1884	64,272,522	11,766,600	3.21	.183
1885	64,281,642	12,049,137	2.40	.187
1886	62,841,077	12,026,631	-0.19	.191
1887	65,461,774	12,164,336	1.15	.186
1888	68,619,145	12,541,861	3.10	.183
1889	71,889,895	13,116,741	4.58	.182
Average Growth Rate (%)			3.43	

Table I.--Continued.

Year	Total Tonnage (U.K.)[a]	Tonnage	Growth (%)	Relative Activity[b]
			CARDIFF	
1868		2,409,692	--	--
1869		2,450,379	1.69	.070
1870		2,539,888	3.65	.069
1871		2,347,581	-7.57	.057
1872		2,834,453	20.74	.067
1873		2,886,391	1.83	.065
1874		3,166,440	9.70	.070
1875		2,867,056	-9.45	.062
1876		3,507,339	22.33	.069
1877		3,820,826	8.94	.074
1878		4,284,333	12.13	.083
1879		4,623,609	7.93	.088
1880		5,509,606	19.16	.094
1881		5,658,229	2.70	.098
1882		6,051,821	6.96	.098
1883		6,674,992	10.30	.103
1884		7,180,539	7.57	.112
1885		6,949,268	-3.22	.108
1886		6,561,766	-5.58	.104
1887		7,642,510	16.47	.117
1888		8,076,931	5.68	.118
1889		6,314,211	-21.87	.088
Average Growth Rate			5.24	
			HULL	
1868		1,834,603	--	--
1869		1,877,893	2.36	.054
1870		1,907,671	1.59	.052

Table I.--Continued.

Year	Total Tonnage (U.K.)[a]	Tonnage	Growth (%)	Relative Activity[b]
1871		2,233,299	17.07	.054
1872		2,467,457	10.48	.058
1873		2,527,345	2.43	.057
1874		2,722,709	7.73	.060
1875		2,589,085	-4.91	.056
1876		2,804,815	8.33	.055
1877		2,818,544	0.49	.055
1878		2,772,765	-1.62	.054
1879		2,522,861	-9.01	.048
1880		2,891,711	14.62	.049
1881		2,711,139	-6.24	.047
1882		3,004,087	10.80	.049
1883		3,110,692	3.55	.048
1884		2,931,926	-5.75	.046
1885		2,995,373	2.16	.047
1886		2,998,368	0.01	.048
1887		3,433,106	14.50	.052
1888		3,401,692	-0.92	.050
1889		3,590,384	5.55	.050
Average Growth Rate			3.49	
			LIVERPOOL	
1868		6,499,994	--	--
1869		6,545,764	0.70	.186
1870		6,773,071	3.47	.185
1871		8,062,959	19.04	.194
1872		8,104,456	0.51	.191
1873		8,547,645	4.36	.192
1874		8,567,841	0.24	.189

Table I.--Continued.

Year	Total Tonnage (U.K.)[a]	Tonnage	Growth (%)	Relative Activity[b]
1875		8,780,319	2.48	.190
1876		8,861,403	0.92	.174
1877		9,041,207	2.03	.175
1878		8,791,103	-2.77	.170
1879		9,003,909	2.42	.171
1880		9,659,813	7.28	.164
1881		9,737,219	0.80	.168
1882		10,046,089	3.17	.163
1883		10,376,925	3.29	.160
1884		10,176,293	-1.93	.158
1885		10,001,351	-1.72	.156
1886		9,732,469	-2.69	.155
1887		10,944,918	12.46	.167
1888		10,329,752	-5.62	.151
1889		10,936,496	5.87	.152
Average Growth Rate			2.59	
			OTHERS[c]	
1868		1,441,978	--	--
1869		1,520,274	5.43	.044
1870		1,598,452	5.14	.044
1871		1,738,777	8.78	.042
1872		1,788,199	2.84	.042
1873		1,927,496	7.79	.046
1874		2,069,012	7.34	.046
1875		2,167,628	4.77	.047
1876		2,639,662	21.78	.052
1877		2,866,767	8.60	.056
1878		3,142,541	9.62	.061

Table I.--Continued.

Year	Total Tonnage (U.K.)[a]	Tonnage	Growth (%)	Relative Activity[b]
1879		3,264,874	3.89	.062
1880		4,015,578	22.99	.068
1881		3,968,847	-1.16	.068
1882		4,465,622	12.52	.073
1883		4,796,257	7.40	.074
1884		4,911,258	2.40	.076
1885		5,009,612	2.00	.078
1886		5,527,464	10.34	.088
1887		5,892,988	6.61	.090
1888		5,660,139	-3.95	.082
1889		5,537,629	-2.16	.077
Average Growth Rate			6.81	

*Sources: Statistical Abstracts for the United Kingdom; Parl. Papers (1883) LXXVI, (1886) LXVIII, and (1890) LXXIX.

[a]All figures for the total tonnage entering and leaving the various ports include ships in ballast.

[b]Defined as a fraction of the total tonnage of the United Kingdom.

[c]Dover, Goole, Harwich, Lynn, Newport.

tonnage, is expressed as a fraction. Table I also presents the absolute growth and relative activity of a number of selected ports. The heading "Others" designates a group of smaller ports which demonstrated similar characteristics in the period 1868-1889: they all experienced fluctuations, but definitely grew significantly between 1868 and 1889. For the sake of a comparison with London, these smaller ports will be treated as if they were one. Figure II presents the data on growth in graphic form. Finally, Figure III graphically portrays the relative activity of each of the ports in Table I. On the basis of this material we may make a number of observations and draw some conclusions about the Port of London.

Both Table I and Figure II indicate that the total tonnage entering and leaving the Port of London increased more or less steadily between 1868 and 1889. Thus, the average annual growth rate of the Port in this period was a respectable 3.43 percent. Figure II also indicates that London was relatively immune to the severe fluctuations which plagued other ports. Where London's volume of trade fell off in only four years, Cardiff's and Liverpool's fell in five, and Hull's in six. The group of small ports were not any less prone to fluctuations than Cardiff, Hull or Liverpool; rather, since fluctuations affected them at different times, treating them as a bloc has mathematically eliminated most of their fluctuations from Figure II.

