

**OPENING THE CLOSED SHOP:
THE GALVESTON LONGSHOREMEN'S STRIKE, 1920-1921**

A Thesis

by

JOSEPH ANTHONY ABEL

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

December 2004

Major Subject: History

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Approved as to style and content by:

David Vaught
(Chair of Committee)

Robert Resch
(Member)

Gregory Pappas
(Member)

Walter Buenger
(Head of Department)

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ABSTRACT

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The Galveston Longshoremen's Strike, 1920-1921. (December 2004)

Joseph Anthony Abel, B.A., University of Houston

Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. David Vaught

Beginning in March of 1920, the Galveston coastwise longshoremen's strike against the Morgan-Southern Pacific and Mallory steamship lines was a pivotal moment in the history of organized labor in Texas. Local and statewide business interests proved their willingness to use the state apparatus by calling on Governor William P. Hobby and the Texas National Guard to open the Port of Galveston. Despite this, the striking dockworkers maintained the moral support of many local citizens from a variety of social classes, including small merchants and officials of the Galveston municipal government. By February of 1921, however, the segregated locals representing the striking longshoremen had fallen victim to the divisive racial tactics of the shipping companies, who implemented the open-shop policy of non-discrimination in hiring on their docks. Further demonstrating the capital-state alliance, the Texas legislature passed Governor Hobby's notorious Open Port Law in October 1920, making it virtually illegal for dockworkers and others to engage in strikes deemed harmful to commerce. This legislation and the nearly yearlong strike not only destroyed the coastwise longshore unions in Galveston, but ushered in a decade of repression from which Texas's organized labor movement did not recover for many years.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

On March 19, 1920, the normally bustling docks of the Morgan Steamship Line lay vacant. That morning, nine hundred white coastwise longshoremen failed to appear for work at the eight o'clock starting time. Several blocks away, seven hundred black longshoremen prepared the holds of the Mallory Line's steamships, but following the noon lunch hour, they too walked off their jobs. The next day a small article hidden within the *Galveston Daily News* announced matter-of-factly "Dockworkers Strike for Increased Wages."¹ Little did the paper or the men know that they would soon participate in Texas's most important labor dispute of the 1920s.

Like most of their counterparts throughout the country, the Galveston longshoremen advocated "pure-and-simple" unionism. Their demands included higher wages and a louder voice in the forces that governed their lives. When these workers left the docks, they did so not as class warriors, or Socialist activists, or civil libertarians, but as loyal Americans. None of them intended to foment a revolution or unnecessarily disturb the social system that surrounded them in the early twentieth century. In return for this loyalty, the men wanted a greater share of the wealth they produced. Recent history contained many indications that their demands would receive a fair hearing. Across the nation, unionists expressed optimism that the wartime courtship between themselves and federal officials would produce even greater benefits in the postwar era. State-sponsored mediation organizations such as the National Adjustment Commission

The journal model for this thesis is *The American Historical Review*.

(NAC) seemed to promise a less conflict-ridden future for both capital and labor. To many it appeared that the United States might soon realize its long held dream of prosperity for all.

The 1920s, however, promised something very different from the halcyon days of World War I labor relations. After making the world safe for democracy, the United States government forgot about its allies in the labor movement. Workers and unions throughout the country began to feel the familiar sting of repression almost as soon as the battles on the western front ended. The Red Scare, Attorney General Palmer's raids, and the massive steel and coal strikes that federal forces helped crush in 1919 all exemplified the sea change in attitude toward organized labor. These events accompanied the revitalization of the once strong open-shop movement. Playing off the ultra-patriotism of the war, the movement's new supporters euphemistically named their anti-union doctrine the "American Plan." Increasingly, even the most conservative unions became associated with radicalism and "un-American" values. Despite their good intentions and reluctance to strike, Galveston's dockworkers became the first group of Texas unionists following the war to face this growing counterrevolution. The coastwise longshoremen's strike transformed not only Galveston and its waterfront, but the entire state as well. When the smoke cleared in February 1921, business interests had thrown open the doors on the waterfront's closed-shop. They had also initiated a struggle between themselves and organized labor in Texas that continued for the remainder of the decade. Conflict on Galveston Island helped reveal the lie of the "Prosperity Decade" to all Lone Star labor unionists.

