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## THE GALVESTON BAY DOCK WARS, 1936-1937

by Don Willett

Irvin Bernstein claimed in *The Turbulent Years: A History of The American Worker 1933-1945* that the 1930s were a militant period of ideological change within the American labor movement.<sup>1</sup> Across the nation, working men and women united in a crusade to better their lot. Often management's stubborn refusal to heed its workers' demands led to wholesale labor violence. Unskilled industrial workers, forgotten for years by the labor movement, cried the loudest. These workers shut down the plants, manned the picket lines, and bore the brunt of labor and management's tragic confrontation.

Maritime labor joined the attempt to assert more control over the work place. On the west coast, longshoremen rallied around an expatriated Australian, Harry Bridges, while seamen pledged their loyalty to Harry Lundeberg. In 1934 these two groups staged a bloody general strike that crippled West Coast commerce and led to a favorable contract to labor.<sup>2</sup> For a number of reasons, East and Gulf Coast maritime workers responded much slower than their West Coast brothers. When they finally moved they released almost 100 years of pent-up frustration. The resulting bloodshed and violence shocked the nation.

East and Gulf Coast seamen entered "The Turbulent Years" on March 2, 1936, when Joe Curran and the rest of the deck department informed the Chief Officer of the *S.S. California* that the ship would not sail from San Pedro, California, until the Panama Pacific Lines paid East Coast seamen the same base wage that West Coast sailors received. The steamship company refused and Curran struck the ship.<sup>3</sup>

The sit-down strike continued until March 5, after Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins telephoned Curran and asked him to end the strike. Curran's refusal led to a heated exchange. Eventually, calmer minds prevailed and the two agreed upon a deal. Secretary Perkins promised to use her "good offices" to convince the Department of Commerce to rescind a threatened charge of mutiny against Curran and his crew members. She also pledged to help the seamen negotiate their wage demand and assured them that they would face no future job discrimination because of the incident.<sup>4</sup> The seamen aboard the *S.S. California* agreed. Later that day the ship sailed to its homeport, New York City.

When the *S.S. California* arrived home, the company fired sixty-four crew members, including Joe Curran. Fortunately, the federal government did not charge these men with mutiny, but unfortunately, it did fine them and permanently mark their employment record with a "declined to report" note on their conduct rating.<sup>5</sup> This punitive action virtually blackballed these men from future employment in the American merchant marine.

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This turn of events left Joe Curran in a quandary. He already had lost his job and could not ask the company to rehire him. Instead, he packed his sea-bag, walked off the ship, and found the nearest bar. After a few beers, Curran made a decision. He called a spur-of-the-moment strike against the *S.S. California* and the International Mercantile Marine, the parent company of the Panama Pacific Line.<sup>6</sup> It worked. What started out as a simple \$5-a-month wage dispute soon became a *cause celebre* that catapulted Joe Curran into national prominence and hurled East and Gulf Coast seamen into "The Turbulent Years."

Curran's strike elicited an immediate response from several sources. The International Seamens Union (ISU), an affiliate of the American Federation of Labor, disavowed the protest, labeled its participants "outlaws," and vowed to crush the strike. The shipowners pledged to keep the ships running.<sup>7</sup> The government officials shook their heads. And a surprisingly large number of rank-and-file seamen sided with the "outlaws."

The so-called Spring Strike of 1936 lasted nine weeks and was strictly an amateur affair. The strike spread up and down the East Coast, with most of the action occurring in and around New York City. The steamship companies encountered little difficulty finding ISU seamen and other "scabs" to operate their ships. By late May the rebels called off the strike but vowed to continue the struggle for higher wages.<sup>8</sup>

The Spring Strike never reached Galveston Bay. Texas maritime workers neither established picket lines nor tied-up any ships at the dock. This lack of solidarity with the East Coast rebels did not mean that labor harmony existed on the Texas waterfront.

Discontent in Texas harbors was widespread but disunited. Many longshoremen, led in Corpus Christi by Gilbert Mers and in Houston by Bill Follette, opposed the dictatorial rule of Joe Ryan, president of the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA). The year before ILA locals in the Gulf Coast had called a strike for higher wages. Ryan refused to support this action and the strike failed.<sup>9</sup> After this betrayal, many Texas longshoremen looked to Harry Bridges and his followers on the West Coast for inspiration.