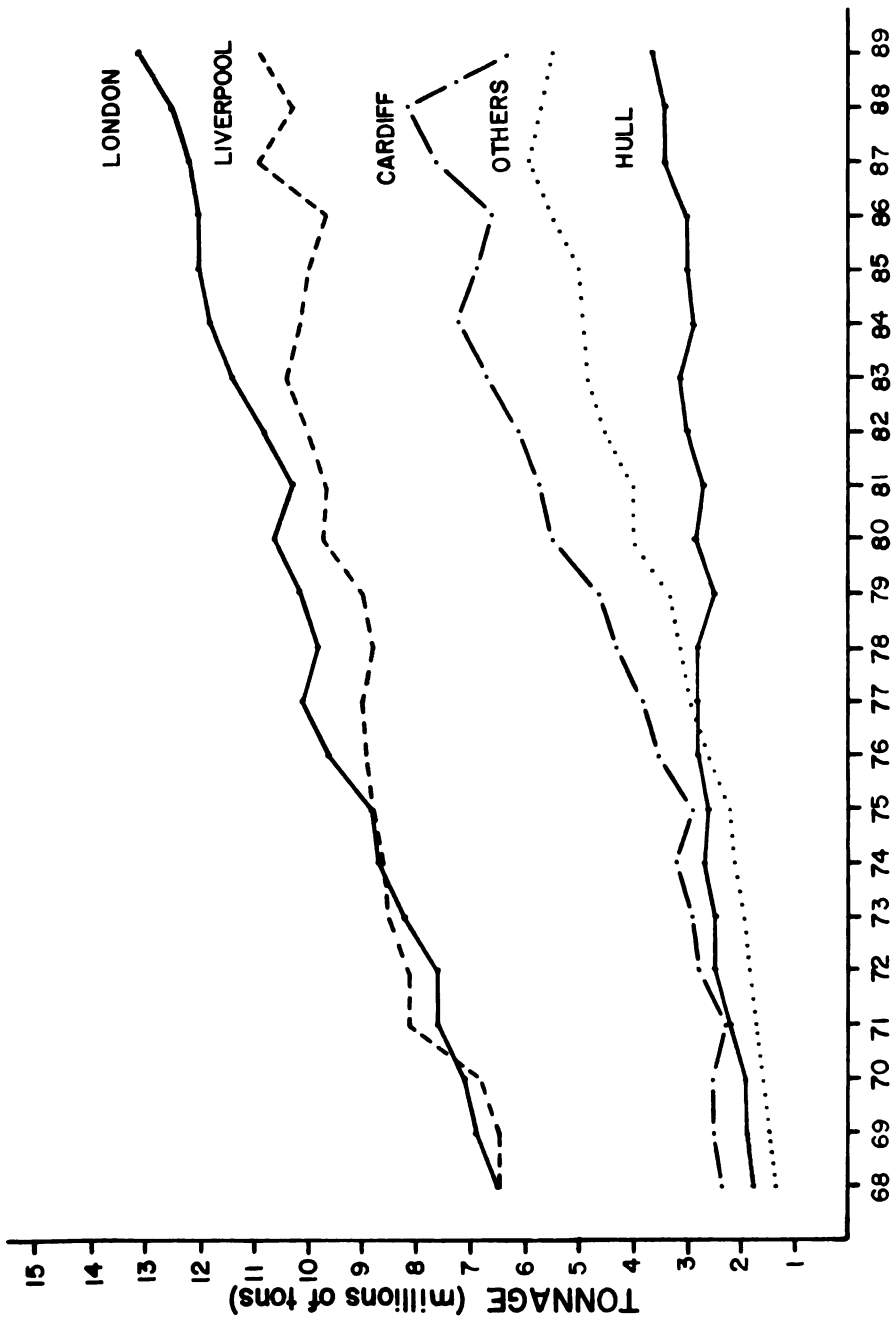

Fig. II.--The Absolute Growth of the Port of London and a Number of Selected Ports, 1868-1889.

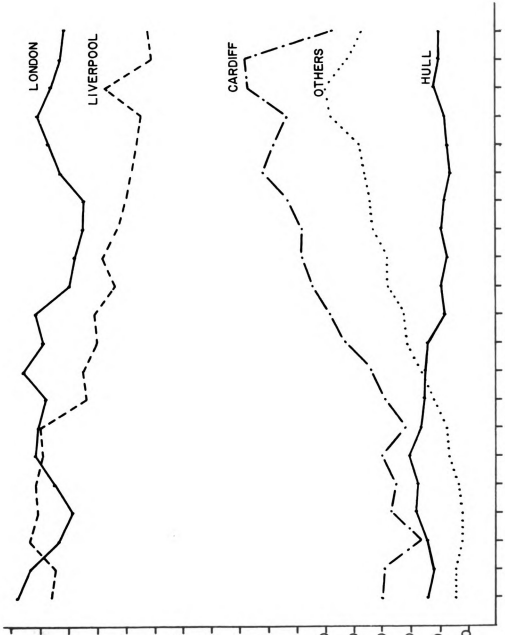

Fig. III.--The Relative Activity of the Port of London and a Number of Selected Ports, 1868-1889.

More importantly, the downswings suffered by London were also much less critical than those suffered by other ports. London's most drastic decline occurred in 1878, when the total tonnage of the Port measured 3.26 percent less than the tonnage of the previous year; its mildest decline, -0.19 percent, occurred in 1886. Cardiff's most severe and mildest declines were, respectively, -21.86 percent in 1889 and -3.22 percent in 1885; Liverpool's were -5.62 percent in 1888 and -1.72 percent in 1885; and Hull's were -9.01 percent in 1879 and -0.92 percent in 1888. London's privileged position was reflected in its rate of growth. Figure II indicates that London's steady growth compared favorably with Hull's relative stagnation. Both Table I and Figure II, on the other hand, show that Liverpool's annual growth rate lagged behind London's. Between 1875 and 1888, only Cardiff and the bloc of smaller ports grew at a faster rate than London according to Figure II. Turning to Table I, we see that Cardiff's annual average growth rate was 5.24 percent, and that of the smaller ports was 6.81 percent. Both averages compared favorably with London's 3.43 percent. Of course, since London's volume of trade was much larger than either Cardiff's or the smaller ports', it required much larger increases in order to register comparably dynamic growth rates. In 1876, for example, the volume of trade in the Port of London increased by 727,381 tons, and Cardiff's grew by

only 640,283 tons; London's growth rate for that year, however, was a mere 8.24 percent and Cardiff's was an astronomical 22.33 percent. Growth rates, then, may be deceptive. Furthermore, the absolute growth of the bloc of smaller ports was, in practice, diffused and somewhat less impressive than Table I and Figure II indicate. Using Figure III we may continue our comparative analysis. Many of the trends which we observed in Figure II are also evident in Figure III. Between 1868 and 1889, London's share of the total volume of trade in the United Kingdom fluctuated. Generally, however, London's relative activity remained at a more or less constant level and did not drop below 0.175 or rise above 0.198. Table I confirms London's relatively stable position. London's ability to maintain a stable level of relative activity simply indicates that its growth rate kept pace with the rate of growth of commercial activity in the United Kingdom.[1] In the same period, however, Liverpool's and Hull's relative activity declined steadily. Liverpool and Hull, then, were not only growing at a slower and more uneven pace than London, but they were also failing to keep pace with the growth of trade in the United Kingdom. Cardiff and the smaller ports, on the other hand, clearly increased their relative activity precipitously after 1875. Cardiff and the smaller ports, then, were growing at a much faster rate than the volume of trade of the United