* * * *

Like most human beings, historians expend a great deal of energy commemorating the successes of the past. A desire to discount and marginalize failures and setbacks often accompanies this. The winners, as the saying goes, write history; Clio's dustbin stands reserved for all the rest. Southern labor history is especially prone to such oversights. Far too often, scholars have neglected workers in both southern history and labor history. For years, they assumed that the Mason-Dixon Line separated a class-conscious group of northern industrial wage earners from their ignorant and subservient southern counterparts, who toiled hopelessly in the company towns of a vast open-shop landscape. Although various explanations attempted to account for this apparent divergence between northern and southern workers, the conclusions remained the same: the chronic failures of southern unions consigned them to a footnote in studies of the South and American labor.

For years, this so-called old southern labor history dominated studies of workers and unions in the South. The work of historian George Tindall is a case in point. "In the Southern workers' agrarian heritage lurked a fateful paradox," he argued, "a fierce and petulant individualism combined with attitudes of dependency and obeisance. The worker often 'appreciated' his job and deferred to the leadership of the gentry...[This] agrarian heritage had erected mental barriers to unionism." Where they existed, unions only interested southern workers as instruments of immediate protest. Employers counteracted this through paternalism and appeals to individuality. Most southerners believed unions challenged economic progress, Tindall continued, and saw organizers as

“‘yankee carpet-baggers’ attempting to keep all Southerners from tasting the sweet fruit of industrialization and higher incomes.” Despised by workers, employers, and the public, labor activism never affected more than minor improvements in the lives of southern workers. In general, though, unions represented an alien presence in southern society. The region’s workers simply did not have the psychological prerequisites to build a successful labor movement.²

As it has in nearly all studies of the South, race also figured prominently in the old southern labor histories. Further complicating their mental shortcomings, a strict racial hierarchy divided black and white southern workers. White laborers, so the argument ran, acted in ways that reflected their racial rather than class identities. Traditions of paternalism and segregation of the races created a malleable southern work force, divided against itself and with little recourse to any kind of labor activism. What few unions existed, whites dominated and used to exclude African-Americans from the most highly paid skilled occupations. Blacks responded to this racism with a wariness of trade unionism and many drifted toward the pro-business position of men such as Booker T. Washington. Rather than agitate for higher pay or better hours and conditions alongside racist whites, blacks provided a ready pool of reserve labor that employers frequently used to break southern strikes. The few unions that successfully organized blacks, such as the United Mine Workers, did so out of expediency and proved exceptions to the rule. According to historian Rick Halpern, this helped explain why the South, “remained a vast open-shop thorn in the side of the [American] labor movement.”³

In their now classic study of black workers in America, Sterling D. Spero and Abram L. Harris directly implicated the South, arguing, “Even when adopted as a matter of expediency, [segregation] hinders the development of trade union consciousness among a class of workers whose industrial traditions are agricultural and servile.” More than anything else, African-Americans’ slave heritage made them unsuitable for unionization without prior education. “These attitudes which made the Negro an obedient, uncomplaining, docile worker, grateful for his job,” Spero and Harris claimed, “naturally made it exceedingly difficult for the unions to organize him and almost impossible for them to induce him to strike.”⁴ Even the most prestigious southern historians made these racial arguments about the southern labor movement. C. Van Woodward noted in his masterpiece that segregationist policies dominated southern unions. “Sometimes aided by employers’ policy of hiring, sometimes encouraged by politicians,” he argued, “white labor kept up an unremitting pressure to drive Negroes out of the better paid, more attractive work, and further down in the job hierarchy.” One of the first scholars to write a synthesis of southern labor, F. Ray Marshall also emphasized the importance of the African-American middle class in forging a distinct class seemingly unwilling to organize.⁵

Whether they focused on the southerner’s psychological defects or his virulent racism, all old southern labor historians agreed upon the futility of union organization and strikes. Both seemed destined to shatter upon the rock of paternalistic employers, individualistic workers, and an unfriendly public. Existing studies of the Galveston dockworkers’ struggle fit comfortably into this tradition and accept most of its outdated

conclusions. These works fall into one of two categories: short chronological narratives lacking substantial analysis, or analytical narratives focusing only on a particular stage of the strike and neglecting the overall picture. Because they fail to utilize the strike in addressing larger questions pertaining to the American and southern labor movements, these studies leave a significant gap in the historiography. Based on a portion of his doctoral dissertation, James Maroney's article "The Galveston Longshoremen's Strike of 1920" provides an example of the chronological narrative category. Maroney argues that "the conflict resulted in near total destruction of the Galveston locals of the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) and passage of an Open Port Law by the Texas Legislature." Although based on a fair number of primary sources, this brief work lacks analysis of larger themes connected to the strike, most notably the racial question. Although two separate and segregated unions struck, they move through the narrative as one. The article's inattention to race relations leads the reader to believe that white and black longshoremen ended the strike together, when in fact racial conflict and division dominated the final months. Maroney also fails to emphasize the connection between the establishment of martial law and the growing commitment of open-shop forces to the destruction of unions in Galveston and Texas.⁶

