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# Dockers matter/Dock matters:

## labour and race relations in Durban and the San Francisco Bay Area, 1960s and 1970s

"A victory for the dock workers is a victory for the entire working class of South Africa."

"The revival of the workers' movement in the factories, mines and stores was arguably the most important development of the 1970s."[1]

As every student of South African history knows, in January 1973 the largest strike wave involving black workers erupted since the 1946. This series of strikes, in the greater Durban area, involved upwards of 100,000 workers from more than 150 companies, shocked the nation, and, as later became clear, reignited the national anti-apartheid movement that had been largely quiescent since the brutal repression of the early 1960s.

Similarly, a series of important, radical social movements emerged in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s. It is widely understood that many of the social movements took inspiration from both the era's Southern-based civil rights movement as well as activists and civil society groups in the San Francisco Bay Area (SFBA).

1 Congress of Democrats, July 1954, cited in David Hemson, "Class Consciousness and Migrant Workers: dockworkers of Durban" (PhD dissertation: Warwick University, 1979), p. 360 (fn 108, p. 380); South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, vol. 2: *1970-1980* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2004), p. xii.

Significantly, across most of the entire 20th century historians of the SFBA and Durban both note the centrality of organized dockworkers[2] in the social movements of these two metropolitan areas. Further, scholars of both nations have noted the influence of these metro areas on their respective nations. However, when histories move from local (i.e. of a city) to national history (history of an entire nation), somehow the dockworkers—their members, strikes, unions, and impacts—disappear. My book project, of which this paper represents a very early and tentative product, attempts to connect what happened on the docks of one very important port city to the history of the nation, specifically by centering the dockworkers and their activism into the larger story of erupting social movements that transformed each nation.

This paper—and the larger project—both seek to do so comparatively, believing that there are myriad fascinating and instructive parallels. Moreover, studying one of these sites will open new avenues of research and discovery in the other. Hence, to reiterate, my goal is both large and comparative in scope but only at the very beginning phases of research and analysis. In other words, my work in progress is even more in progress than most works in progress.

This paper examines dockworkers in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa and Oakland, California in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s. In both ports, historically among the busiest in each nation, dockworkers have proud, strong, long-standing, and self-consciously militant traditions of strikes, organizing, and unionism. In both cities, powerful labour, race, and other social movements repeatedly exploded in the 20th century, particularly in the sixties and seventies. This paper argues that dockworkers were central to many of the struggles for social justice in both places. In this paper, I am less interested in examining how dockers in these two cities empowered themselves and more in how they encouraged others to act, along with how dockers and their unions participated in and/or contributed to other social movements. While the term is less widely used in the States, in South Africa these efforts sometimes are referred to as social movement unionism though I am mindful that black workers,

2Though mindful of the many different types of work in the marine transport industry, as well as variations in different ports and nations, in this essay I will use the terms dockworker, docker, and longshoreman interchangeably.

Durban's dockers included, were prohibited from formal unions in this era.[3] While, in the larger project, I intend on exploring a variety of social movements, here I want to highlight the role that dockworkers and their unions played in race-based social movements, generally referred to as civil rights in the US and anti-apartheid in SA.

By exploring the historic similarities and differences of these workers, their efforts, and their organizations experiences, we can learn more about both groups, what is unique about each group and nation, and what might be more universal. We can discern how these cities shape their workers and how the workers shape their cities. We can see how the processes of industrialization and urbanization interact and play out, simultaneously shaped by movements from below and the nation-state and corporations from above. We can examine how race relations develop in groups, cities, and nations. We also can explore the role of worker activity (e.g. strikes, unionism) as they relate to anti-racist struggles in both cities and nations. Specifically, we can seek to understand how dockers were uniquely situated to play pivotal roles in each city's labour and other social movements. Finally, using comparative and occasionally transnational approaches (albeit not the latter in this paper), I want to discover what Durban teaches us about Oakland and vice versa.

One of this paper's main arguments is that the central role of workers generally and Durban dockers particularly (though the latter not given enough credit) in the resurgent anti-apartheid movement offers a corrective to the current historiography of America in the 1960s and 1970s. In the US historiography, the labour movement plays little role in most accounts of the era's history or social movements. Indeed, the laundry list of US social movements at that time include civil rights, women's rights, antiwar, students, environmentalism, Chicanos, American Indians, homosexuals—seemingly every possible group of Americans except organized labour. However, in the San Francisco Bay Area the powerful International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) already had been involved in many of these issues for decades, particularly

3On the US side, see the very influential Robert Rodgers Korstad. *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

related to advancing the black freedom struggle. Hence, what the history of Durban offers Americanists is that worker movements cannot simply be ignored—especially when there is the convergence of a powerful labour union like the ILWU and myriad other social movements. Indeed, one of my larger project's primary objectives, on the US side, is to make more people aware of how vital the ILWU was to the SFBA's exploding social movements; i.e. taking a page from the South African historiography and applying it to the US one.

## Historiography

While some scholars have brilliantly compared some aspects of the histories of SA and the US, there are still a great many that have been explored hardly at all. The attraction of comparing these two societies is based less upon similarities in the respective size of population or economy than in the ways each has grappled with ethnic diversity and witnessed powerful, democratic social movements emerge to combat racial inequality. In fact, both societies ripped themselves apart due to racism and other forms of prejudice and, yet, both nations overcame the worst of these systems of racial oppression—all the while inspiring other peoples the world over with admittedly abstract promises of freedom and equality that have proven nearly impossible actually to achieve. Among the many differences: (post-) industrial vs. developing society; African Americans and immigrants who possessed citizenship rights vs. the formal denial of rights for the African majority; the existence of formal unions in the US in contrast to the legal denial of such worker rights for blacks, and; perhaps most significantly, the reality that African Americans were (and are) a distinct minority of the total population while black Africans were (and are) the overwhelming majority of South Africans. Every scholar must make accommodations for these (and other) divergent aspects of the US-SA comparison—most particularly attempting to achieve some sort of chronological convergence—but these differences often make for worthwhile examinations and have not proven to be insurmountable hurdles. A handful of historians, led in recent years by Peter Alexander and Rick Halpern, have examined

the intersections of labor and race in both societies and my research intends to build upon this small yet rich and emerging field.[4]

On the South African side, the history and importance of Durban's dockers owes an enormous debt to scholar-activist David Hemson. His mammoth, never published dissertation, not easy to come by in the United States, and smattering of articles over several decades provide the starting point for anyone interested in this subject. Hemson repeatedly has argued for the militant, class consciousness of Durban dockers, among the first group of urbanized, proletarian Africans in the country, though he does not spend much time connecting the dockers to the city at large (granted, they were more physically segregated than many other SA workers and far more so than on the US side).[5] Considering his own role in the labour and—by extension—anti-apartheid movements, forever interconnected in South Africa, as well as his long-standing, personal, and intimate experiences in Durban, it can be hard to argue against him. Nor am I attempting to do so in this paper; rather, I seek to build upon Hemson's work—both by comparing his conclusions to SFBA dockers as well as more linking the Durban waterfront to other parts of greater Durban. The other, much more recent, entry into this field is Bernard

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4The widely acknowledged "dean" of comparative SA-US history remains George Fredrickson. See, especially, *White Supremacy: A Comparative Study of American and South African History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) and *Black Liberation: A Comparative History of Black Ideologies in the United States and South Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). *Safundi: The Journal of South African and American Studies* devoted an entire issue, 7:1 (2006), to White Supremacy on its 25th anniversary. On comparative SA-US labour history, see the entire special issue devoted to the subject in *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30:1 (March 2004), especially Peter Alexander and Rick Halpern, "Introduction: Comparing Race and Labour in South Africa and the United States": 5-18.

5Key works by David Hemson include: "Class Consciousness and Migrant Workers"; "Dock workers, labour circulation, and class struggles in Durban, 1940 – 59," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 4:1 (1977): 88–124; "Beyond the Frontier of Control? Trade Unionism and the Labour Market in the Durban Docks," *Transformation* 30 (1996): 83-114; K.R. Cox & Hemson, "Mamdani and the politics of migrant labor in South Africa: Durban dockworkers and the difference that geography makes," *Political Geography* 27:2 (2008): 194-212.