Kingdom. Again, however, the apparent strengths of Cardiff and the smaller ports are due as much to mathematical illusions as they are to real trends. From this discussion we may conclude that, at least in terms of the total tonnage entering and leaving the Port, London was a dynamic enterprise in the late nineteenth century. Compared to other ports London was also much more secure: it suffered fewer fluctuations than other ports and maintained a more constant level of relative activity. The worst that could be said about the Port of London in the late nineteenth century is that it was less dynamic than Cardiff and a few smaller ports; even this, however, is open to question. We may point out that the assumption often made about the Port of London by contemporaries and historians alike is not quite correct. On the basis of our evidence, the Port of London was not declining relatively and absolutely in the years prior to 1889. Instead, the Port was growing absolutely and remaining stable and secure in relation to other ports and the volume of trade in the United Kingdom.

Despite the Port of London's absolute growth and relative stability, however, the dock companies operating within it were suffering from a chronic inability to sustain profit rates. This problem seems to have stemmed from the intense competition among the dock companies themselves. As independent firms each company attempted

to capture the trade of the Port of London. Simultaneously, they forced prices and profit rates to plummet. Although Table II deals only with the profit rates of the London and St. Katharine's and the East and West India Companies, it does offer a fair indication of the extent to which declining profit rates were a problem in the Port of London. The London and St. Katharine's and the East and West India Companies were the two largest enterprises in the Port. As such, they engaged in a large and diversified trade which provided some immunity to fluctuations. The Surrey Commercial and Millwall Docks, in contrast, were involved in a highly specialized trade. As grain and timber docks, the Surrey Commercial and Millwall enterprises were also somewhat protected against fluctuations. That is, as docks which handled some of London's biological necessities, such as grain, Surrey Commercial and Millwall were insured at least a minimum amount of trade. Nevertheless, Surrey Commercial and Millwall were probably more sensitive to fluctuations in trade than either London and St. Katharine's or East and West India. Not all of the trade of Surrey Commercial and Millwall was absolutely necessary to the City of London's biological existence. Nor were the Surrey Commercial and Millwall Docks diversified enough to prevent them from occasionally approaching their minimal level of business activity. And, of course, as commercial enterprises, the Surrey Commercial and

Table II.--Capital Expenditures and Profit Rates; The London and St. Katharine's and East and West India Dock Companies, 1868-1888.*

Year	London and St. Katharine's Co.			East and West India Co.		
	Total Capital Outlay ( )	Net Earnings ( )	Profit Rate (%)	Total Capital Outlay ( )	Net Earnings ( )	Profit Rate (%)[a]
1868	8,660,981	294,469	3.400	2,065,668	133,748	6.475
1869	8,599,141	295,931	3.441	2,485,509	114,674	4.614
1870	8,557,758	324,841	3.796	2,635,509	137,692	5.224
1871	8,662,583	328,419	3.791	2,660,690	156,337	5.876
1872	8,624,633	361,371	4.190	2,675,300	140,485	5.251
1873	8,672,033	402,364	4.640	2,705,500	152,223	5.626
1874	8,691,579	385,449	4.435	2,705,500	159,841	5.908
1875	8,805,045	362,423	4.116	3,025,560	163,350	5.399
1876	8,890,751	337,320	3.899	3,106,971	168,587	5.426
1877	9,108,064	316,475	3.475	3,124,207	143,772	4.602
1878	9,273,077	304,288	3.281	3,189,438	172,041	5.394
1879	9,475,339	305,978	3.229	3,282,268	176,860	5.388
1880	9,783,875	319,424	3.265	3,351,651	147,472	4.400
1881	9,871,702	283,492	2.872	3,351,232	128,868	3.845
1882	10,018,467	290,439	2.899	3,546,205	134,353	3.789
1883	10,034,598	325,097	3.240	4,009,250	132,884	3.314
1884	10,472,747	319,026	3.046	4,337,423	141,202	3.255

Table II.--Continued.

Year	London and St. Katharine's Co.			East and West India Co.		
	Total Capital Outlay ( )	Net Earnings ( )	Profit Rate (%)	Total Capital Outlay ( )	Net Earnings ( )	Profit Rate (%)[a]
1885	10,676,712	295,899	2.771	5,472,561	128,242	2.343
1886	10,689,474	225,616	2.110	5,694,617	69,569	1.222
1887	10,703,081	236,113	2.206	5,793,159	32,250	0.557
1888	10,720,816	267,864	2,486	5,785,872	17,566	0.304

*Source: Royal Commission on the Port of London Bill (Parl. Papers 1902, XLIV, pp. 28-29).

[a]Profit rates are defined as the proportion of net earnings to total capital expenditures.

Millwall Docks were very similar to the London and St. Katharine's and East and West India Companies. Both enterprises had to contend with competition from each other, and from a large number of independent wharves in London; moreover, they also had to bargain with a number of independent merchants who were interested in paying the companies as little as possible for their services. Given these similarities, we may safely assume that the trends evident in Table II adequately represent tendencies for the entire port.

Between 1868 and 1888, then, the most obvious development was the consistent increase, with the exception of a few years, of capital expenditures. In the same period, however, net earnings demonstrated a tendency to fall. After 1873 the London and St. Katharine's Company had some difficulties maintaining profit margins. Net earnings for the London Company fell in every year until 1879, and then began to fluctuate; after 1879 increases in net earnings usually occurred in two year sequences which became chronologically further apart as the period progressed. After 1878 the net earnings of the East and West India Company diminished drastically in every year except 1884. This generalized tendency of capital expenditures and net earnings to move in contradictory directions resulted in falling profit rates. Between 1873 and 1887 the profit rates of the London and St. Katharine's Company

plummeted from a peak of 4.640 percent to a low of 2.206 percent. The upward turns which the London and St. Katharine's profit rates enjoyed in 1880, 1882, 1883, 1887 and 1888 were only modest, contrary to the general downward trend, and temporary. Profit rates in the East and West India Company demonstrated the same general tendencies. Between 1874 and 1888, the East and West India Company's profit rates fell from 5.908 percent to 0.304 percent. Upturns ceased in the East and West India Company in 1878, and the following decline was precipitous. Thus, in the years immediately preceding the dock strike, the London dock companies were suffering from an inability to sustain profit margins and, consequently, decreasing returns on capital expenditures.