Many Texas seamen were equally unhappy. Since the end of World War I, working conditions and wages in the industry continually worsened. Able-Bodied seamen's wages (the rating used to compute a seaman's salary) peaked in 1920 at \$85 a month plus overtime. By 1935 some Able-Bodied seamen earned \$30 a month for an eighty-four-hour work week.<sup>10</sup> Throughout this debacle the International Seamens Union remained powerless and the shipowners refused to sign a contract with the labor organization.<sup>11</sup>

Early in 1936 discontented seamen and longshoremen met in New Orleans, formed the Maritime Federation of the Gulf Coast, and elected Gilbert Mers their president.<sup>12</sup> These workers, hoping to unify maritime laborers in the Gulf Coast, modeled the new organization after Bridges' and

Lundeberg's powerful Maritime Federation of the Pacific. When word of Curran's strike reached the Gulf members of the Maritime Federation of the Gulf Coast and loyal followers of the established labor unions, the ILA and the ISU challenged each other for hegemony in the Gulf. This showdown quickly led to violence.

By their nature most seamen love to fight. Bar-room brawls and back-alley scuffles are the norm, not the exception. Bloodied noses and blackened eyes are an occupational hazard. This nautical violence seldom elevates to a life-threatening level. By mid-April, 1936, however, a new type of violence swept the Galveston Bay waterfront and reached a flash point on April 23 when Jack Rafferty, an official from the Galveston ISU hall, and two others beat L. Phillipps unconscious in front of the Houston union hall. Two days earlier local officials had expelled Phillipps for wearing a Maritime Federation of the Gulf Coast button. Phillipps' beating was the eighteenth such act in three weeks.<sup>13</sup>

An investigator in the Houston district attorney office, Earl Hind, fearing more violence, quickly increased police surveillance throughout the port. Still the violence increased. The Houston and Galveston press soon labeled the situation "The Houston Dock War" and Hind admitted that "beef gangs of waterfront thugs" had the upper hand.<sup>14</sup>

The situation reached a second flashpoint on April 30 when William Green, president of the American Federation of Labor, appealed to both sides to end the violence. That evening "the beef squad" assaulted twenty members of the Maritime Federation of the Gulf Coast.<sup>15</sup> This type of black-and-blue unionism continued until May 28, when Curran called off the Spring Strike. Overnight, the violence subsided and an eerie calm blanketed the waterfront.

After the strike both sides attempted to consolidate their position. ISU officials tried to force dissidents out of the union by ejecting them from union meetings and denying them jobs. Curran's troops recruited new followers and united with dissidents along the Gulf. The New York-Galveston Bay link was Bill Follette, a Houston longshoreman who edited *The Ship Channel*, the local rebel newspaper.<sup>16</sup>

One group of seamen that the dissidents tried to influence was the black mariner. Both the ISU and the shipowners practiced racial and job discrimination against black seamen. The only jobs open to blacks were in the steward's department. Yet, during times of labor unrest shipowners encouraged blacks to "scab" against white strikers. Once the strike ended it was "business as usual" with the black seamen again out of a job. As a result few blacks joined the Spring Strike in 1936.

The *Seminole* affair changed that situation. On June 17, 1936, the steward's department of the *S.S. Seminole*, a Clyde Mallory Line freighter-passenger ship, struck in Galveston. Their demand for fifty-cents-per-hour overtime met stiff resistance from company officials. But a third-party promise to discuss all grievances at the company's New York City headquarters gained

widespread approval. The strikers agreed to end the sit-down and prepared to return to work. At that moment the company's agent returned to the ship, boasting, "To hell with the Niggers, we'll take the B...ds to sea and make them work." After that racist outburst the entire group again refused to work. The strike was short lived and the ship sailed on time.