Dubbeld, who has written a fine Master's thesis and compelling article on this topic. In his best piece, Dubbeld argued that dockers in Durban, whether previously militant or not, were defanged in the 1970s and '80s due to a combination of technology (containerization) and changes in global trade; in this matter, Dubbeld also is somewhat following Hemson, who offered such tentative thoughts in a 1996 essay. However, these same forces exist in every port in the world yet many dock unions remain relatively militant and strong—including in Durban and the SFBA.[6] Hence, Dubbeld wants to ignore the ongoing presence and relative strength of Durban dockers, now a vital part of the South African Transport and Allied Workers Union (SATAWU). This paper will not engage Dubbeld very much as his work largely is concerned with the 1980s. Of course, now there is a third historian on the scrum, Ralph Callebert, whose graduate work focuses upon the decades before 1959 and who seeks to challenge some of Hemson's claims on the urban and proletarian identities of Durban's dockforce. As for the relative importance in the anti-apartheid movement, until recently the dockers were well known among labour historians but not as much in the larger narrative. In 2007, though, the South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET) released the second volume in its planned five-volume, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, a herculean effort involving literally dozens of scholars. The second volume covered the decade from 1970 to 1980. While the labour movement—and even dockers –received greater treatment, readers were left with the confusing reality that there were not one but two chapters that examine labour's role! While not explicitly noted, a careful reader would note that one chapter was written by two black South Africans and the other by three white South Africans, including two senior scholars who also were involved personally in the labour and anti-apartheid movements. What, in fact, a reader is supposed to conclude is unclear other than that the revived labour movement was an essential ingredient in the re-ignition of the freedom struggle. Jabulani Sithole and Sifiso Ndlovu acknowledge the dockers but do not explicitly link them to the 1973 strikes: "While there is unanimity that a sharp upswing in inflation and the

6 Bernard Dubbeld, "Labour Management and Technological Change: Stevedoring in Durban,
1959–1990." M.A. dissertation, University of Natal, 2002; "Breaking the Buffalo: The Transformation of Stevedoring Work in Durban between 1970 and 1990," in *Uncovering Labour in Information Revolutions, 1750–2000*, ed. by Aad Blok and Greg Downey (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Also see Fredrickson, *White Supremacy*, chapter 5.

accompanying lack of wage increases among African workers, in particular, and the black workers, in general, were major causes of the strikes, what has remained elusive is why they first broke out in Durban." More surprising, given David Hemson's personal role, the following chapter—co-authored by Hemson, Martin Legassick, and Nicole Hemson—does not center the dock struggles in the 1973 strikes.[7]

On the US side, the ILWU has attracted a considerable amount of scholarly attention, presumably because its story is rich, important, and—to many whose sympathies lie with labour—inspiring. While Bruce Nelson's and Howard Kimeldorf's writings on the ILWU both are foundational, neither explores in much depth the post-WWII history nor does either focus his gaze upon the San Francisco metropolitan area in much depth; simply put, their objectives were not to connect the ILWU with the larger urban forces and history of the SFBA. David Wellman, like Kimeldorf more of a historical sociologist than historian, has written a book-length study on Local 10, the SFBA branch of the ILWU, but his approach was, basically, ethnographic and examined the internal workings of this union; his conclusion was that the union and work created—even into the 1990s—a culture of solidarity. While Local 10 forms the backbone of my work, I seek to connect it to forces and struggles off the waterfront. Thus, despite widespread awareness of these workers' power and influence, especially on the waterfront, they have not been fully connected to the larger milieux to which they belonged.[8]

Another historiographical field that this paper engages is how labour figures into the wider SFBA, one of the major centers of US activism and turbulence in the heady days of the 1960s and 1970s, especially how the ILWU impacted civil rights. It might seem that every significant social movement of the era either arose or expanded in the SFBA: the civil rights,

7Jabulani Sithole and Sifiso Ndlovu, "The Revival of the Labour Movement, 1970-1980," SADET, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, vol. 2, pp. 190-191; Dave Hemson, Martin Legassick and Nicole Ulrich, "White Activists and the Revival of the Workers' Movement," SADET, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa*, vol. 2, p. 254. Of course, Ralph Callebert did his M.A. work at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. I have had the chance to read some of his works in progress, including "Urban means towards a rural goal: Livelihood strategies of dock workers in Durban in the 1950s," Northeast Workshop on Southern Africa (NEWSA), April 2010, Burlington, Vermont, USA.

New Left, women's, antiwar, student, gay, counterculture, American Indian, Chicano, and other movements, the list goes on and on. However, arguably the most important social movement across most of US history, the labour movement, is almost entirely absent from most discussions of the sixties and seventies. Of course, the US labour movement was still in an early phase of its long, painful decline as an important force in American life; however, the SFBA generally and the waterfront particularly has proven an exception to this trend. In fact, the ILWU undertook the longest strike in its history in 1971 and struck Chilean cargo ships to protest the coup d'etat against Salvador Allende. Yet, the thousands of black, white, and brown longshore workers, belonging to one of the most militant and progressive organizations in the United States, are invisible in discussions of both the SFBA and social movements of the era. While there is no single history of the SFBA in this era, neither the leading anthology nor any of the important surveys of the 1960s era examines labour in any significance, let alone the dockers of the SFBA. Similarly, most treatments of the civil rights movement, and its sister, the Black Power Movement, make little mention of the role of labour's contributions or that many of the blacks involved in the civil rights movement had schooled themselves in labour unions.[9] Notably, Peniel Joseph's 2009 historiographical essay in the emerging field of "Black Power Studies" totally ignores the ILWU (and organized labour) in analyzing this subject, despite the clear leftist orientation of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP) and the reality that almost all

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8Bruce Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront: Seamen, Longshoremen, and Unionism in the 1930s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990) and *Divided We Stand: American Workers and the Struggle for Black Equality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); Howard Kimeldorf, *Reds or Rackets? The Making of Radical and Conservative Unions on the Waterfront* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); David T. Wellman, *The Union Makes Us Strong: Radical Unionism on the San Francisco Waterfront* (New York: Cambridge University Press 1995).

9Exceptions to this generalization include: the role of A. Philip Randolph upon Martin Luther King, Jr.; see Paula Pfeffer, *A. Philip Randolph, Pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1996). Mike Honey's most recent work on MLK and labour; *Going Down Jehrico Road: The Memphis Strike, Martin Luther King's Last Campaign* (NY: W.W. Norton, 2007). And the impact of E.D. Nixon, of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, on the Montgomery bus boycott; see Taylor Branch, *Parting The Waters; America In The King Years 1954-63* (NY: Simon & Schuster: 1988).

urban blacks were working class or poor. I believe that the ILWU and its members—as well as their strategic location in Oakland, the national center of Black Power with the birth of the Panthers—may have had particularly important roles. It is the contention of my project that members of ILWU Local 10 (SFBA longshore workers) and ILWU Local 6 (the area's warehouse workers) had significant influence on other social movements, and especially race-related ones—civil rights and black power.[10]

Finally, at least a few words on the history of longshore workers and comparative history, are in order. In many nations and on every continent, dockworkers have been among the most likely to strike and organize unions in the modern era. The history of militant dockers—in Australia, Chile, Germany, Kenya, and many other nations--is remarkable. Docker activism suggests that there is something significant about the nature of this work, the strategic location of workers in the global economy as well as the cosmopolitan nature of port cities. Accordingly, many historians have documented and analyzed these workers. Most significantly, the International Institute of Social History spearheaded an international, collaborative effort that resulted in a two-volume series entitled Dock Workers: International Explorations in Comparative Labour History. This collection is invaluable, particularly the introduction by Sam Davies and Klaus Weinhauer, in explaining why "this important occupational group" should be "considered in a comparative fashion on an international scale." Among the collection's "thematic essays" is one by Bruce Nelson on "Ethnicity, race and the logic of solidarity," which is a useful starting point for integrating such modes of analysis into my own work, though Nelson largely looks at how dockers and unions grappled with diversity in their own ranks, rather than how dockers used their power to promote, for instance, a racially inclusive society, the focus of this paper. Book-length comparative analysis of longshore workers has lagged a bit

10James Brook, Chris Carlsson, Nancy J. Peters, eds., *Reclaiming San Francisco: History, Politics, Culture*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2001). Among popular surveys that generally ignore labour as well dockers as in the SFBA, see Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam, 1983); Alexander Bloom and Wini Breines, eds., *"Takin' it to the streets": A Sixties Reader*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). Peniel E. Joseph, "The Black Power Movement: A State of the Field," *Journal of American History* 96:3 (2009): 751-776.

behind. Colin Davis has written the only book-length project, comparing how a rank-and-file dockers' movement in London proved much more successful than one in New York City after WWII.[11] The best known book on any group of African longshoremen is Frederick Cooper's On the African Waterfront; his focus is "the late colonial period and examines the ways in which the colonial authorities attempted to counter the threat of unreliable and antagonistic 'casual labour' at the port of Mombasa by creating a stable, urbanized, and carefully surveyed African working class." Cooper's book, then, would be more useful were this study concentrating on the era before 1960, when a radically new system of labor relations were imposed from above in Durban.[12]

The port cities of Durban and Oakland

Without going into too much detail, it is worth taking a quick look at the demographics, political economy and geography of these port cities, Durban and Oakland—though, really, Oakland must be considered within the context and history of the entire San Francisco Bay area. In short, these two places share enough in common that a comparison of labour and other social movements in these respective cities is worthwhile.