With the Port of London growing and the London dock companies unable to maintain profit rates, the directors and stock holders of the dock companies were confronted with a critical situation. The situation became even more critical after 1873, when the so-called Great Depression limited the options open to the stock holders and authorities of the dock companies. The Great Depression was characterized by increasing home investment, absolute productive growth and falling profit rates in many sectors of the economy.[2] Thus, the Great Depression made it possible for the London dock companies to obtain capital by issuing debenture stock when net earnings did

not cover new expenditures, but it made it impossible for investors in the London dock companies to find more lucrative investment opportunities.[3] Under these conditions, the directors and stock holders were compelled to deal with their crisis. Theoretically, there were a number of options open to the dock companies.

Expansion was the traditional way in which the London dock companies responded to competitive pressures. Ever since Parliament, under pressure from shipping magnates, had removed the legal restrictions on dock construction in 1800, the dock companies built frantically in order to capture ever larger shares of trade.[4] Expansion in the late nineteenth century, however, was precluded by general and specific conditions. The geographic contours of the Thames, for example, limited the size and number of docks. If we quickly glance at Figure IV, we will notice that the docks which existed at the end of the nineteenth century covered virtually the entire available area of the Thames waterfront. Moreover, there were few remaining promontories leading off of the Thames which would have provided for an efficient dock complex. Of course, it is highly questionable whether the docks which existed at the end of the nineteenth century were incapable of handling an even larger volume of trade than they already were. The problem with the docks was an intense competition which made them relatively unprofitable, but not necessarily

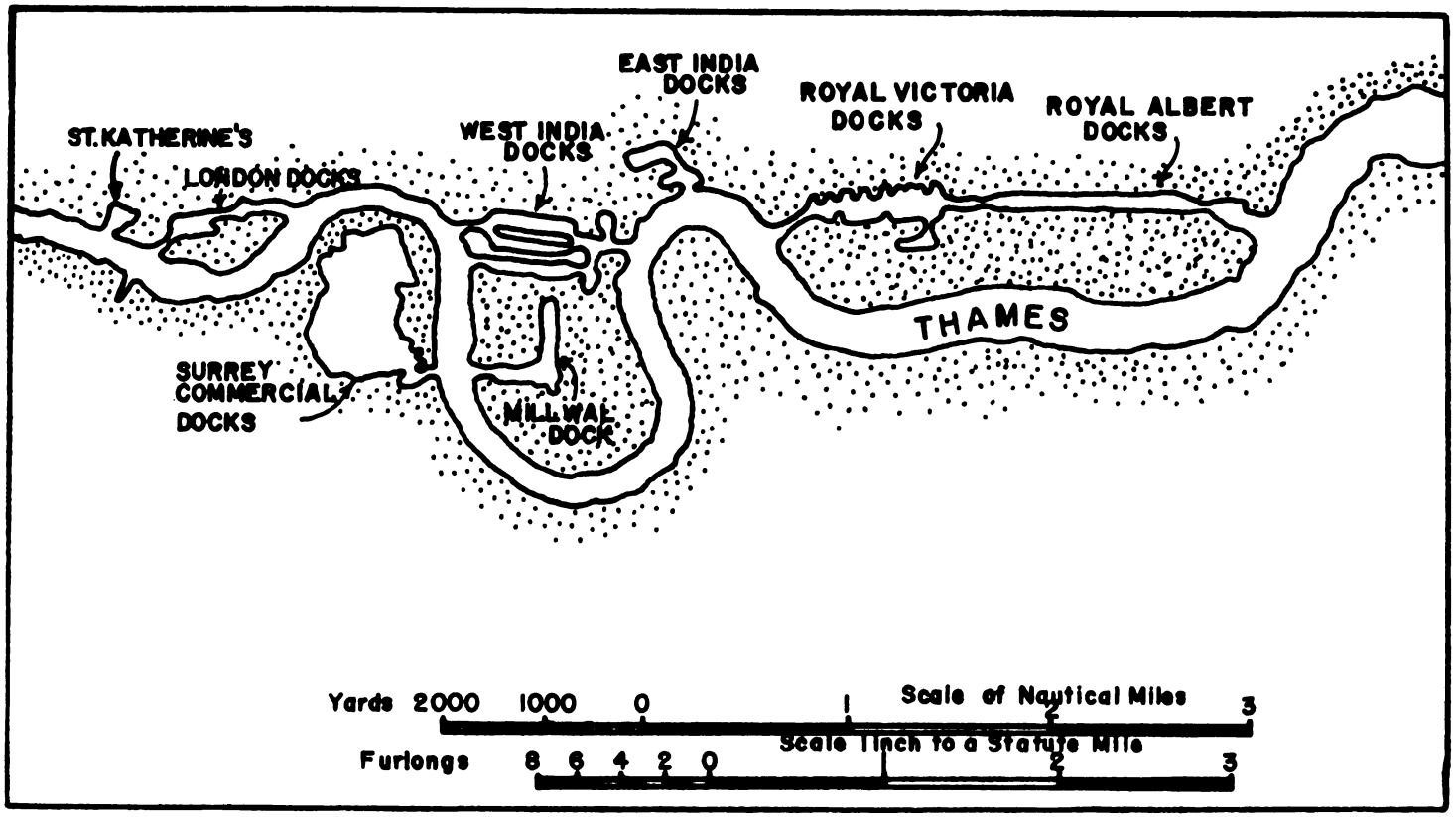

Fig. IV.--The Thames Waterfront in the Late Nineteenth Century.

inadequate. In this sense, expansion of the dock facilities without reorganization and competitive limitations would have been counterproductive: it would have only required increased capital expenditures, and would not have necessarily guaranteed an increase in trade. Expansion was also limited by the inability of the dock companies to procure the necessary sums of capital. Without large profit rates, the London dock companies had virtually no way of independently generating large capital sums.

With expansion precluded as an option, the London dock companies quite naturally sought to reinforce their faltering position through labour intensification and economic and managerial rationalization. By limiting labour costs, the London dock companies sought to increase their profit rates. In practice this meant limiting the number of men hired and placed in gangs to the minimal complement necessary to perform the given tasks. The physical limitations of the dock system aided the dock companies in this effort; only so many men could efficiently work on a quay or in a hold at one time. Limiting labour costs also meant extracting intense activity from the employed gangs. The dock companies simultaneously attempted to increase the amount of cargo handled in any given work period and reduce the length of the work period required to handle a given amount of cargo. This form of labour intensification

had the additional advantage of consolidating the existence of a surplus labour population at the docks. The continued existence of large reserves of labour, in turn, permitted the dock companies to feel free to intensify labour without raising wages proportionately; workers could, after all, be easily replaced. With the absolute growth of the Port of London and the simplicity of its productive forces, then, dock workers dispatched ever increasing tonnages at ever faster rates.