When the *Seminole* returned to New York the company fired twenty-nine ring leaders of the strike. A threat by other black crews to "sit down" all Clyde Mallory ships forced the company to cancel all scheduled cruises. This unexpected militancy by the black crew members shocked the company and became a catalyst for improved relations between black seamen and the rebel group. This courageous act of defiance, in many ways similar to Joe Curran's "sit-down" on the *S.S. California*, elicited a positive response from the outlawed seaman's movement. In part the *ISU Pilot*, the rebels' mouthpiece, noted:

The militant example shown by our colored brothers ... is proof that once guaranteed that they have the support of the white seamen, that we will fight with them for equal opportunity to earn a living, they will fight with us shoulder to shoulder on the next picket line. The shipowners (Sic) can only defeat us when our ranks are divided but once we forget our petty bickering and unite, regardless of race or creed or color then we will force the shipowners to his knees.<sup>17</sup>

This call for racial unity among all militant seamen, the so-called *Seminole Pledge*, drove a wedge into the shipowners' racial discrimination policies. It also signaled the beginning of an enlightened racial policy that thrust the East and Gulf Coast seamen's movement into the forefront of organized labor's long struggle against Jim Crow segregation.<sup>18</sup>

Everyone on the waterfront knew that the Spring Strike was not the end of the struggle. Most believed that another strike loomed in the future, and each side sent leading representatives to Galveston Bay in the hope of firming support in this crucial maritime labor outpost.

On August 3, Ivan Hunter, the secretary-treasurer of the ISU, addressed over 400 seamen at the Galveston union hall. The seamen warmly greeted Hunter and the Galveston Labor Council, which consisted of AFL unions active in the city, unanimously backed the ISU. In his speech Hunter shifted blame for the local maritime unrest from the Communist Party to the Maritime Association of Galveston and Houston. In a speech on April 30, Hunter had suggested that the sole purpose of the outlaw strike was "To destroy the International Seamen's Union and substitute a Communist controlled organization in its place." In the Galveston speech he attacked the Maritime Association of Galveston and Houston, the local affiliate of the Maritime Federation of the Gulf Coast, and suggested that this local organization was allied with the shipowners and against the seamen.<sup>19</sup> In effect, Hunter argued that the Maritime Federation of the Gulf, not the International Seamen's Union, was the reactionary group.

Two weeks later Joe Curran arrived in Houston and quickly set the tone for the upcoming strike. On August 17 Curran addressed dissident seamen at their favorite hangout, the Ship Channel Club. He talked about the seamen's situation with the shipowners, the union, and the federal government. Much to everyone's surprise, several uninvited Houston policemen interrupted the meeting. It seemed that someone had informed the officers that a dangerous communist had come to the Bayou City to stir up trouble. After the speech the police told Curran to come with them. Fearing the worst, Curran feigned a trip to the bathroom and sneaked out the backdoor. He jumped into an awaiting car and sped to Port Arthur.<sup>20</sup>

The Fall Strike began on October 31. When Curran's followers "hit the bricks," Galveston Bay maritime workers willingly followed suit. Houston seamen joined the strike that day while Galveston seamen waited until November 2 before they walked out. In both instances the Maritime Federation of the Gulf Coast, not the Curran faction, called the strike.<sup>21</sup>

The strike started on a sour note. Houston seamen decided to establish picket lines at strategic locations. At one of these sites a nasty confrontation developed. N.G. Fite, president of the Houston Dockworkers Council, allowed members of the black ILA local to cross the seamen's picket line. Tensions ran high and everyone expected trouble. "This is a hell of a thing. We're all union men," shouted one of the striking seamen. "Yes, and we were all union men when the ILA was fighting for its life a year ago" replied Fite, "And what did you seamen do? Went on the ships and got the steam up for the scabs."<sup>22</sup> The seamen had no response.

Fite's statement was correct. When ILA members in the Gulf called a strike in 1935 the ISU refused to honor the picket line. One year later the shoe was on the other foot. There would be no Galveston Bay maritime labor solidarity during the Fall Strike. Instead, seamen faced opposition from all sides – from their union, the ISU; from the longshoremen's union, the ILA; from the shipowners; and from various Texas law enforcement agencies.