Harry Krenek follows much the same pattern in his book, *The Power Vested: The Use of Martial Law and the National Guard in Texas Domestic Crisis, 1919-1932*, in which he devotes a chapter to the Galveston troubles. Unlike Maroney, however, Krenek places more emphasis on the role played by the National Guard and its day-to-day activities during the occupation of Galveston. Focusing almost entirely on the

period from June to October 1920, the strike serves as little more than background to the activities of the state militia. Krenek presents a romantic vision of martial law in which disinterested soldiers and officers uphold law, order, and the interests of Texas against rioting workers and their uncooperative municipal allies. When he does address the strike, Krenek accepts without question the conclusions of business and military supporters to justify the presence of troops on the island. By assuming that a “domestic crisis” existed in Galveston, the very subtitle of the work indicates its author’s bias. This anti-labor tone reinforces the position of the old southern labor historians. Even before it confronted the indomitable sons-of-Texas in the state militia, the disorder caused by the Galveston strike assured its failure.⁷

Diverging from both these examples, William D. Angel, Jr. provides a much more useful analysis of the motives underlying the strike in his article “Controlling the Workers: The Galveston Dock Workers’ Strike of 1920 and its Impact on Labor Relations in Texas.” Angel argues that the Galveston situation demonstrated “the brutal willingness of private businessmen to ally with the state to create open-shop working conditions.” The actions taken by Governor William P. Hobby and his business supporters in the Island City provided his more reactionary successors with a precedent for limiting union activity throughout the state. Unfortunately, source limitations overshadow this astute emphasis on the state-business alliance and severely weaken Angel’s argument. On questions such as race relations and public attitudes towards the strike, Angel too falls into the same trap as Maroney and Krenek, providing little analysis of these important elements.⁸

None of these three studies directly confronts the key historiographical issue of the strike, Texas exceptionalism. All historians, especially those engaged in local or regional scholarship, grapple with the question of how their subject fits into the larger narrative of American history. The old southern labor historians had no difficulty arguing for the South's uniqueness. Psychology, racism, and cheap wages explained southern workers' aversion to unionization and their distinctiveness from laborers in the rest of the nation. "Although we shall note that the south's individual characteristics are being dissolved by industrialization, causing its economic, political, and social institutions increasingly to be patterned after those of the nation," argued F. Ray Marshall, "there can be little question that from an historical viewpoint the south is unique by almost any definition."⁹

In Texas, regional exceptionalism has become something of an art form. The bumper sticker proverb "I'm from Texas—What country are you from?" is an overly-simplistic, yet fairly accurate description of how historians and citizenry view events in the state's past. Ask any group of students in the Lone Star State's public schools and they will confirm the immortality of events and figures such as the Alamo and San Jacinto, Stephen F. Austin and Sam Houston. For many Texans, this hubris justifies the separation of their own past from that of everyone else. Historians Walter Buenger and Robert Calvert contend that this Anglo-Texan myth has severely hindered the study of the state's complicated past, arguing that "selective historical memory persists and Texas elites in particular still profess at least a limited subscription to that romantic concept of Texas." Confusion over the state's identity has only furthered this romanticism. Unsure

whether they belong to the slaveholding Deep South or the cattle ranching Wild West, most Texas historians are content to ignore interpretive innovations in both fields with the simple argument that the state has always been unique. Because the “shelf life” of this mythic past refuses to expire among scholars of the state, notions of exceptionalism continue to exert a powerful, reactionary force on state historiography. Even the new social history of the 1960s and 1970s did not dislodge this extreme conservatism and the reluctance to accept new interpretations. By continually reproducing accounts of the heroic nineteenth century, historians have ignored critical events and conflicts that shaped the twentieth century.¹⁰

Texas workers in particular have suffered from this confining historiography. In their attempts to recapture and celebrate a more romantic past, many historians have imposed an artificial barrier separating the state’s workers from their counterparts throughout the nation. Simple, narrowly focused studies of industries and their pioneers, Buenger argues, “include few links to the world outside the firm or industry and almost no analytical framework for evaluating long-term changes in the state’s economy.”¹¹ Determined to celebrate the state’s seemingly harmonious and ideal frontier days, old Texas labor historians marginalized the problems associated with a transforming urban industrial society and failed to acknowledge the connection this process shared with other regions of the country. Scholars of Texas’s longshoremen, for example, inevitably focused on the Screwmen’s Benevolent Association (SBA) of Galveston. Few of these scholars seemed to realize that the craft exclusionism and do-it-yourself voluntarism practiced by these labor aristocrats differed little from that practiced by other skilled