Labour intensification was accompanied by an explicit attempt by the dock companies to rationalize their operations. In April 1888, Parliament passed a Private Bill, based on the researches of Messrs. Oakley and Findley, and sponsored by the London and St. Katharine's and East and West India Companies, permitting the two companies to amalgamate. Amalgamation became effective in January 1889, although the two companies had instituted a number of reforms prior to that date. Amalgamation, official and unofficial, allowed the companies to pool their capital, limit competition, close unproductive docks, and divide their business efficiently. At the same time, amalgamation created a joint committee of directors and a uniform management. Through amalgamation the directors of the East and West India and London and St. Katharine's Company hoped to eliminate the private war they had engaged in since 1885, when the India Company had opened the Tilbury

Dock and reduced charges in order to attract a larger number of steam ships. They also hoped to make the docks profitable once again. According to the Times, Mr. Dobree, a director of the East and West India Company, defended the proposed amalgamation to stock holders on January 20, 1888 in this way:

> The accounts, he must confess, were most disappointing. He might almost call them disastrous. The directors had done their best to improve the state of affairs, but to a great extent their hands had been tied behind their backs. They appreciated the fact that it was the wish of the proprietors that they should use every possible means to bring about an amalgamation of the companies, and that being so, it was impossible, during the continuance of the negotiations in that direction to attempt in any aggressive manner to increase returns this year. (Dobree went on to add) Considerable savings, however, would be effected by amalgamation in the reduction of staff and working expenses, and there would be increased revenue derived from a return to the rates prevailing in 1885.[5]

Mr. Norwood, a director of the London and St. Katharine's Company, saw amalgamation in much the same light. According to the Times, Mr. Norwood defended amalgamation before stockholders by arguing that:

> The only way that the dock property of London could be restored to its old prosperity was to put an end to the ruinous competition which had been prevailing, to effect economies, and to raise rates wherever it was possible to do so without injury to the trade of the port.[6]

Amalgamation, obviously, placed a large section of dock workers under pressure from one large, but homogeneous, capitalist institution.[7]

The development of time-work in the Port of London accompanied labour intensification and rationalization. Dock workers were accustomed to a form of task work traditionally associated with sailing vessels. Sailing vessels were not only dependent upon the seasons and favorable winds, they were also under much less pressure to load and discharge their cargoes rapidly. Since they did not embody a proportionately large capital outlay, they were able to remain inactive until it became profitable for them to sail. Dockers working sailing vessels were, then, under a minimal amount of pressure from shipping firms. Consequently, periods of intense activity alternated with periods of relative inactivity. Sailing vessels also provided dockers with a certain amount of leisure in between the performance of their particular tasks: ship and quay workers, for instance, could alternate their tasks; while one worked, the other rested. Finally, sailing vessels allowed dockers to unload a cargo over a relatively prolonged period--approximately two weeks, to enjoy lengthy meal times, and to take an occasional stout.[8] The life and work of the docker was, then, more casual than the common use of the term would imply. Despite a tinge of bourgeois reproachfulness, Charles Booth captured the casual nature of dock life rather well:

> The labourers of class B (casual labourers, basically dockers in East London) do not, on the average, get as much as three days' work a week, but it is doubtful if many of them could or would

> work full time for long together if they had the opportunity. From whatever section Class B is drawn, except the sections of poor women, there will be found many of them who from shiftlessness, helplessness, idleness, or drink, are inevitably poor. The ideal of such persons is to work when they like; these it is who are rightly called the "leisure class" amongst the poor--leisure bounded very closely by the pressure of want, but habitual to the extent of second nature. They cannot stand the regularity and dullness of civilized existence, and find the excitement they need in the life of the streets, or at home as spectators of or participators in some highly coloured domestic scene.[9]

After 1854, when compound steam engines became practical for shipping, steam ships began to change all this.[10] Increasingly, steamers becaue popular for national and international commerce. Table III attempts to chart this development within the Port of London. Although the evidence is somewhat scanty, the trends are obvious. Between 1872 and 1881 the number and proportion of cargo carrying steamers grew steadily. More importantly, the proportion of tonnage carried by steam increased even more precipitously. By 1872 over half of the cargo entering and leaving the Port did so by steam; by 1875 more than half of the vessels docking in the Port were steamers.

The growing importance of steamers in the Port required much more disciplined processes than sailing ships, and induced a transition to a form of time work. Steamers, representing a large capital outlay, required their cargoes to be loaded and discharged rapidly. Unlike sailing vessels which depended upon bulk, the profitability of steamers was based upon rapid transit, constant use and

Table III.--The Development of Steam Shipping in London.*

Year	Total No. of Ships	Total No. of Steamers	Proportion of Steamers	Total Tonnage	Tonnage in Steam	Proportion in Steam
1872	17,388	7,804	44.88	6,842,437	3,660,931	53.50
1873	16,881	7,950	47.09	7,384,646	4,145,652	56.14
1875	17,388	8,946	51.60	7,825,702	4,668,434	59.66
1876	17,570	9,320	53.04	8,336,957	4,931,545	59.15
1878	17,162	9,360	54.54	8,439,521	5,233,314	62.01
1879	16,862	9,543	56.59	8,807,149	5,734,455	65.11
1880	17,308	10,105	58.38	9,554,861	6,460,253	67.61
1881	16,645	10,120	60.80	9,463,377	6,684,995	70.64

*Source: The Reports of the Commissioners of Her Majesty's Customs, 1873-1882. All figures refer to cargo carrying steamers entering and leaving the Port of London. Data for certain years were not available.

quick cargo turnovers. Dockers, quite naturally, were required to sustain an intense pace in order to satisfy the needs of the steam ships. Although dock work remained irregular and seasonal, specific jobs on steamers subjected dockers to unusual modes of work. The periods of inactivity between tasks became shorter; meal times were shortened, and sometimes eliminated altogether; stout was eliminated; the normal work day was lengthened up to twenty hours; and, finally, the clock became an important frame of reference--and, consequently, dockers and dock companies accused each other of tampering with the minute hand. Although steamers did not induce a highly developed form of time-work, as epitomized in industrial production, they did initiate a transition to a limited form of time-work embodied in perpetual discipline and a sustained intensity of labour.