When the strike began the police departments in Galveston and Houston took a decidedly anti-labor position. In Galveston, Chief of Police Tony Messina moved quickly to defuse the situation. Three days after the rebels called the strike the police chief arrested thirty-eight picketers and charged them with causing a riot. As Messina piled the seamen into the paddy-wagon, he prophesied, "I'll break up these mobs or wear out the jail trying."<sup>23</sup>

The Houston police department took an equally tough stand. When seamen first set up picket lines, Police Chief B.W. Payne placed Lieutenant J.E. Murry in charge of waterfront law enforcement. Murry ordered his men to "clean up all joints" and remove all undesirables from the area. Payne and Murry also limited the strikers to two pickets per ship. On November 3, Chief Payne changed his mind and ordered the seamen to remove all picket lines from the port or face arrest for vagrancy. When seamen failed to heed his warning, he arrested 161 picketers. Shortly afterwards a court injunction

reinstated the seamen's right to establish their picket lines.<sup>24</sup>

The "Houston Dock Wars" resumed when the Fall Strike began. In Galveston the police arrested twelve strikers and charged them with the assault and robbery of two black crew members from a Clyde Mallory cruise ship. Eight seamen from a non-union tanker crew wandered too near the Houston rank-and-file headquarters. This foolish mistake cost them a trip to the hospital. On another occasion a female taxi driver, who helped haul picketing seamen to the port of Houston, forgot to check her passengers' strike credentials. The three passengers kidnapped the woman and threatened her with bodily harm if she continued to aid the strikers.<sup>25</sup>

Before the renegade seamen "hit the bricks," public officials from the Galveston Bay area called for outside help to quell the violence. Harris County commissioners authorized T.A. Binford, the county sheriff, to employ and deputize seventy-three additional law enforcement officers. The county assigned these dollar-a-year deputies to the port area. After the strike began the county commissioners asked Governor James Allred and the Texas Department of Public Safety for help. The DPS sent the Texas Rangers.<sup>26</sup> If the inscription "One Riot, One Ranger," on the Texas Ranger statue at Dallas' Love Field is true, then the six Texas Rangers who headed for the Port of Houston must have expected the worst.

The steamship operators and the ISU made contingency plans to overcome any labor shortages aboard contract vessels. Shortly after the strike began local ISU officials declared that any work stoppage on a contract vessel was an illegal strike. As a further precaution local officials also removed all members of the Maritime Federation of the Gulf Coast from the union's roster. To ensure that ships outbound from Galveston Bay sailed with a full crew, the ISU asked for volunteers, especially from the Great Lakes, to come to Texas and man all ships tied up by the outlaws. The union also opened its membership to anyone willing to cross the rebel picket line.<sup>27</sup>

Fearing the worst, steamship operators, especially Lykes Brothers Steamship Company, the largest shipping company operating in the Gulf, purchased space in the help-wanted section of several Dallas and Fort Worth newspapers asking Tarrant and Dallas county residents to consider a new career in the merchant marine. The ads promised free transportation and a job to any Trinity River sailor who would come to Galveston Bay and cross the outlaws' picket line.<sup>28</sup> Few accepted this generous offer of employment.

The striking seamen made plans to counter any attempt to flood the waterfront with strikebreakers. In Galveston strikers stationed cars on the causeway and followed suspicious looking vehicles into town. If the occupants were ISU "volunteers," a rumble usually resulted or the suspect experienced a conversion to rank-and-file unionism. In the Bayou City striking seamen patrolled the local Greyhound Bus terminal and queried suspicious characters about their maritime employment status. However, Houston law enforcement agents quickly squelched such tactics. One evening the police

arrested four striking seamen when they asked an undercover agent, "Are you off a ship?" A quick frisk of the suspects produced a short piece of rubber hose, a blackjack, and a pistol.<sup>29</sup>

By the third week of the strike the ISU shifted its office from the waterfront to the Cotton Exchange Building in downtown Houston. Overnight, the outlaws set-up a picket line around the building. On November 27 the Houston police arrested thirty-six seamen for "carrying a banner without a permit." Undaunted by this rebuff, more seamen showed-up the next day with a witty sign that said "You can't do that." Apparently, Police Chief Payne failed to appreciate this humor. He arrested the eighteen picketers. The following day forty-two more sign-carrying seamen received a one-way ticket to the city jail.<sup>30</sup>