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11Sam Davies, et al. eds., *Dock Workers: International Explorations in Comparative Labour History, 1790-1970*, 2 vols. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000), esp. Bruce Nelson, "Ethnicity, race and the logic of solidarity: dock workers in international perspective," pp. 657-680; Colin Davis, *Waterfront Revolts: New York and London Dockworkers, 1946-61* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

12Frederick Cooper, *On the African Waterfront: Urban Disorder and the Transformation of Work in Colonial Mombasa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987). Quote from David Gordon, "Workers and Decolonization," H-Africa, June 1997: www.hnet.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=1076 accessed on 26 February 2010. Also see Frederick J. Kaijage, "The War of Clubs: life, labour and struggles of the Tanga dockworkers," in *Dock Workers*, Vol. 2, pp. 290-318; John Iliffe, "The Creation of Group Consciousness: A History of the dockworkers of Dar es Salaam," in *The Development of an African Working Class*, R. Sandbrook and R. Cohen, eds. (London: 1975), pp. 49-72.

The port has been integral to Durban's identity and economy since its "discovery" by the Portuguese and settlement by the British, though native Africans had lived in the vicinity for hundreds of years before that. In 1823 the British chose to locate a trading post next to Durban Bay precisely because it offered the best natural harbor on the eastern coast of Africa, south of Portuguese-controlled Lourenço Marques (now Maputo) in Mozambique. Durban has been for some decades and remains the largest port in South Africa, surpassing Cape Town, historically the country's largest port. As Steven Friedman succinctly describes 1970s Durban, "This coastal city was, at the time of the strikes [1973], South Africa's major port, its third largest city and its second most important industrial area." To this day, the area referred to as "The Point" is the site of Durban's shipping industry, unlike many long-time port cities which have seen the old port areas decline as massive cranes needed to move modern shipping containers have come to dominate. In the early 1970s the city's population was more than one million and growing rapidly. Of course, Durban is best known for its conspicuously large Indian population, relatively large English population (as opposed to Afrikaner), and relative homogeneity of its African population, being primarily amaZulu.[13]

Similarly, Europeans who occupied the San Francisco Bay Area did so because it proved the best natural harbor on the Pacific coast of North America, though American Indians had lived in the area for centuries prior. From the moment that the United States took (Alta) California from Mexico in the 1840s, and perhaps into the 1970s, the SFBA served as the nation's primary Pacific coast port. Shipping has been central to San Francisco's and the entire region's identity and economy for the colonial and postcolonial period though it has been supplanted by the port

13Steven Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today: African Workers in Trade Unions, 1970-1984* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985), p. 63. For good places to start with modern Durban history are Paul Maylam and Iain Edwards, eds., *The People's City: African Life in Twentieth-Century Durban* (Pietersmaritzburg and Portsmouth, NH: University of Natal Press and Heinemann, 1996) and Bill Freund and Vishnu Padayachee, eds. *(D)urban vortex: South African city in transition* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2002). A short history of the city can be found at: www.durban.gov.za/durban/discover/history/durbans-history/introduction-to-the-history-of-durban accessed 27 February 2010. The best book on containerization is Marc Levinson, *The Box: How the Shipping Container Made the World Smaller and the World Economy Bigger* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

of Los Angeles (San Pedro-Long Beach) in the last several decades. San Francisco also is a major center for finance and corporate headquarters, going back to the mid 19th century and extending into the late 20th century, when Los Angeles surpassed the SFBA for regional dominance. Nevertheless, the SFBA remains the second most important metropolitan region on America's West coast. Due to the containerization revolution of marine transport, most of the area's shipping traffic shifted from San Francisco's Embarcadero to the "East Bay," especially West Oakland, where the city of Oakland undertook major expansion and renovations of port facilities from the early 1960s into the mid 1970s. Indeed, shipping became the city's leading industry, and Oakland became one of the busiest containers ports in the world in the early 1970s. The San Francisco Bay area is quite diverse. The City of SF historically was Irish and German with the largest Chinese population in the entire United States, though they suffered tremendous discrimination for many decades; over time, the city also came to house large numbers of Mexican Americans, other peoples from Latin America, some Filipinos and other Asians. Meanwhile, "across the bay," Oakland was—and remains—the largest city and, along with its neighbor to the north, Berkeley, became a haven for Southern-born African Americans during the so-called 2nd Great Migration, beginning during WWII and carrying through the 1960s.[14]

## The Unusual Militancy of Dockers

Just as there are sufficient similarities between Durban and the SFBA to merit comparison of their general histories, so, too, does each port possess a history of: dockworker militancy, including strikes that rocked not just their respective cities but also their nations; waterfront workforces that are heavily, or almost entirely, black; militant, racially inclusive,

14Robert W. Cherny, "Longshoremen of San Francisco Bay, 1849-1960," in *Dock Workers*, vol. 2, pp. 113-115; Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), pp. 153-155, 206-209; William Issel and Robert V. Cherny, *San Francisco, 1865-1932: Politics, Power, and Urban Development* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Alexander Saxton, *Indispensible Enemy: Labor and the Anti-Chinese Movement in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971).

decidedly left-wing union traditions; dock unions that have proved influential in their respective labour movements, and; dockers that contributed to other burgeoning social movements.

Dockworkers are a fascinating lot, frequently among the most militant workers in many nations. Many have noted that dockers seem to be more ready and able to strike and unionize than many other types of wageworkers. To oversimplify, the explanation for their militancy and power derives from their collective labours that breeds solidarity, willingness to act, and strategic location in the global market economy. To say a bit more, the ever-expanding reach of capitalism and centrality of marine transport to the global economy have provided—indeed, still provide—openings for strategically situated workers, such as dockers, in promoting their own interests as well as a worker-centered, internationalist, egalitarian agenda.[15]

Another fascinating aspect of comparing dockers of two different nations is in the combining of the local and the global, as Saskia Sassen has done in her influential work, The Global City, and advocate others to do. So far, Colin Davis has been the only historian who has attempted to do so in a book as far as labour historians of port workers; for instance, Davis grapples with how communist parties in the US and UK were shaped by domestic forces as well as the international Cold War. Transnationalism is the other, increasingly popular method that assists scholars in "examining the interplay between the local, the national, and the global." I envision using a transnational approach in another portion of this project, specifically how the SFBA members of Local 10 boycotted South African ships in order to protest apartheid in 1984 and later. Fascinatingly, due to the role model provided by the ILWU, Durban members of SATAWU have boycotted a Chinese ship loaded with weaponry destined for Robert Mugabe's regime in Zimbabwe and Israeli vessels during and after the Israeli invasion of Gaza in 2009. While, obviously, nation-states still matter (just look at the roles of the state in the divergent

15Davies, et al. ed., *Dock Workers*. I have explored another example of militant longshore unionism in *Wobblies on the Waterfront: Interracial Unionism in Progressive-Era Philadelphia* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007). Another book that provides a good explanation of longshore (and sailor) radicalism is Nelson, *Workers on the Waterfront*.

paths of the US and SA over the course of the 20th century), connecting local and global by way of Sassen's "global cities" offers a relatively new method of examining and comparing the past.[16]

With these introductory and historiographical sections complete, this paper now can examine how dockworkers in Durban and Oakland mightily contributed to the larger labour and racial struggles exploding in each in the 1960s and 1970s.

Durban dockers: The (surprisingly) missing link in the Durban strikes and aftershocks

Dockworker actions proved vital to the city's black working class as well as to other social movements, notably the anti-apartheid movement. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the state brutally repressed black working class and anti-apartheid struggles, resulting in a largely quiescent black working class in the 1960s. Repression against Durban's dockers (in 1958-9) predicted repression against social movements more generally. Nevertheless, dockers again led the charge of Durban's black workforce, striking in 1969, threatening to in 1971, and striking again in late 1972.[17] This last strike, in particular, helped launch the mammoth series of strikes in early 1973 that shaped the trajectory of the anti-apartheid movement and, ultimately, entire nation in the mid-1970s and beyond.