The development of steam transport also induced a simple technological innovation which had far-reaching consequences. Traditionally the London dock companies were not attracted to technological innovations. They enjoyed a cheap surplus labour force which made technological innovation much less appealing than the mobilization of large contingents of workers. Moreover, since machines adapted to one type of vessel would not necessarily fit the specifications of others, the absence of standardized vessels made technological innovation

impractical.[11] Finally, technological innovation required large capital investments which the dock companies could not generate. Steam transport, however, allowed the companies to introduce the relatively inexpensive and durable hydraulic crane. Since sailing vessels usually did not have a power source to operate machinery, they were loaded and unloaded with manually operated capstans. The development of steam shipping made the use of the hydraulic crane feasible. The first hydraulic crane was installed in the London Docks in 1860. The popularity of the cranes grew with the success of steam transport. The cranes, after all, speeded up the processes of loading and unloading and permitted each set to hold greater weights.[12] The crane, then, was particularly suited to the needs of the steam ships. On the other hand, since cargo was loaded and unloaded with increasing rapidity in the years prior to 1889, the dock companies had to adapt their warehouses. By 1888 it was no longer possible for workers to bring goods to the various floors of the warehouses by means of a manually operated system of pulleys, or by the use of a weak steam hoist, without causing a bottleneck. Consequently, hydraulic hoists were introduced into most of the warehouses in the course of 1888.[13] The use of hydraulic power antagonized dock workers for a number of reasons. Hydraulic cranes and hoists not only eliminated a number of jobs and intensified labour by speeding-up the processes

of loading, discharging and storing cargo, but they also reduced the dockers' control over the productive process. As we have seen, most of the services of the Port of London were realized by the physical exertion of the dock labourers themselves. Unlike industrial enterprises, the productive forces in the Port of London were not merely serviced and superintended by dock labourers. Instead, the dock labourers often served as the motive power for all the other productive forces. The dockers, for instance, pushed the handcarts and operated the capstans and pulley systems. Since the dockers served as a motive force, they also had a certain amount of control over the pace of work. As hydraulic cranes and hoists became more popular in the Port of London, dockers increasingly lost control over the pace of work, and were subjected to an external and impersonal regulator. In marxian terms, as 1889 approached, dockers were becoming appendages to a machine and increasingly alienated.

These changes in the productive relations and processes of the Port of London had far-reaching consequences. Labour intensification, the transition to time-work and the introduction of hydraulic machinery provided dock workers with a clearly identifiable set of common experiences toward which they expressed an implacable hostility.

When testifying before the Select Committee on the Sweating System in 1888, the dock laborer, James Welsh, for instance, had this to say:

> They (dock workers) do not know what space of time they are required to do the work (discharging a particularly hurried steamer); but they are driven like slaves to do this work in order to convenience the company.

Further on he added,

> I believe there is a certain bonus allowed to be given at the end of the year to the warehouse keeper in proportion as he shall do this (get his work done cheaply) for the company. The company seems to be thoroughly cognisant of this mode; that it is a system that has only lately grown under Colonel Du Platt Taylor, and it is encouraged . . . .[14]

William Pidgley echoed Welsh's analysis when he observed that in earlier days, ". . . we had none of these steam travellers."[15] And, consequently, "where a ship used to require a fortnight or eighteen days, they are out in four days now."[16] James Millward more or less agreed with his fellow dock laborers:

> At one time, before the machinery (hydraulic cranes) was perfected we could be working a sailing ship that would last six weeks, and now it will be got out, if it is a large tonnage vessel, in as many days; six to ten days is generally the time that the same class of vessel would be got out.[17]

Perhaps Edward Stewart, however, was the most succinct observer. He offered the Sweating Committee this "simple idea" concerning the problems confronting dockers: "The company lowers their rates and they do not make any alteration in the men (required to perform a job), only over burden them with work . . . ."[18] Later in his testimony, he

went on to add, ". . . they (foremen and deputies of the dock companies) have reduced the machinery of the hands of men as well as introducing machinery; I mean that they try to keep us down by reducing the hands and making us do more work."[19]

Obviously, although dock workers did not have a very clear idea of the source of their troubles, by 1888 they had constructed mental barricades; that is, they had clearly identified a set of common problems and a group of common enemies. Once again, Edward Steward expressed the antagonism to the dock companies and their functionaries most clearly:

> The company's staff, that is what I term idlers: that is to say, suppose I go and undertake to do 100 tons of wheat, I have to put them on the lead and place them on the truck, I myself or anyone doing the same job; I have six men to push them on a truck, and one man on the barge; I have a man there to run after me with a tin ticket in his hand; he takes one ticket for two bags, and sometimes two tickets for two bags; I call him an idler; anybody can pick up a ticket. Then there is another man who calls himself the "tallyman," a clerk he is to put down the weight or mark, to see that they are all right; I call him an idler. Then there is a fellow coming out of the warehouse who says, "Move a bit sharper than that": I call him an idler.[20]

The amalgamation of the London and St. Katharine's and East and West India Companies, provided dock workers with a focal point for these expressions of discontent. The existence of a large, homogeneous and uniform structure of authority simplified antagonisms for the dock workers. That is, amalgamation made it much easier for them to

attack the joint committee, rather than this or that company or functionary.

Together, then, labour intensification, the transition to a form of time work, the introduction of hydraulic machinery and amalgamation made the London Dock Strike of 1889 possible. Amalgamation, however, seems to have determined the Strike's specific timing. It was no accident that the leader of the dock workers, Ben Tillett, began attacking the joint committee before amalgamation even became legally effective; it was also no accident that the Strike fell close on the heels of the first legal session of the joint committee in January 1889. Having said this much, we must now attempt to pull the pieces together, and indicate where further research is needed.

NOTES

CHAPTER III

[1]Relative activity may be expressed as an algebraic function of the absolute growth rates of the total tonnage entering and leaving the various ports and the United Kingdom as a whole. That is

$$\text{Relative Activity} = \frac{T_2}{TT_2} = \frac{T_1\frac{(T_2-T_1)}{T_1} + T_1}{TT_1\frac{(TT_2 - TT_1)}{TT_1} + TT_1}$$

where: T_1 = the total tonnage entering and leaving the selected port in the first year of a two year series.

TT_1 = the total tonnage entering and leaving the United Kingdom in the first year of the same two year series.

T_2 = the total tonnage entering and leaving the port in the second year.

TT_2 = the total tonnage entering and leaving the United Kingdom in the second year.

Proof: Relative Activity = $\frac{T_2}{TT_2}$; Absolute Growth (for the Port in the second year) = $\frac{T_2 - T_1}{T_1}$; Absolute Growth (for the United Kingdom in the second year) = $\frac{TT_2 - TT_1}{TT_1}$.