American workers. By disassociating their subjects from the rest of the nation, Texas labor historians have missed many opportunities to utilize the arguments of a prolific and dynamic field of historical inquiry.¹²

Such notions of Texas exceptionalism dominate all three studies of the Galveston strike. Although Angel's article attempts to bridge the gap between this old regionalism and more broadly defined interpretations of American labor movements, all three studies of the coastwise strike fail to connect the troubles with the growing, nationwide hostility toward organized labor in the 1920s. The longshoremen stand alone as casualties of the state's returning postwar prosperity, when in fact they exemplified the weakened position of the entire labor movement during the "Prosperity Decade." Though the strike brought this reality home to Texas, Maroney, Krenek, and Angel overlook the connections it shared with larger events in the nation.¹³ This trio also fails to employ potentially helpful conceptual frameworks found in other historical fields and studies of labor; as a result, they do not provide answers to such important questions as public attitudes toward the strikers and the racial dynamic on Galveston's waterfront. When combined with the outdated framework of the old southern labor history, this exceptionalism prevents a full understanding of the Galveston strike's significance to Texas as well as American labor history. Overcoming these confining legacies is an essential task that one must achieve in order to chart an original course, but as all historians know, this proves much more daunting than it would first appear.

One of the greatest challenges lying before all revisionist historians is the simple fact that the conclusions reached by their predecessors often seem quite sound and

logical. It appears in retrospect, for example, that most if not all southern unions and the strikes they provoked fit the pattern described by the old southern labor historians as exercises in futility. Employer paternalism and white racism do indeed appear as convincing explanations for the impotency and constant failures of the southern labor movements. Disavowing notions of exceptionalism proves just as difficult. Native Texas pride notwithstanding, innumerable works, both popular and scholarly, celebrate the uniqueness of the Lone Star State even within the confines of a supposedly unique South. As explanatory or self-satisfying as they may be, these arguments hinder attempts to write a new account of the Galveston longshoremen's strike because they leave vital questions unanswered. A multitude of revisionist studies has emerged in the last few decades that confront this outdated historiography. Challenging head-on many of the conclusions reached by their predecessors, the new southern labor historians' compelling arguments and innovative conceptual frameworks offer a solid foundation on which to build a fresh study of the strike.

New southern labor historians have had little trouble demonstrating the fallacy of Texas's exceptionalism and isolation. Although they focus primarily on agrarian rather than industrial activism, studies of Populism and Socialism have helped to erase the imaginary boundaries between the Lone Star State and the rest of the nation. According to Lawrence Goodwyn, the national phenomenon of Populism in the 1890s owed its very success to the creation of a distinct "movement culture" in the farmer alliances and Granger movements of 1870s Texas. Goodwyn's contemporary, James Green, uses this same framework to show how ordinary, rural Texans established one of the Southwest's

most energetic Socialist movements of the early twentieth century. The importance of both works lies in their conclusion that the citizenry of Texas played vital roles in larger national movements.¹⁴ Other scholars more focused on industrial conditions have attempted to show the parallels between Texas labor movements and others outside the state. In a revision to his earlier work, F. Ray Marshall concludes that union organization initially began among skilled or strategically placed workers and grew at much the same pace and in the same places as unions across the nation. Historian Eric Arnesen compares biracial unionism on Galveston's waterfront with movements in New Orleans, Mobile, and Baltimore. The similarities that he finds help demonstrate the falsity of viewing Texas as unique from the rest of the South and the nation.¹⁵

The new southern labor history has also begun to dispel misleading notions about southern strikes and their apparent hopelessness. In the interests of studying the vital center, such arguments led the old southern labor historians to marginalize the dreams and expectations of an entire class of southerners. Unlike modern scholars, the Galveston longshoreman, the Birmingham miner, and the Virginia textile worker did not have the advantage of hindsight. They did know, however, about the past and this knowledge no doubt disheartened them. Southern and American history seemed to offer them nothing but an endless line of defeats and repression. In spite of these examples, millions of southern workers through the years still chose to walk the picket lines and fight hostile employers for better wages and conditions. Many new scholars embrace the audacity and desperation of such workers, arguing that these qualities make their strikes more interesting to study than similar conflicts in the North. "During an era [the 1880s

and 1890s] when major labor organizations such as the Amalgamated Association of Iron and Steel Workers and the Americans Railway Union failed in their strike activity,” historian Mark Wetherington argues, “the efforts of unskilled Savannah black laborers to challenge the South’s largest rail system take on additional meaning.” The South’s racist preconceptions and the racial composition of labor movements add an even more complicated dimension to these strikes.¹⁶