In several earlier waterfront strike waves, 1941 and 1942 and again in 1958 and 1959, the state (many dockers were employed by the South African Railway and Harbours administration) and private employers took extreme measures—firing the entire dock force in order to squash worker militancy. The 1959 strike evolved out of a national stayaway campaign being waged by

16Saskia Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991); Kornel Chang, "Circulating Race and Empire: Transnational Labor Activism and the Politics of Anti-Asian Agitation in the Anglo-American Pacific World, 1880-1910," *Journal of American History* 96:3 (2009): 680. On SATAWU and Israel-Palestine, see www.satawu.org.za/international/10-international

17The standard treatment remains Hemson, "Class Consciousness and Migrant Workers."

the ANC and other anti-apartheid groups—demonstrating the linkages between economic and political struggles. The fact that employers had to crack down so vehemently and repeatedly inside of twenty years suggests that dockers were quite a militant bunch and that the work must have something to do with it—given that the workforce turned over several times.[18] Ironically, the interlocking systems of labour and race relations on the docks (and South Africa generally) contributed to the militancy that the state and business elites sought to contain.[19] Moreover, the fact that the great majority of Durban dockers were Zulu, who hailed from rural parts of KwaZulu and supposedly were quite conservative, yet repeatedly acted with tremendous militancy, suggests that the work regime on the docks was a major, perhaps the major, factor.[20]

Durban's dockers willingness to strike repeatedly, despite massive repression, contributed mightily to the militancy of black workers in Durban and across Natal in the years after World War II. Hemson contends, "In Durban the base was laid for the mass organization of industrial workers which developed in the 1950s with the growth of SACTU (the South African Congress of Trade Unions), a phenomenon which placed the Durban area as a leading centre of militant trade unionism, mass political activity, and a high level of strike activity." Hemson's body of work—foundational to our knowledge and understanding of Durban dockers and the role of the working class in Durban and all of South Africa's struggles—is supplemented by the important dissertation of Robert Lambert, "Political Unionism in South Africa: The South African

18Hemson, "Beyond the Frontier of Control?": 84 and "In the Eye of the Storm: Dock-Workers in Durban," in *The People's City*, pp. 155-159.

19For a far more in-depth treatment of the interconnected relationship of repression from above and resistance from below in South Africa, see Anthony Marx, *Making Race and Nation: A Comparison of the United States, South Africa, and Brazil* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

20Discussion with David Hemson, Durban, 13 July 2009; discussions with Jane Barrett, Johannesburg, July 2009; Ralph Callebert, "Urban means towards a rural goal."

Congress of Trade Unions, 1955-1965." Lambert's work lends further weight to the contention that Durban's working class was at the forefront of the nation's labour movement and that SACTU played a leading role in the era's anti-apartheid struggle.[21] Many dockers (many were black but Indians also played key roles) were active in SACTU in Natal. For instance, Curnick Ndlovu, a resident of Cato Manor, found a job as a "casual dock worker" in 1953 and continued working on the waterfront into the mid 1960s. He belonged to the South African Railway and Harbour Workers Union (SARHWU), a black union whose origins dated back to the 1930s, and SACTU, of which SARHWU was a founding member. As was the case with other longshore activists in SARHWU, Ndlovu became a regional commander of Umkhonto we Sizwe ("Spear of the Nation" or MK) in Durban in the 1960s. According to the circumspect Ndlovu (he was being interviewed in 1983, after all), he was active in various "day-to-day struggles" in this period, which ultimately earned him an arrest and prison sentence on Robben Island, where he remained for almost twenty years.[22]

Clearly Durban dockers were quite militant and organized—though most did not belong to any formal union, a decent number did belong to SARHWU.[23] Given previous rounds of firings in the aftermath of labor activity, the dockers already had learned that formal organizations might inhibit their efforts to improve their conditions. Accordingly, SACTU had a hard time lining up members on the docks, though Rob Lambert contends about 500 belonged to SARHWU. And, notably, two leaders of SARHWU, Billy Nair and Moses Mabhida, were

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21Hemson, "Dock workers, labour circulation, and class struggles in Durban": 90; Robert Lambert, "Political Unionism in South Africa: The South African Congress of Trade Unions, 1955-1965" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1988).

22Curnick Ndlovu interview, conducted by Jenni Duggan . KCAV 853. Workshop on African Urban Life in 20th Century Durban, University of Natal, Durban. 26-7 October 1983. Killie Campbell Africana Library, University of KwaZulu-Natal. Arguably the most notable SARHWU longshore leader was Archie Sibeko (also known as Zola Zembe), who became one of the national leaders of the MK; see Margaret Kiloh and Archie Sibeko (Zola Zembe), *A Fighting Union: An Oral History of the South African Railway and Harbour Workers' Union* (Randburg: Ravan Press, 2000).

among the defendants in the legendary Treason Trials. In this moment, and not for the last time, the experience of the Durban waterfront converged with the national story, as a major upsurge in activism occurred in the late 1950s only to be suppressed brutally by the early 1960s.[24]

Of course, black workers, Durban dockers included, also suffered from a host of racist laws and labour regimes that dramatically restricted their rights. The superior power of the apartheid state and employers, on the docks oft one and the same, was momentarily triumphant. As David Hemson notes, "the comparatively 'free' form of labour [migrant workers paid on a daily basis on the Durban docks] was transformed into contract labour under a strict labour regime" by the end of the 1950s, controlled exclusively by the Durban Stevedoring Labour Supply Company.[25] As the Labour History Group succinctly summarized the labor situation:

> In the 1960s there were very few strikes. When workers went on strike, the government acted strongly and quickly to keep workers weak and afraid. Very few workers were members of unions. They remembered how SACTU had organised, but they also remembered the government repression. Some workers were afraid to join unions. They had seen too many of their leaders,

23I have no desire to get into a debate with Ralph Callebert or David Hemson, over how class conscious Durban dockers were, especially prior to 1960. Hemson has argued for the proletarian nature of the dockers. Meanwhile, Callebert—while praising Hemson's work more than once—does seems to reaching a very different conclusion for workers prior to 1959: namely, that Durban dockers were drawn from a rural population and willingly returned there after retiring from the docks and that these men seemed to resist proletarianization, which generally was accompanied by becoming permanently urban. See Callebert, "Urban means towards a rural goal," pp. 28-29; Hemson, "Class Consciousness," p. 718.

24Lambert, "Political Unionism in South Africa," pp. 481-482.

25Muriel Horrell, *South African Trade Unionism: a study of a divided working class* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1966); Hemson, "Dock workers, labour circulation, and class struggles in Durban": 89.

> banned, banished and pt in jail. Some workers did not want to trust trade unions any more. They said that the leaders had fled and gone overseas.[26]

However, given the long-standing activist tradition on the waterfront, it should come as no surprise that Durban dockworkers returned to the struggle prior to other workers, in April 1969. Approximately 2,000 dockworkers struck, their demands being for wage increases, predictable given the poverty of most African workers. Also predictably, given previous strikes, the strikers were brutally treated by the police, fired, and "endorsed out" (i.e. deported) from Durban. Subsequently, also as in prior clashes, employers replaced the striking workers with fresh recruits from rural KwaZulu, who supposedly were more "traditional" in their outlook, loyal to the Zulu royalty and apartheid state, and without class consciousness. As Hemson writes, "The strike of dock workers in 1969 signalled the reawakening of black working class action after the suppression of the labour movement in the early 1960s." Oddly, despite other claims made in his chapter on 1973, Steven Friedman agrees with Hemson, "In 1969, Durban dock workers struck for more pay and their stoppage was later seen as the start of a new worker militancy." In a different article, Hemson ironically notes that the dockers 1969 strike came at "precisely the same time as the ANC and SACP had concluded at the Morogoro Conference that mass among the working class had been exhausted as a means of resistance to apartheid." At that conference, a letter from Ray Alexander on how to revive the labour movement importantly highlighted Durban's stevedores: We must organise under any name—the Mutual Benefit Societies, Co-ops. We may even have to consider utilising the 'Works Committee'. It was the Works Committee at Durban Docks that led the dockers' strike this month…" That strike also helped inspire radical students at the University of Natal-Durban: "As a result of the strike by the dockworkers, activists launched the idea of students undertaking research into the wages of black workers as a means of organising them."[27]

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26Labour History Group, *Durban Strikes* (Salt River: Labour History Group, 1987), p. 2, Killie Campbell Africana Library, University of KwaZulu-Natal.

27Hemson, "Beyond the Frontier of Control?": 84 and "Dock workers, labour circulation, and class struggles in Durban": 123; Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 44; Hemson, "In the

The dockers resumed their struggle, yet again and without any formal labor organization, just two years later, briefly striking in 1971 and again October 1972. In this latter strike the workers sought to avenge their fallen comrades from 1969—just like in the 1940s and 1950s, when dockers demanded the return of their deported leader, Zulu Phungula. But the dockers' '72 strike was not spontaneous by any means; rather, it was the culmination of many months of growing anger and agitation in their effort to raise wage rates—and demonstrated remarkable organization despite the lack of an actual trade union.[28]

Three months earlier, in July 1972, several hundred dockers audaciously appeared at a hearing of the Department of Labour's Wage Board to demand a raise, with the active support of the Durban Student Wages Commission. As Steven Friedman summarizes, "workers demanded that their pay be raised from R8.50 a week to the poverty datum line of R18 and said they would appeal to their 'homeland' 'governments if it was not." The workers also wanted higher rates for dangerous and holiday work along with shorter shifts. Friedman and many others have commented, African wages in the early 1970s were incredibly low and inflation, including for "basic goods," had soared by 40%. Morris Ndlovu, who found work as a "stevedore" in Durban around 1963 and was still working there in 1979, recollected the strikes in 1972-73 were caused by "poverty, hard work, poor treatment." While no one disputes the material suffering of Durban's black population, to this historian's gaze it seems crystal clear that a series of events were building in 1972 that, it seems hard to dispute, contributed significantly to the strikes in other Durban industries that exploded at the start of 1973.[29]

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Eye of the Storm," p. 160; Hemson, Legassick, and Ulrich, pp. 248 (Alexander quote), 251-252.