Thus, $T_2 = T_1$ (A.G. for year 2) + T_1, and

$TT_2 = TT_1$ (A.G. for U.K., year 2) + TT_2

or, $T_2 = T_1\frac{(T_2 - T_1)}{T_1} + T_1$ and

$TT_2 = TT_1\frac{(TT_2 - TT_1)}{TT_1} + TT_1$.

Relative Activity then equals $\frac{T_2}{TT_2}$ or $\frac{T_1 \frac{(T_2 - T_1)}{T_1} + T_1}{TT_1 \frac{(TT_2 - TT_1)}{TT_1} + TT_1}$

We may conclude then that if a port's absolute growth rate, $\frac{(T_2 - T_1)}{T_1}$, kept pace with the United Kingdom's absolute growth rate, $\frac{(TT_2 - TT_1)}{TT_1}$, its Relative Activity would remain stable.

[2]See W. W. Rostow, The British Economy in the Nineteenth Century (London: Oxford University Press, 1961); and S. B. Saul, The Myth of the Great Depression, 1873-1896 (London: Macmillan, 1969), pp. 9-16 and 19-22.

[3]The London Times, January 25, 1888, p. 11

[4]Llewelyn Smith and Vaughn Nash, The Story of the Dockers' Strike (London: T. Fisher Unwin, n.d.), Ch. 1.

[5]The London Times, January 21, 1888, p. 13.

[6]The London Times, February 1, 1888, p. 11.

[7]The information on dock amalgamation is scanty. See, however, The London Times, January 20, 1888, p. 11; January 25, p. 11; January 26, p. 11; January 31, p. 11; February 6, p. 11; February 13, p. 11; February 20, p. 11; February 27, p. 11; March 2, p. 11; March 21, p. 11; March 26, p. 11; April 13, p. 11; April 18, p. 12; May 11, p. 5; and May 16, p. 12.

[8]This analysis owes a great deal to E. P. Thompson's stimulating essay "Time, Work Discipline and Industrial Capitalism," in Past and Present, No. 38 (1967). See also The Select Committee on the Sweating System, 1888, q. 13124, 14111 and 15304.

[9]Charles Booth, Life and Labour of the People in London, 1st. Series: Poverty, Vol. 1 (London: Macmillan & Co., 1902), pp. 42-43.

[10]David S. Landes, The Unbound Prometheus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 277.

[11]Eric J. Hobsbawm, "National Unions on the Waterside," in Labouring Men (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Co., 1967), pp. 244-47.

[12]Aubrey Wilson, London's Industrial Heritage (Devon: David and Charles Ltd., 1967), p. 14.

[13]Wilson, London's Industrial Heritage, p. 110.

[14]The Sweating System, q. 13006 and 13020.

[15]The Sweating System, q. 13159.

[16]The Sweating System, q. 13160.

[17]The Sweating System, q. 12530.

[18]The Sweating System, q. 13211.

[19]The Sweating System, q. 13215.

[20]The Sweating System, q. 13233.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

We began this essay with two basic questions: (1) What prevented dock workers from engaging in large-scale strike activiqy prior to 1889? (2) What made a port-wide strike possible in 1889? Through an analysis of the productive processes and relations in the Port of London, we attempted to answer these questions. Prior to 1889, we found, these processes and relations were fluid, diverse and fragmented. As a consequence, dock workers lacked concentration, common experiences and problems, and a set of common antagonists. As 1889 approached, however, the Port of London's productive processes and relations changed substantially. For various reasons, common experiences, problems and antagonists emerged in the form of intensified and alienated labour, time-work and a rationalized structure of authority. The dock companies attempted to impose more intense modes of work in order to counteract the tendency for the rate of profit to decline in the Port of London. The two largest companies also began to rationalize their operations for the same reason. Economic and managerial rationalization, on the other hand, provided

dockers with a set of common antagonists and common experiences. The development of steam shipping induced a transition to time-work which was characterized by a sustained pace of intense labour and an attempt by the companies to impose labour discipline. Finally, hydraulic machinery simultaneously intensified and alienated labour. These changes transcended the traditional forms of diversity encountered by dock workers and made the Strike of 1889 possible. 1889 became the year of the strike at least in part because it was the first year in which dockers were confronted by a more or less homogeneous group of employers.

In the process of arriving at these conclusions, we subjected various scholars to severe criticism. There is no reason why we should not subject our own essay to equally severe criticism. In many ways this essay is very parochial. Although it has analyzed the productive processes and relations which confronted dockers, it has failed to analyze dockers themselves. The entire question of misery, for instance, was strictly avoided. Misery, we argued, is a relative and qualitative phenomenon which must be defined in terms of cultural traditions and social standards. Measured in this way, we may agree with the contemporaries and historians of the "new unionism" that a sense of unsatisfied individual and social needs motivated dock workers and contributed to the development of heated strikes in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

A broader analysis, however, would require us to specify precisely what cultural traditions and social standards made dockers feel that they had unsatisfied needs.

A number of other issues have suffered almost as much as the question of the misery in this essay. In our analysis, for instance, we somewhat casually mentioned the effects of demoralization and repression. The inability of dock workers to take positive steps to ameliorate their condition, we implied, contributed to the development of demoralization and pessimism. These attitudes, in turn, inhibited the emergence of strike activity. The dock companies, on the other hand, contributed to the demoralization of the dock workers by weeding out rebellious workers and potential trade union leaders. Of course, this treatment of the problem of demoralization is sketchy at best. An adequate analysis of the problem would have to take into account the hiring practices of the dock companies. These practices made dockers dependent upon the whims of foremen and contractors, created a supra-exploitative situation, and inculcated subservient attitudes among dockers. An adequate discussion of demoralization would also have to include an analysis of the ways in which collective demoralization were transformed into individualized forms of resistance, such as theft and ca'canny. Further, the moral sanctions among dockers which permitted individual resistance would require attention.