Each day more picketers arrived at the building. The object of their ire was Wilbur Dickey, the Houston ISU business agent. The striking seamen claimed that Dickey had transferred union records without the rank-and-file's consent. The dissidents also believed that Dickey used the union office to recruit strike breakers.<sup>31</sup>

The situation exploded on December 4 when union members demanded that Dickey produce all records. Rather than comply, Dickey and two bodyguards ran to the back of the building and exited through an open window. Once outside the three men ran into a group of seamen who had been guarding the rear of the building. A tense confrontation ensued. As the seamen closed in, Dickey pulled a revolver and shot one of the rank-and-filers, Johnny Kane, in the abdomen. Kane fell backward and collapsed to the ground. The other seamen surged forward and attacked Dickey and his friends. Only the timely intervention by several Houston police saved Dickey's life.<sup>32</sup>

The shooting of Johnny Kane shocked the community. The next day the Houston National Bank sponsored a telephone broadcast from the strike headquarters on radio station KTRK. Houstonians generously responded to the strikers' urgent plea for blood transfusions and money to pay for the seaman's medical bills.<sup>33</sup> These good intentions proved inadequate; Johnny Kane died on December 15. Labor leaders from Houston and striking seamen from the Galveston Bay area attended the martyred seaman's funeral.<sup>34</sup>

Johnny Kane was not the only Texan to die as a result of the Houston Dock Wars. Five days after the Kane shooting, eight seamen from the tanker *W.L. Steed* left the Galveston drydocks and headed downtown to Post Office Street for a night on the town. Later that evening fifteen striking seamen assaulted the tankermen outside a bar. The ensuing scuffle sent eight men to the U.S. Marine Hospital. On December 14, Peter Banfield, a seaman from the *W.L. Steed*, died from multiple stab wounds about the chest and abdomen. Kane and Banfield were two of twenty-eight seamen nationwide who died in the Fall Strike.<sup>35</sup>

The Banfield murder intensified efforts by Galveston officials to end



violence on the waterfront. Mayor Adrian Levy ordered the police department to place ten additional patrolmen on harbor patrol. Mayor Levy noted, "I am determined to put a stop to the violence here." O.E. Casey, city commissioner in charge of the fire and police department, agreed with the Mayor: "The police will no longer temporize with the situation. The police will stop terrorism here."<sup>36</sup>

The steamship operators, particularly Lykes Brothers, worked behind the scene to end the strike in Galveston. They employed a divide-and-conquer tactic to weaken the strikers' will to continue. On December 1, James Lykes, president and general manager of the Lykes Lines, opened separate negotiation with the Master Mates and Pilots (MMP), representing the deck officers, and the Marine Engineers Benevolent Association (MEBA), which represented the engineers. The two organizations joined the strike on November 23 and manned the picket lines for one week. However, on December 1, these officers presented six major demands to the shipowners, including a closed shop, vacation for twelve months of continuous service in any company, and "a reasonable wage scale in accordance with the present standard of living." Lykes broke off the negotiations with the striking officers and announced a pay increase for all licensed personnel not on strike. However, in a surprise move on December 13, Lykes signed a contract with MMP and MEBA.<sup>37</sup>

Although Lykes Brothers showed some flexibility with its licensed personnel on strike, the company maintained a hard line against the rebels. R.E. Tipton, executive vice president of the Lykes Lines, echoed company policy when he noted, "We cannot be placed in the position of violating a contract to make another, particularly so with a group whose movements have been branded as an outlaw strike, and agitated by communist, by the AFL." This threat, along with increased police surveillance in the harbor area and the signed officer's contracts, broke the Galveston strikers' will to continue.<sup>38</sup>

After the shooting of Johnny Kane the Houston strikers refocused their efforts on the port area. The rebels continued to picket the docks and both sides resumed their daily ritual of beatings, kidnappings, and harassment. As the Christmas holidays neared everyone on the waterfront showed the strain of this long and deadly showdown, but neither side displayed a willingness to quit.

On December 23 the strike rose to a new level of violence. That night the Houston police, on orders from Lt. J.E. Murry, forcefully removed the pickets from their post, transported them to the dock police station, and beat them. When asked about the incident Murry said he "wanted to stop the beating of non-union men." Strikers quickly labeled this police action a "Reign of Terror."<sup>39</sup> They did not know that the worst was still to come.