28Hemson, "In the Eye of the Storm," p. 160.

29Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, pp. 46, 62; Morris Ndlovu Interview. Stevedore life, unions, 1973 strikes, 50 min. KCAV 183. 20 June 1979, Durban. Interview by Deanne Collins and Andrew Manson. Killie Campbell Africana Library, University of KwaZulu-Natal. I believe

Not only did hundreds of dockers boldly push for these wage increases (never forget that previous docker activism was met by mass firings), they also challenged the authority of their Zulu foremen, who often were corrupt and generally detested by the workers for collaborating with management; this hatred was particularly directed at the senior induna, J.B. Buthelezi. As long-time, influential Durban labour activist Harriet Bolton later recalled, "for years, the board's hearing had been attended by an 'induna' or African foreman who employers had appointed to represent workers—his chief role was to thank the employers for their efforts on workers' behalf. To the consternation of the board, the stevedores angrily challenged his right to speak for them—and his claim to be a dock worker." Bolton went on, "The board's faces were a picture…I don't think they'd ever heard a real worker speak at a hearing before."[30]

Others sympathetic to the dockers also recalled that July 1972 meeting as being remarkable. Halton Cheadle, one of the key student activists at the University of Natal who belonged to the Wages Commission that strove to help black workers, later noted:

> I remember the docks had a Wage Board hearing in 1972. They had a little room in the Labour Department building, off the Esplanade. The room only had seats for 30 or 40 people, but 200 dock workers arrived. As was usual in those days, the workers were represented by an induna from the dock hostel. When he got up to speak for the workers, they all shouted him down. It was absolute chaos.

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Morris Ndlovu has no family relation to Curnick Ndlovu, a common name. The newest, in-depth treatment of the Student Wages Commission and the Wage Board hearings in 1972 is Grace Davie, "Strength in Numbers: The Durban Student Wages Commission, Dockworkers and the Poverty Datum Line, 1971–1973," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 33:2 (2007): 401-420. While, I believe, Davie exaggerates her main point—after all, even most dockers, let alone the tens of thousands of other workers who struck in 1973, had no contact with the Wages Commission people—the article's thesis has value, demonstrating significant linkages between some workers and student radicals. Also see Hemson, Legassick, and Ulrich, pp. 252-254.

30Hemson repeatedly notes the anger directed at Buthelezi; see Class Consciousness," chapter 7; Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, pp. 46, 62; Labour History Group, *Durban Strikes*, p. 6; Davie, "Strength in Numbers": esp. 413-416. Hannah Keal is doing her graduate thesis on the life and work of Harriet Bolton.

> After that the government changed the law so that the chairman of the Wage Board could decide whether he would allow people to come to the meeting.[31]

Friedman notes that this hearing was "an early example of activist attempts to offer workers a platform" but also that dockers had been agitating for wage increases prior to the involvement of student radicals, including a brief-threatened September 1971 strike that apparently resulted in a 30% wage increase. Hemson, uniquely capable of combining personal experiences along with scholarly research, recounts "an extraordinary letter from 'The Stevedoring Workers' to the Wage Board in 1972 who demanded the return of 'those who stood for us in 1969'." Thus, as Hemson points out, "The letter provided concrete evidence of an underground network which did not declare itself even when open trade-unionism started among dock-workers at about that time." Former members of SACTU, the MK, some other ANC or SACP underground cells all seem possible if not yet fully uncovered. Bheki (Harold) Nxasana is one example of the linkages between the ANC underground, SACTU, and dockers; in 1972:

> Nxasana was employed by the Benefit Fund as an organiser, speaker, and translator. Interviewed in1981, he recalled that after they had re-established SACTU: 'The Special Branch arrived and took me to their offices and told me we couldn't do this and must disband. So we contacted the Wages Commission and they took over our members and established a Benefit Fund. This was the start of the unions.'[32]

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31Labour History Group, *Durban Strikes*, p. 6. In "The Revival of the Labour Movement," Sithole and Ndlovu also cover some of this ground, pp. 202-203.

32Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, p. 62; Hemson, "In the Eye of the Storm," p. 160; Hemson, "Trade Unionism and the Struggle for Liberation in South Africa," *Capital and Class* 4-6 (1978): 22-23; L. Douwes Dekker, D. Hemson, J.S. Kane-Berman, J. Lever and L. Schlemmer, "Case Studies in African Labour Action in South Africa and Namibia (South West Africa)," in *The Development of an African Working Class*, R. Sandbrook and R. Cohen, eds. (London: 1975), p. 212; Nxasana quote from Hemson, Legassick, and Ulrich, p. 253. On SACTU in exile and working underground, see Sithole and Ndlovu, pp.. 211-220.

By October 1972, however, the Wage Board had not issued its ruling yet and the workers decided that they could wait no longer. First, workers struck at Maydon Wharf. Ten days later, workers struck at the Point, the main part of the port and nearly opposite Maydon. This strike shut down all traffic in the harbor. One docker who worked at the Point and participated in the strike, identified only as Mr. Zulu in a 1987 interview, recounted the beginnings:

> There was a pamphlet in Buthelezi's office (a "welfare officer," perhaps an induna), and other pamphlets on the walls. The pamphlets said there was going to be a strike. When the date of the strike came we heard a voice and a whistle. Somebody was shouting and whistling in the compound [workers lived in hostels near the docks]. Somebody was shouting "Nobody is going to work". And somebody answered on the other side.
>
> All the compounds were shouting like that. They were saying: "Asiyi emsebenzini, sifuna imali yethu". Those who tried to go to work were met with bottles which were thrown at them, and they ran back. Everybody moved out of the compounds.
>
> When this happened Buthelezi disappeared. The workers shouted for him. They said: "He is always standing like a god at the gates, but look today. He will if only we find him in the street."[33]

Importantly for subsequent strike actions, the dockers refused to elect a delegation and, rather, told management their demands by way of shouting them from their group; Morris Ndlovu recalled how all of the strikers went to management to demand a raise to R18 per week, not just their leaders. This tactic was noteworthy given the repression of the 1969 (and earlier) strikes. While the number of strikers is somewhat in dispute (Hemson claimed 1,000, while Friedman said 2,000), the short-term result is not. Friedman writes, "The dockers returned to work after

33Labour History Group, *Durban Strikes*, pp. 6-7.

the company threatened to fire them," a credible threat given how employers had dealt with numerous previous strikes, including the one in 1969. However, the dockers did win one concession, for "employers did react by asking the wage board [Wages Commission] to speed up its investigation." In fact, just weeks later, in November, the Wage Board raised wages a little and some employers sweetened that raise slightly more, though, of course, the dockers received nothing like the R18 they had demanded. Despite something of a resolution, tensions remained; in December, dockers attacked several policemen and threw empty bottles at a police vehicle in the Point, after police attempted to arrest one worker.[34]

However, the significance of the 1972 strike was far greater than simply a minor improvement in the wages of the dockworkers—arguably, the strike also helped launch the legendary Durban strike wave that touched off in January 1973. Of course, the Durban strikes began the widely accepted "domino effect" of rising protests against apartheid. As Hemson writes, "On October 23, 1972 1,000 stevedores went on strike and signalled the beginnings of mass opposition to apartheid." He—and I—make such an assertion because "their strike and agitation was an advance shock wave of the earthquake of the 1973 strikes which followed and the opening of a new era of resistance."[35]

Dockers have been essential to many of the battles fought in Durban, not just on the waterfront but also in other workplaces and the war against apartheid. Yet, while acknowledged for their militancy, dockers' role in the most important labor struggle in Durban's history, the 1973 strike wave, seems quite downplayed. For instance, Steven Friedman's important survey

34Morris Ndlovu interview; Hemson, "Beyond the Frontier of Control?": 84; Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, pp. 45, 62; Labour History Group, *Durban Strikes*, p. 7; Robinduth Toli, "The origins of the Durban strikes, 1973" (M.A. thesis, History, University of Durban-Westville, 1991), p. 213.

35Hemson, "Beyond the Frontier of Control?": 84.

*Building Tomorrow Today* begins his second chapter with this line: "The 1970s began for South African employers early on the morning of January 9, 1973, when 2 000 workers at the Coronation Brick and Tile works on the outskirts of Durban gathered at a football field and demanded a pay raise." A bit later, Friedman writes, "African unionism had indeed died in the 1960s, but the train of events which began that morning would soon revive its spirit."[36] The most recent survey In fact, Durban's dockers not only foreshadowed but also helped shape the far better known Coronation strike that "officially" kicked off the 1973 Durban strikes.