In this sense, the scholarly discussion of closed communities may be useful, if it is modified and qualified. Dockers probably did possess a unique set of moral standards, but they did not necessarily constitute a closed community. If, on the other hand, they did constitute a closed community, we must specify when this community came into being. Further, if a closed community did exist, we must estimate its influence on the ability of dockers to engage in large scale strikes. The problem of the psychological composition of dock workers must, then, take into account the influences of the social and geographic origins of dockers, marriage patterns in the East End of London, and the ability of dockers to be occupationally and geographically mobile. It must also be remembered that the psychology of the dockers was not simply the mechanistic expression of demoralization and an "anti-social" morality. The hiring practices and productive processes in the Port of London contributed to the development of attitudes which were, at least, potentially, antithetical to demoralization and individual acts of resistance. The "call-on" at the docks, for instance, was the one place where workers had an opportunity to freely exchange complaints about their work in a concentrated mass. The process of negative discussion during the "call-on" probably aided the development of a positive consciousness. The productive processes, on the other hand, required dockers to be

relatively talented, if not skilled, independent, and capable of making some decisions. These requirements provided dockers with a sense of self-importance; they also made the functionaries of the dock companies, who seemed to do nothing but intensify labour, appear parasitic and superfluous. In this sense, we may take issue with those scholars who have argued that some workers are strike-prone partly because they are alienated from an impersonal employer. At least in the case of dock workers in the late nineteenth century, the very presence of company representatives was a source of antagonism. We may assume that as 1889 approached, and the heterogeneous experiences of dock workers diminished, these positive psychological perspectives came to the fore. We may also concede that the cyclical and seasonal upswing at the Port of London in the years 1888-1889 complemented this process by placing the dockers in a strategically advantageous position, and giving them a certain amount of self confidence. But, of course, this essay has failed to deal with these problems and issues adequately. Where the scholars of strike activity failed to get into the skins of workers, then, this essay has failed to get into their heads.

This essay is also severely deficient on a number of other issues. It has, for instance, had a marked tendency to treat the Port of London as an isolated and closed universe. Nothing, of course, could be further

from the truth. In this sense, a more adequate discussion of the effects of competition on the dockers would have to analyze shifts in international trade, the degree of specialization among the British Ports and, finally, the role of shippers in the Ports. At the same time, this essay has never attempted to explain why dockers should have been attracted to socialist leaders. Nor has it attempted to explain how the socialists made themselves attractive to the dock workers. An analysis of the socialist leadership is particularly necessary since this leadership was the mechanism through which discontent from below was channelled against the dock companies. The socialist leadership was also responsible for developing the strategy which won the strike of 1889 for the dockers. Insofar as this essay does not deal with these problems, it fails to set its analysis in motion.

Obviously, this essay leaves quite a bit to be desired. Nevertheless, it does provide a firm basis upon which further research can build. Once the Dock Strike of 1889 is analyzed in its entirety, we will have a much better understanding of the origins of modern Britain.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL ESSAY

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It would be impossible for us to list all the works which have influenced this essay. Here we will try only to indicate the most important documents and books available to students of the London Dock Strike of 1889.

Parliamentary Papers

The Report of the Select Committee on the Sweating System, 1888 is a valuable document. Lord Dunraven questioned dockers, dock officials and contractors. His probing, patient questions permitted us to reconstruct the Port of London in the late nineteenth century. They also made us aware of a number of problems which confronted both dockers and the dock companies. The Royal Commission on Labour, 1892-1894 adopted a much broader perspective than Dunraven's Committee; it dealt with docks throughout Britain. Since many of the issues raised in the testimony before The Royal Commission on Labour were related to the strikes and organizing efforts of 1889-1890, The Commission's value to the student of the Dock Strike of 1889 is limited. The Board of Trade's Report on the Strikes and Lock-outs of 1888 and its Report on

the Strikes and Lock-outs of 1889 contain some useful statistics, but very little else. The Statistical Abstracts for the United Kingdom contain much information about the Port of London and a number of other Ports. The statistics, however, often require reworking in order to be useful. The Reports of the Commissioners of Her Majesty's Customs, 1873-1882 are a wealth of information on business conditions in London and Liverpool. More importantly, they contain statistics on the use of sailing vessels and steam ships. The Reports of the Commissioners of Her Majesty's Customs are difficult to use, however, since they did not always deal with a standardized set of criteria and, consequently, did not produce a uniform series of statistics and questions year after year. The Committees on the Port of London Bills of 1902, 1903 and 1908 contain much useful information about the London dock companies and, to a lesser extent, dock workers.

Contemporary Accounts

W. H. Abraham's "The Hull Strike," in The Economic History Review, 3, No. 3 (July 1893), provides one new unionist's view of the struggles which followed the strikes of 1889. H. H. Champion's The Great Dock Strike (London: Swan Sonnenschien and Co., 1890) provides a more or less standard interpretation of the dock strike by a man who was both a socialist and a propagandist for the dockers. Frederick Harrison's "The New Trades-Unionism,"

in Nineteenth Century, 26, No. 153 (Nov., 1889), is also a standard interpretation. George Howell's Trade Unionism New and Old (London: Metheun and Co., 1900) adds very little to the interpretations of the Strike of 1889 and the "new unionism." Since Howell was an "old" unionist, however, his work does contain a provocative discussion of the differences between old and new unions. Clem Edwards provides a nice overview of the "new unionism" in his article "Labour Federations," pt. I, The Economic Journal, 3, No. 10 (June, 1893). Tom Mann's "The Development of the Labour Movement," Nineteenth Century, 27, No. 159 (May, 1890) does much the same thing as Edwards' article, only with much more depth. Tom Mann and Ben Tillett wrote The "New" Trades Unionism (London: Green and McAllan, 1890) in response to attacks by old unionists, particularly George Howell. Their argument is an eloquent defense and analysis of the functions of the "new unionism." Ben Tillett's A Brief History of the Dockers' Union (London: Dock, Wharf, Riverside and General Workers' Union and Twentieth Century Press Ltd., 1910) is a sketchy introduction to the Dockers' Union. Llewellyn Smith's and Vaughn Nash's The Story of the Dockers' Strike (London: T. Fisher Unwin, n.d., but certainly 1890) contains much information about the Port of London, and a decent summary of the Strike of 1889. The most useful works, however, are Charles Booth's Life and Labour of the People in London

(London: Macmillan and Co., 1902) and Henry Mayhew's London Labour and London Poor (London: Charles Griffin and Co., 1861). Both men were talented and compassionate sociologists who have left much information about workers in general, and dock workers in particular.

Histories

Historians have generally passed lightly over the Strike of 1889 and the "new unionism." Of the studies devoted specifically to London dock workers, John Lovell's Stevedores and Dockers (London: Macmillan and Co., 1969) is the best. Ann Stafford's popular history of the London Dock Strike, A Match to Fire the Thames (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1961), is useful for introductory purposes. Jean Trepp McKelvey's Dock Labour Disputes in Great Britain, New York State School of Industrial Relations Bulletin No. 23 (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1953) is a history of Parliamentary Commissions rather than a history of labour disputes. Eric Hobsbawm's provocative essay, "National Unions on the Waterside," in Labouring Men: Studies in the History of Labour (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1967), is more provocative and enlightening than any of the other works mentioned above. Hobsbawm has provided much of the theoretical framework in which our own research was conducted.