The next morning, Christmas Eve, the seamen re-established their picket lines and things returned to normal. The day passed uneventfully and night-fall gave no hint of potential trouble. The holiday calm shattered later that

evening when fifty policemen, armed with tear gas, blackjacks, guns, and fists, "cleaned out" the waterfront. First the police force, with the aid of several non-striking seamen, chased the pickets off the docks. Then Murry and his men attacked the local seamen haunts. The police beat 150 seamen and an undetermined number of local bystanders. Eighteen of these victims required hospitalization.<sup>40</sup>

Reaction to the police riot was swift and poignant. Acting Police Chief R.T. Honea rushed to the scene, quickly relieved Murry of all waterfront duties, and ordered an immediate investigation. Local newspaper reports, which suggested that many policemen were intoxicated, made the situation worse. One angry editorial, titled "Hell at Port Houston," noted that police "actions are the foulest shame that has yet come to Houston." When Curran heard about the incident, he labeled it "The Christmas Eve Massacre."<sup>41</sup> Apparently the rest of the nation agreed.

Shortly after the Houston mayoral election in 1936, several members of the Seamen's Joint Strike Committee approached Mayor-Elect R.H. Fonville and asked him to form a citizens' committee to investigate the strike. The rebels hoped that this panel could act as an intermediary between the strikers and the Lykes Brothers Steamship Company and exert some pressure on the giant shipping company to negotiate with the dissidents. The Houston Better Business Bureau also endorsed the idea.<sup>42</sup>

When Fonville became mayor of Houston he moved quickly to settle the strike and end the Houston Dock Wars. On January 3, he appointed three prominent citizens, Burke Baker, Earle Amerman, and Gus Wortham to a citizen's committee to investigate the seamen's strike in Houston. Fonville also empowered the panel to negotiate a settlement of the long and bloody labor dispute. The board met with James Lykes, who expressed a desire to reach an agreement. In Lykes' opinion the only stumbling block was the continual bickering between the waterfront factions.<sup>43</sup> Lykes Brothers did not sign a new seamen's contract until after the strike.

Next, Fonville initiated a new strategy to stop the escalating waterfront violence in Houston. He appointed Chester Williams the new police chief. Williams, a veteran of the Houston police force, had a reputation as a tough but fair cop. He promptly removed sixteen "special officers" who had been assigned to the dock area by the previous administration and replaced them with ten regular policemen. Williams announced that he would no longer assign patrol duties to law enforcement agents who lacked a civil-service status.<sup>44</sup> This pronouncement shifted the Houston Police force from a pro-shipowner, anti-strike stance to a neutral law enforcement policy. The striking seamen responded positively to this turn of events. Almost overnight violence on the Houston waterfront subsided to pre-strike levels. The Houston Dock War was over.

The Fall Strike dragged on for another three weeks. On January 21, 2,000 rebel seamen met at the New York City strike headquarters and voted

to end the strike if the out-ports concurred. Houston and Galveston at first hesitated but eventually agreed.<sup>44</sup>

The Spring and Fall seamen's strike permanently altered the American merchant marine. The ISU's policy of using strikebreakers and beef gangs to crush the outlawed seamen's movement so alienated the rank-and-file that in May 1937 they formed a new union, The National Maritime Union. When the ISU asked the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) to conduct representation elections, over eighty percent of the Gulf and East Coast mariners voted for the National Maritime Union.<sup>45</sup>

The new union called its first national convention in July 1937. The first order of business was the constitution of the union, one of the most extraordinary documents to evolve from "The Turbulent Years." The highlight occurred when the convention, echoing the *Seminole* Pledge, unanimously agreed that "no person shall be excluded from membership by reason of race, color, religious beliefs, sex and/or political affiliation."<sup>46</sup> Unfortunately, the rest of American society waited over three decades before they tackled racial and sexual discrimination.

Seamen in Galveston Bay flocked to the National Maritime Union. Shortly after the NLRB elections the American Federation of Labor, seeing the handwriting on the wall, disbanded the International Seamen's Union. This act gave the National Maritime Union hegemony over all East and Gulf Coast sailors. The ISU halls in Galveston and Houston, recently the scene of much hatred and violence, shut down.