As just noted, the dockers struck less than two months before the Coronation brick workers "officially" launched the wave and, clearly, were influenced by the dockers' earlier strike. In his fascinating, if little referenced, 1991 Master's thesis, Robinduth Toli convincingly argues that the dock strike in October 1972 was very influential on the Coronation workers, who are universally credited with launching the Durban strikes. As Toli notes, "the strike at Coronation was made possible when African workers, having been emboldened by the 1972 dock workers strike and having become acutely conscious of their problems were encouraged to take militant action on 9 January [1973]."[37] Thus, if the Coronation strike was central to starting the wave that energized the national movement against apartheid, then the dock strike that inspired those textile workers is as integral.

Toli begins his first chapter with the three factors that shaped the Coronation strike: economic decline, the emergence of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), and "dock

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36Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today*, pp. 37-38. Friedman devotes just one sentence to the dockers' 1972 strike, merely noting that 2,000 stevedores struck for higher pay but failed to achieve their demand (45).

37Toli, "The origins of the Durban strikes, 1973," abstract. Toli also notes in the abstract, "The Durban strikes of 1973 marked a turning point in black working class militancy in South Africa. They not only provided the impetus for renewed black worker organization following the state repression of the 1960's but also heralded in a decade of renewed challenges to the state's apartheid labour policies. Nevertheless, the events have enjoyed very little scholarly analysis." Sadly, this statement is about as true today as it was in 1991.

worker militancy in 1969 and 1972, [which] culminated in the Durban strike wave of 1973."[38] Further, Toli writes that the Coronation strike "resembled in many ways the Durban dock workers' strike of late 1972." However, since the dock strike occurred when many companies were closed (the Christmas holidays), "Workers were therefore less influenced by that strike. Nevertheless, Coronation workers…experienced a raised level of consciousness which was a consequence of the dock workers' strike." Specifically, "As the dock workers had done, brickworkers downed tools, assembled on company premises, shouted their demands to management and refused to elect a strike leadership or a delegation of worker representatives to management for fear of victimization."[39] Toil does not explore why the dockers engaged in such acts but, following Hemson, it is clear that they were trying to protect themselves from repression, as had occurred in previous strikes.

Specifically, Toli notes how Coronation's strikers modeled themselves in multiple ways after the earlier dock strike. First, the Coronoation workers demanded almost the same raise as the dockers; Toli quotes one Coronation striker as saying, "We are determined to go home if we do not get our R20. We know what happened to the stevedores and we will not go back is we are offered less." Secondly, the Coronation strikers modeled their tactics on the dock strike. Famously, when the Coronation workers met on the company's football field that first day, they refused to elect a delegation to negotiate with management precisely because the dockers had deployed the same tactic. Friedman also notes the parallels: "Like the 1973 strikers, the stevedores refused to elect spokesmen—when they were asked to do so by a company executive, the crowd shouted back: 'We will be fired.'" Thirdly, the dock strike was mediated by the Zulu Royal House, just as the Coronation strike was a few weeks later. In general, the Coronation

38Toli, "The origins of the Durban strikes, 1973," p. 1. Douwes Dekker, et al. also offer some similar points, pp. 219-226.

39Toli, "The origins of the Durban strikes, 1973," pp. 13-14.

strikers were mindful of the risks of putting down their tools for, as one Coronation worker noted, he feared "the men would be victimized," just as they dockers had been.[40]

Toli agrees with the important, highly critical *South African Labour Bulletin* review of *The Durban Strikes 1973* by Johann Maree, namely that while the strikes might have been spontaneous, no doubt there was some organization and leadership among the workers that simply were unexplored in the book. Thus, the events leading up to the strike are important, and —again—the dock strike just a few weeks prior to the Coronation walkout simply must be fully incorporated into the historical narrative of the much hailed '73 strikes; Maree does not make this link overt in his essay. More broadly, the dockers had helped make Durban the likely spot for such an uprising, having made the city "a leading centre of militant trade unionism, mass political action, and [with] a high level of strike activity." Hemson even contends that the dockers had "contacts with migrant workers in similar work-places (e.g. the Coronation Brick and Tile workers) [that] certainly helped spark the strike action by other contingents of workers in 1973."[41]

Given the nature of apartheid, almost any strike of African workers had a political dimension, definitely so when tens of thousands of workers from dozens of different workplaces took part. Specifically, the Bantu Labour (Settlement of Disputes) Act of 1953 made African strikes illegal. Nevertheless, after the strike, dockers joined railway workers in a march in downtown Durban, demanding that SACTU be made legal again (though this author believes SACTU never was banned outright though, clearly, it suffered tremendous repression). Labour activity continued unabated from early 1973 onwards, and on the docks the Transport and

40Toli, "The origins of the Durban strikes, 1973," pp. 212-213. Toli quotes come from Daily News (Durban), 1 January 1973; Friedman, Building Tomorrow Today, p. 62.

41Johann Maree, "Seeing Strikes in Perspective: Review Article of The Durban Strikes 1973," *South African Labour Bulletin* 2:9-10 (May-June 1976); Fisher F. and P.G. Mare, eds., *The Durban Strikes 1973: "Human Beings with Souls"* (Durban: Institute for Industrial Education, 1974); Toli, "The origins of the Durban strikes, 1973," pp. 211-212; Hemson, "In the Eye of the Storm," pp. 160-161.

General Workers Union (TGWU) as well as General Workers Union (GWU) emerged in the mid 1970s, both of which played key roles on the nation's waterfronts (especially Durban and Cape Town). Although worker activism grew nationwide in the aftermath of the Durban strikes, "Unions grew quickest in Natal." Hemson concludes, "The dockworkers of Durban—have had a decisive part in the initiation of mass working class resistance in SA." However, these notions are not nearly as widely held as they should be. For instance, Leonard Thompson's famous survey *A History of South Africa* makes but brief mention of the Durban strikes, predictably with no mention of the dockers, acknowledges the importance of the '73 strikes and quickly moves on. The recent, important survey by the South African Democracy Education Trust does better but still gives insufficient credit to the dockers. Ultimately it seems clear that, as Toli concludes, "the Durban dock worker strikes were a forerunner of the 1973 strikes and foreshadowed a reawakening of black worker struggles in the 1970s," though that belief still is not widely shared.[42]

In the future, I will attempt to probe the connections between labour activism, including the dock strikes, and Steven Biko and the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM). Toli notes that many BCM and SASO activists were arrested or banned in the immediate aftermath of the strike wave, but that they denied having inspired the workers' actions; however, no version of the Durban strikes asserts that BCM dramatically impacted Durban's black working class. Rather, BC student activists generally were middle class and had little success in connecting with the black working class; a Black Workers Project was established as well as an independent trade union, the Black Allied Workers Union, neither of which gained traction. What little effort that was made generally fell flat though some Black Community Programmes strove to reduce the intense suffering of the rural poor. Of late, there have been some fascinating efforts to analyze

42Toli, "The origins of the Durban strikes, 1973," pp. 210-212; Margaret Kiloh and Archive Sibeko (Zola Zembe), *A Fighting Union: An Oral History of the South African Railway and Harbour Workers' Union* (Randburg: Ravan Press, 2000), pp. 68-69; Labour History Group, *Durban Strikes*, p. 30; Hemson, "Class Consciousness and Migrant Workers," p. 719; Leonard Thompson, *A History of South Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), pp. 212, 224; Sithole and Ndlovu, "The Revival of the Labour Movement, 1970-1980," p. 202.

how white students turned to activism among the black working class after being rejected by middle class black students affiliated with the BCM. Despite the unlikely linkage, one of my future lines of research is to investigate if the myriad strikes in Durban inspired these black students to expand their own ideology and activism in the mid 1970s.[43]

To conclude this section, it seems safe to say that the dockworkers played a key role in the subsequent Durban strikes. David Hemson, writing about the 1969 and 1972 strikes, makes a different, if complimentary point: that the resurgent labor and anti-apartheid movements after 1973 "demonstrated effectively the capacity of the dockers to reorganise after defeat, [and] indicated the tendency for the dock-workers to act in advance of the workers of Durban and, indeed, of the entire country." Perhaps it is ironic that "a group of migrant workers should lead the advance of the African working class into an entirely new era of industrial and political relations"? Yet, as Bill Freund writes, dockworkers (particularly in Durban) served as the "pioneers of unionisation and the spread of socialist ideas in Africa." Similarly, I believe that Oakland's longshoremen were important in many of the San Francisco Bay area's and America's social movements in precisely the same era.[44]

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43Toli, "The origins of the Durban strikes, 1973," p. Davie, "Strength in Numbers." On the failures of BAWU, see Sithole and Ndlovu, p. 201. Ian Macqueen, who completed his undergraduate studies at the UKZN, currently is studying for his doctorate at the University of Sussex in the United Kingdom; Macqueen's work examines the impact of University of Natal Prof. Rick Turner, his influence on white student radicals, and Turner's connections to Biko and the BCM. Leslie Hadfield's Michigan State University dissertation analyzes some of these BCP, including a fascinating chapter on a leather factory in Njwaxa, not far from King William's Town, in the Eastern Cape. Both Macqueen's and Hadfield's work promise to add immensely to analysis of "the Durban Moment."