The new union established hiring halls in both cities and quickly asserted its dominance over the Galveston Bay maritime labor market. During its formative years the union faced several crises, including an in-house revolt by Gulf Coast members, a disastrous strike against the nation's leading tanker operators, the birth of a rival AFL affiliated Seamen's union – the Seafarers International Union – and a violent right-wing coup that almost toppled Curran.<sup>48</sup> The union successfully weathered these storms and eventually grew into a strong and stable labor organization.

In Texas the rebel seamen's overthrow of the ISU left Texas maritime workers with two powerful unions, the International Longshoremen's Association and the National Maritime Union. Most Texas working men have avoided unions like the plague. But, most Texas seamen and longshoremen continue to choose nationally-affiliated unions as their collective bargaining agents. Galveston Bay remains a stronghold for Texas organized labor.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Irvin Bernstein. *The Turbulent Years: A History of the American Worker, 1933-1941* (Boston, 1970).

<sup>2</sup>Literature on the 1934 West Coast strike abounds. A good beginning is Charles P. Larrowe's two articles in *Labor History*, Charles Larrowe, "The Great Maritime Strike of '34: Part I," *Labor History* 11 (Fall, 1970), pp. 403-451; "The Great Maritime Strike of '34: Part II." *Labor*

*History* 12 (Winter, 1971), pp. 3-37 and his biography of Harry Bridges, Charles Larrowe, *Harry Bridges: The Rise and Fall of Radical Labor in the United States* (Connecticut, 1972).

<sup>1</sup>National Archives, Record Group 41, Records of the Bureau of Marine Inspection and Navigation, *Strike File 1936*, File 102.3-9 #3, no title, no date. Hereafter citations of this nature will be given as: BMIN, File number, *Strike File 1936*, Title (if any) and Date (if any).

<sup>2</sup>Joe Curran, *Interview*, Columbia University Oral History Collection, pp. 52-54; *New York Times*, March 6, 1936, p. 43.

<sup>3</sup>*New York Times*, March 5, 1936, p. 45; March 20, 1936, p. 29; BMIN, File 102.3-9 #3, *Strike File 1936*, no title, no date; *Seamen's Journal*, March 1936, pp. 68-69.

<sup>4</sup>*ISU Pilot*, March 20, 1936, p. 1.

<sup>5</sup>Joe Curran, *Oral Memoirs*, Joe Curran Papers, Archives, Texas A&M University, p. 129.

<sup>6</sup>Curran, *Columbia Interview*, p. 57; *ISU Pilot*, May 29, 1936, p. 1.

<sup>7</sup>Gilbert Mers, *Working the Waterfront: The Ups and Downs of a Rebel Longshoreman* (Austin, 1988), pp. 88-113.

<sup>8</sup>Joseph Goldberg, *The Maritime Story: A Study in Labor-Management Relations* (Cambridge, 1958), p. 127; *The Marine Workers Voice*, November, 1932; April, 1933, p. 1. Coal passers wages dropped to \$25.00 per month and Ordinary Seamen's monthly wages sank to \$17.50.

<sup>9</sup>*Seamens Journal*, January 1, 1935, April 1, 1936, p. 65. Between 1921 and 1935 East and Gulf Coast shipowners refused to sign a contract with the International Seamans Union.

<sup>10</sup>Mers, *Working the Waterfront*, p. 125; *Houston Press*, April 30, 1936.

<sup>11</sup>*Galveston Daily News*, April 26, 1936; *Houston Press*, April 30, 1936.

<sup>12</sup>*Galveston Daily News*, April 24, 1936.

<sup>13</sup>*Galveston Daily News*, April 30, 1936.

<sup>14</sup>*The Ship Channel* was a mimeographed newspaper-handout that Follette and later Francis P. O'Donahue edited. A complete run of this interesting paper may be found in folders 24 and 25 of the Gilbert Mers *Papers*. They are housed at the archives of the Houston Public Library.

<sup>15</sup>*ISU Pilot*, June 19, 1936, p. 5.

<sup>16</sup>Donald Willett, "Joe Curran and the National Maritime Union, 1936-1945" (Ph.D. Dissertation: Texas A&M University, 1985). pp. 55-56, p. 189.

<sup>17</sup>*The Union Review*, May 15, 1936, August 7, 1936.

<sup>18</sup>*The Ship Channel*, August 22, 1936; Mers, *Working the Waterfront*, pp. 144-146.

<sup>19</sup>*Galveston Daily News*, November 1, 1936, November 3, 1936.

<sup>20</sup>*Houston Press*, November 2, 1936.

<sup>21</sup>*Galveston Daily News*, November 6, 1936.

<sup>22</sup>Mers *Papers*, folder 11, November 25, 1936, N.J. Nicholson to Follette; *Houston Press*, November 3, 1936, November 11, 1936, November 18, 1936.

<sup>23</sup>*Galveston Daily News*, November 14, 1936, November 18, 1936, November 23, 1936.

<sup>24</sup>*Galveston Daily News*, November 17, 1936. The list of special deputies may be found in the Mers *Papers*, folder 13, September 17, 1936. Governor Allred sent the Texas Rangers to Galveston Bay on November 16, 1936.

<sup>25</sup>*Galveston Daily News*, November 18, 1936, *Houston Press*, November 2, 1936.

<sup>26</sup>*Galveston Daily News*, November 19, 1936.

<sup>27</sup>*Galveston Daily News*, November 18, 1936, *Houston Press*, November 9, 1936.

<sup>28</sup>*Houston Press*, November 27, 1936, November 30, 1936, December 1, 1936.

<sup>29</sup>*Houston Press*, December 1, 1936.

<sup>30</sup>*Houston Press*, December 5, 1936.

<sup>31</sup>Mers *Papers*, folder 11, December 6, 1936, Fred Halistrap to Follette. Johnny Kane's real name was James Nancy.

<sup>32</sup>Mers, *Working the Waterfront*, pp. 168-169.

<sup>35</sup>Galveston *Daily News*, December 9, 1936, December 14, 1936, December 16, 1936; National Maritime Union, Bernard Raskin, "*On a True Course*" *The Story of the National Maritime Union of America AFL-CIO*, (Washington D.C., 1967), p. 37; Richard Boyer, *The Dark Ship*, (Boston, 1947), p. 198.

<sup>36</sup>Galveston *Daily News*, December 11, 1936.

<sup>37</sup>Galveston, *Daily News*, December 2, 1936, December 12, 1936. December 14, 1936.

<sup>38</sup>Galveston *Daily News*, December 12, 1936; *Mers Papers*, folder 10, Robert Gurtov to Bill Follette, December 18, 1936.

<sup>39</sup>Houston *Press*, December 24, 1936.

<sup>40</sup>*Mers Papers*, folder 10, December 25, 1936; Houston *Press*, December 25, 1936.

<sup>41</sup>New York *times*, December 30, 1936; Houston *Post*, December 25, 1936. The editorial is found in the Houston *Press*, December 26, 1936.

<sup>42</sup>*Mers Papers*, folder 10, Robert Gurtov to Bill Follette, December 18, 1936. N.J. Nicholson to Bill Follette, December 21, 1936, N.J. Nicholson to Bill Follette, December 23, 1936.

<sup>43</sup>Houston *Press*, January 4, 1937.

<sup>44</sup>Houston *Press*, January 9, 1937.

<sup>45</sup>New York *Times*, January 22, 1937, January 25, 1937.

<sup>46</sup>U.S., Department of Commerce, National Labor Relations Board, *Decisions and Orders of the National Labor Relations Board*, (Washington D.C., 1935-present), vols. II, IV, V, VI, VII, various pages.

<sup>47</sup>National Maritime Union, *Constitution of the National Maritime Union of America*, (New York, n.d. (1937?)), see Article XVII, Sec. 2; National Maritime Union, *Proceedings of the First Constitutional Convention of the National Maritime Union of America*, (New York, 1937), pp. 269-270.

<sup>48</sup>Willett, "Joe Curran," 78-136; Donald Willett, "The 1939 Tanker Strike," *International Journal of Maritime History* Vol. II (June, 1990), pp. 155-173.