44Bill Freund, *The African Worker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 37-38, quoted in Nelson, "Ethnicity, race, and the logic of solidarity," pp. 679-680; Hemson, "In the Eye of the Storm," p. 160.

Oakland's longshore workers influence upon local black freedom struggles[45]

This paper contends that longshore workers, particularly through their union but also through their connections with and influence upon other Bay area residents, had a tremendous impact on SFBA social movements in a pivotal time in US History, when older cultural and social mores were breaking down under the weight of amazing pressure on many fronts. This paper will focus upon how the ILWU influenced race-based social movements in the area, particularly civil rights and Black Power.[46] By extension, the SFBA longshore workers, generally proud members of the ILWU, helped shape the entire nation's economic, political, and social landscape in the 1960s and 1970s. However, the significance of SFBA's longshore workers. members Local 10, along with Local 34 (waterfront clerks) and Local 6 (warehouse workers) largely has been ignored in the larger historiography. More generally, the labour movement is left out of the history of American social movements in the era. This omission becomes much more apparent when applying the comparative method, namely the history of Durban and South Africa, where there is more widespread acknowledgement of the vital role of the labour movement, if not Durban's dockers, in the anti-apartheid struggle. At this point my research on the Durban side is more advanced. While I am confident that black and white longshore workers, members of the ILWU, were involved in all sorts of SFBA social movements, so far, my research is insufficient to be conclusive.

As is widely known, a tremendous upsurge of activism occurred in the SFBA, including both San Francisco and Oakland, in the 1960s which continued into the 1970s. While the best known Bay area social movements include student protests at the University of California at Berkeley and gay rights, especially in San Francisco, this paper will focus on efforts to advance

45Given the nature of the UKZN History Seminar, I have chosen to spend the bulk of my space on the Durban side of my project; hence, the more limited coverage of the Oakland aspect.

46I am aware that there are debates over whether these were two sides of the same coin (the black freedom struggle) or distinct traditions with long, separate, if interconnected histories; see Joseph, "The Black Power Movement."

African American rights on both sides of the Bay. When dealing with Oakland, it is impossible to not think about the Black Panthers. Notably, the Panthers maintained an explicitly anti-capitalist ideology and rhetoric and allied with white leftists; hence, there are fascinating connections among East Bay black militants between ILWU members and Panthers—not unlike the connections between radical white students in Durban and dockers there. However, there were numerous other civil rights projects simultaneously pulsating in the region. This paper suggests that the ILWU and its thousands of African American and progressive white members played a significant role in the area's civil rights struggles. Not only did the union contribute, many black Local 10 members lived, no doubt, in the same West Oakland, North Oakland, and Berkeley neighborhoods as Huey Newton, Bobby Seale, and many other Panthers. At this point, all I can merely scratch the surface of these matters.[47]

Almost from the union's birth—on the San Francisco waterfront in 1934—the union boldly proclaimed itself racially inclusive, at a time when taking such a stand against white supremacy in San Francisco or most anywhere in the nation was highly unusual. Much has been written on the ILWU's progressive policies and that is not the focus of this paper; however, the union's racial policies must be established. Cleophas Williams, an African American who became Local 10's first black president in 1967, recalled, "When I first came on the waterfront [1944], many black workers felt that Local 10 was a utopia." Not only was it the most racially inclusive institution, "Local 10 was the most democratic organization I've ever belonged to." As far back as the 1930s, when there were very few African Americans working in the port of San Francisco (or in any Pacific port), the ILWU took a very strong stance for racial inclusion. Perhaps most well known is a declaration by the first leader of the ILWU, Harry Bridges (an Australian immigrant), who declared that, if there were only two men left working on the

47In 1960 about 40% of the dock workers in Local 10 were African American and, presumably, the rest were mostly European American, though there quite likely were a smattering of Mexican Americans and European immigrants (Scandinavians, Irish, and Portuguese), as well. By 1970 about half of Local 10's members were black. Cherny, "Longshoremen of San Francisco Bay," pp. 106-109, 138; Harvey Schwartz, *Solidarity Stories: An Oral History of the ILWU* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), pp. 45-51.

waterfront, he hoped that one of those two would be a black man. When Local 10 expanded its ranks during WWII and beyond, the union made a conscious effort to include people from poor areas and of different ethnic groups, including poor blacks in San Francisco's Hunter's Point, perhaps the most ghettoized part of SF, and West Oakland, the poorest neighborhood in that city. Due to this commitment, the ILWU's black membership increased dramatically during and after WWII. Bill Chester, the first black International officer in the union, notes Local 10 went from having less than 100 black members in 1940 to possessing a slight majority of African American members in 1969. The policies of the ILWU stood in marked contrast with most other labor unions in the nation and SFBA; for instance, the main shipbuilders union, which employed more than 100,000 people in the region during WWII, was notorious for its tremendously low percentage of African American workers. Changes in Local 10 (and the ILWU more broadly) did not happen solely because African Americans pushed for changes; Chester comments that "a group of well-meaning 'progressive whites'" supported the struggle for racial equality. While also beyond the scope of the current paper, many of the whites Chester cites were Communist Party members (likely including Bridges) and other white leftist positions also were committed to the fight against racial discrimination. As Cleophas Williams recalled, "Those who were more active in expressing concern [for African Americans], I later found out, were considered to be left-wingers. They were the ones who would come over and speak to you and ask you about your housing and your transportation." Black activists also worked to develop black leaders and get elected to various union offices, including walking bosses, ship's clerks, dispatchers, business agents, and even higher elected offices—with great success. As historian Robert Self concludes, the ILWU "forged an intense solidarity, and Harry Bridges and cosmopolitan radicals of both communist and syndicalist persuasion turned this solidarity into a force for racial equality."[48]

The ILWU pushed to have blacks hired in many other workplaces, public and private, across the SFBA. Once the ILWU took the lead on racial inclusion, maritime employers started

48Cleophas Williams and Bill Chester interviews both in Schwartz, *Solidarity Stories*, pp. 38-45 and 45-51; Self, *American Babylon*, pp. 53, 84. There have been some who wondered if the Bridges line is apocryphal but African American ILWU activist Williams declared, in an interview, that the story is true. Also see interview with Harry Bridges in *Solidarity Stories*.

hiring more African Americans in other capacities, and other unions started opening up their ranks to African Americans. Bill Chester also notes that maritime unions like the Marine Firemen, Oilers, Watertenders, and Wipers Association as well as Sailors' Union of the Pacific, both of which practiced racial discrimination, became more open to black members. Even some of the area's most notoriously hostile unions, the building trades, became a bit more open to African Americans. Similarly, the ILWU pushed for hiring of black workers in various private sector (e.g. Sears, Roebuck department stores and hotels—covered more below) and government jobs. Union longshoremen even provided physical protection to black workers breaking into an industry. Interestingly, the ILWU successfully pressed the city of San Francisco to hire its first black streetcar driver, Audry Cole, but he quickly was beaten up by hostile whites. Following that incident, "guys in our union—there were always four or five of us—would ride the streetcar whenever he was driving. We rode in shifts…He didn't have any more trouble." By 1970, more than half of all drivers of buses and streetcars in San Francisco supposedly were black. Summing up the ILWU's contributions, Chester contended that they were "a group of workers who didn't just look at their own selfish points of view as far as what they had economically. We were willing to participate and spread the experience that we had learned in the trade union movement."[49]

The ILWU was very influential and supportive of the civil rights movement in the SFBA, in formal and informal ways, and its members already had been active for decades by the 1960s. Robert Self notes that, as early as 1947, white leader "Paul Heide of ILWU, Local 6, delivered a stinging indictment of police brutality against African American before the Oakland City Council." The ILWU belonged to a coalition of civil rights and labor organizations that led statewide struggles to get progressive, bellwether fair housing and fair employment laws passed in the 1950s and 1960s. Self—generally highly critical of the racism of white people in the East Bay, notes that the ILWU was among a handful of unions that "stood at the center of the Bay

49Schwartz, Solidarity Stories, pp. 38-45. On racism in the shipbuilders union during the WWII era, see Robin Dearmon Jenkins, "Rivets and Rights: African-American workers and shipbuilding in the San Francisco Bay Area, 1890-1948" (Ph.D. dissertation, Carnegie Mellon University, 2004).

Area's African American trade union culture and remained an influential force in all of the region's midcentury black community." Indeed, "the importance of the Bay Area locals of the ILWU and MCSU [another left-wing maritime union] to shopfloor racial equality and civil rights is definitive."[50]

One of the best known civil rights battles in the SFBA was a 1964 effort to get San Francisco hotels to hire more African Americans and employ them in more skilled jobs—what is far less known is the ILWU played multiple, important roles in that struggle. Upwards of 1,500 black and white demonstrators, representing a variety of civil rights groups, participated in protests, including civil disobedience that resulted in the arrests of more than 150 people. The ILWU was quite active in the protests at The Sheraton-Palace. "While we were still in jail, leaders in the ILWU had phoned Mayor Shelley, who had enjoyed major union support for his recent election, and urged him to resolve the conflict. Several children of the ILWU leadership were in the Sheraton demonstrations, and many Negroes were among its members." Jo Freeman, an important SFBA activist who partook in the demonstrations, also notes that ILWU local leaders were instrumental in bringing together local and agrees with another important activist, Mike Myerson, who credited the ILWU for "creating a network of familiarity among the mayor, the unions, and the protestors." Ultimately, an unprecedented agreement was struck that resulted in a commitment by thirty-three hotels to hire 15-20% minority workers. This victory was quite important in the SFBA civil rights movement and just one example of how the ILWU pushed local employers to be more aggressive in hiring people of color—as well as local governments in promoting and hiring people of color.[51]

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50Self, *American Babylon*, pp. 4, 46, 53, 69, 77.

51Jo Freeman, *At Berkeley in the Sixties: The Education of an Activist, 1961-1965* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), pp. 94-100, 301; Chester interview in Schwartz, *Solidarity Stories*, pp. 38-45.

In many other instances the ILWU used its economic power and political influence to promote a progressive, racially inclusive agenda, unlike many U.S. labor unions that did not seek to advance other social movements. As Bill Chester, an ILWU vice president (in the late 1960s), commented in 1969, "We also went outside the labor movement to bring our union programs to the wider community…We found that, in a sense, the union is the community." As a result of this worldview, many black longshoremen became active in other groups, as well, including the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and many churches. The ILWU pushed hard for new, public housing for low-income residents, including in San Francisco's Western Addition. Further, children of ILWU members also were very politically active, including in W.E.B. Du Bois Clubs, which were Communist Party-led organizations—basically, CP youth groups.[52]

San Francisco Bay area dockworkers and their union also were involved, quite possibly in myriad ways, in the Black Power movement, especially with the Oakland-based Black Panthers. Tellingly, historian Robert Self, author of the influential recent book *American Babylon*, begins his chapter entitled "Black Power" by quoting Paul Cobb, "The time has come for a declaration of independence for West Oakland…We have to plan our liberation." Who was this black power advocate? Paul Cobb's name is not known today, but he was the one of the most active and involved African Americans in many of the struggles for social justice in the East Bay in the late 1960s and 1970s. Crucially, he was the son of an Oakland longshoreman and, thus, the son of a member of the ILWU. Moreover, growing up in West Oakland's black community, future activist Cobb listened to dock workers and Pullman porters talk about distant cities; it was there and then that he was made aware of his community's "cosmopolitan laborite culture blended politics, trade unionism, and human rights."[53]

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52Chester interview in Schwartz, *Solidarity Stories*, pp. 38-45; Williams interview, pp. 48-49; Freeman, *At Berkeley in the Sixties*, pp. 26-27.

53Self, *American Babylon*, pp. 50, 217. Self repeatedly invokes how important the ILWU and its members were in social justice struggles in Oakland and across the entire East Bay albeit mostly in general terms.

A second black dockworker involved with the Black Panthers and many other African American community struggles for decades was "Sweet" Jimmie Ward, whose story offers glimpses into the many interconnections that, no doubt, existed among black radicals in Oakland. Ward moved to California from his native Louisiana in the 1950s and secured work on the Oakland waterfront around 1960. Through his waterfront connections, he built a series of popular nightclubs and used his nighttime business (financed, at first, by his longshoring job) to support a host of black community and political organizations, from mainstream to radical. Among other groups that he belonged to, Ward was a member of the Oakland chapter of the Black Panthers. Ward's fellow black longshoremen in West Oakland proved among his most valued friends, customers, and allies. Ward staffed his first club, the Lamp Post, with Panther members, thanks to his friendship with the Panther's co-founder Huey Newton, who also invested some Panthers' funds in Ward's businesses. While at this time, I have no further information on Ward or the Lamp Post, it is pretty easy to imagine that this bar was a popular meeting point for ILWU and Black Panther members to meet, discuss, and coordinate any number of community plans.[54]

Due to the tremendous support of the ILWU for African American equal rights—and since thousands of ILWU members were themselves black—it should not be surprising that the relationship was reciprocal. 1971 witnessed a coast-wide ILWU strike that lasted for more than four months. The primary issues "centered on the consequences of containerization. When talks reached an impasse over union jurisdiction, wage parity and work rules, the resulting strike vote was a resounding 96.4 percent 'yes' – a measure of the solidarity that sustained the longest coastwise longshore strike in U.S. history." According to the ILWU's online history, this strike "gave rise to a new militancy among the younger generation of longshore workers in 1971." I might suggest that it also was a reflection of that militancy. Cleophas Williams, elected Local 10's first African American president in 1967, claimed that the union received a lot of support "from my church and from the black community." The strike was neither a victory, nor a defeat,

54"Jimmy Ward Biography" and "Panther Connection" PDF both found at: http://www.itsabouttimebpp.com/home/home.html (19 February 2010).

but it suggested solidarity with the union as well as significant support for the ILWU among African Americans throughout the East Bay.[55]

## Conclusions

Hopefully, this paper has illuminated some of the many interconnections between class-based and race-based social movements in both Durban and the SFBA and how militant dockworkers in both ports were integral to them. In particular, this paper has attempted to prove that dockworkers, due to their propensity to strike and organize, had a major impact on the black freedom struggles in both metropolitan areas. Thought not explored in this essay, it is common knowledge that social movements in both places were influential on hugely important shifts in each nation in the 1960s and 1970s; hence, Durban and SFBA dockers had profound impacts, at key times, in each nation's history.[56] I also hope that this paper proves that historians and other scholars must place labour more centrally into the analysis of the US civil rights and black power movements.

It already is widely believed that workers were quite important in re-energizing the anti-apartheid movement in the early-mid 1970s. However, less known and accepted is that the dock strike of late 1972 helped inspire the January 1973 wave. The Durban strikes, in turn, helped re-launch the anti-apartheid struggles in the mid 1970s (along with the rise of Biko and the BCM, the rise of a generation of student activists inspired by Rick Turner, the strikes and their impact oft are called "the Durban moment") culminating, or rather, going to another level, with the black student uprising that began in Soweto. The 1976 wave, though, also had Durban roots by way of the BCM; how working class movements, particularly dockworker activism in Durban,

55"The ILWU Story – Origins" found at: www.ilwu.org/history accessed 5 June 2009; Williams interview in Schwartz, *Solidarity Stories*, p. 50.

56On "the Durban moment," see Edward Webster, "The Impact of Intellectuals on the Labour Movement," *Transformation* 18 (1992): 88 –91. Add sources

might have impacted the Durban-based Steven Biko (up through March 1973, when he was banned) remains one of many issues that I still must explore. Further, the role that dockers might have played in the trade union upsurge of the late 1970s and 80s, in a variety of different unions (GWU, TGWU, and SARHWU) that dramatically contributed to the exploding anti-apartheid struggle in the 1980s also remains to be explored. SARHWU and its role in COSATU, in Durban and across Natal, also sit near the top of my research agenda.

On the US side, I have attempted to insert the militant dockworkers and their relatively mighty union, the ILWU, into the wider world of SFBA social movement history of the 1960s and 1970s. Though my research so far has but scratched the surface of this topic, it already seems clear that the longshore workers, especially via Local 10, played a very important role in the Bay area. In this paper, I have focused on how the ILWU influenced the civil rights and black power movements on both sides of the Bay. Much work remains on how the ILWU shaped other social movements, including the student movement, women's and gay rights movement, the Chicano movement (especially by way of ILWU support for the United Farm Workers), and others.

Finally, I hope that this paper has further demonstrated the utility of comparative history by revealing the fascinating similarities and differences in the experiences of Durban and Oakland dockers, their labour activism, and the social movements of each city—particularly the black freedom struggles—in the 1960s and 1970s. Re-positioning the dockers into the middle of the firestorms erupting in both locales connecting dockers to the broader labor movement—as well as black freedom struggles—and pushing the centrality of these cities to the larger, nationwide struggles of those times, these are all subjects that demand further research.