Unlike their predecessors, new southern labor historians do not dismiss all unions as ineffective or the southern working-class as incapable of organization. Though they do not necessarily fall under the category of new southern labor history, Goodwyn and Green’s studies both demonstrated that southerners deserve more credit as activists than they previously received. Many other scholars have cited waterfront unionism in New Orleans as an important example of such activism. Even the old southern labor historians grudgingly admitted that the Crescent City was an exception to their rule, often noting the benefits workers derived from the Democratic political machine. Much to the dismay of business and commercial elites, machine politicians dependent on working-class and union votes usually adopted a supportive or hands-off policy toward the conflicts of their constituency. Waterfront labor organizations capitalized on this support by pressuring employers to recognize union work rules and wage rates. Following a brief period of weakness in the 1890s, labor’s success in New Orleans stood unrivalled in the South from the end of the Civil War to the 1920s, and compared favorably to labor movements in other American cities.¹⁷ Similar studies focusing on the mining industry provide even more evidence of strong southern unions. Much like

those in New Orleans, mine unions exerted a significant amount of control over the jobs of their members. Only after employers used racial tensions to their advantage did these unions collapse and provide old southern labor historians with support for their conclusions.¹⁸

Race and its relationship to class has been a particularly fertile field of inquiry for the new historians.¹⁹ Many scholars have discovered that the vitality and success of southern labor movements depended on their ability to overlook racial prejudices and unify black and white workers in pragmatic alliances. Although not free of controversy, the new southern labor history suggests a less monolithic view of African-Americans' relation to white workers and unions. Acknowledging that exclusionary craft unionism dominated the South for most of the twentieth century, these historians have uncovered further evidence suggesting strong currents of biracial and interracial unionism in many industries.²⁰

In his revisionist study of the Alabama coalfields, Daniel Letwin demonstrates that black and white workers cooperated through their separate unions and exerted a significant amount of job control. "Chronic, intense, and wide-ranging conflict with operators over material conditions and power relations," Letwin claims, "focused the miner's consciousness in ways that could submerge the divisive capacities of race." Letwin argues further that notions of white supremacy did not prevent unionism, but simply imposed limits. As long as no one attempted to overturn "the social question" of segregation, the workers accepted interracial cooperation. Brian Kelly finds evidence of this class solidarity as well, but adds to it the argument that southern employers played

“a more fundamental and consistent role in maintaining racial divisions” by using segregation as a tool to weaken and tear down labor organization.²¹

Because of their long history of unionization and the racial composition of southern docks, longshoremen also receive a great deal of attention from new southern labor historians interested in examining racial solidarity in the labor movement. In his study of New Orleans dockworkers, Arnesen finds a very strong tradition of biracial unionism running from Reconstruction to the 1920s. He attributes this to two factors: the overall strength of African-American longshore unions, which limited white workers’ abilities to dominate the labor market, and a political culture receptive to the dockworkers’ efforts to unionize. Through work sharing agreements, united contract negotiations, and port-wide work rules and wages, separate white and black unions exerted a significant amount of control in New Orleans.²² Ernest Obadele-Starks goes even further by offering a radical revision of the old southern labor history that places African-Americans at the center of biracial efforts among dockworkers. Starks argues that racism was much more virulent among white longshoremen on the upper Texas Gulf Coast than in New Orleans. As a result, the impetus for cooperation came not from whites, but from blacks in the ports of Texas. Other historians have taken Starks’ emphasis on white racism and attempted to revive parts of the old southern labor history’s emphasis on race rather than class solidarity. These scholars argue that African-American union members rejected biracialism and cooperative associations with racist whites, neither of which dominated anyways, on the grounds of “race-firstism” and their pride in being black. The resulting unions provided blacks with a freedom to

act independently that they would not have otherwise enjoyed had they associated with whites.²³

Although their subjects vary and their arguments show as much contention as those in any historical field, the underlying motivation behind all of these new southern labor histories has been to show that the southern labor movement was just as strong and occasionally stronger than its counterparts in other areas of America. Where the old labor historians painted themselves and their subjects into a historical corner, this new wave of scholars has discarded their reductionism, geographic insularity, and misinformed racial assumptions to discover southern workers and their unions for the first time. Their voices reveal a dynamic and nuanced southern labor movement that scholars once thought did not exist.

Even more essential for the task at hand, the new southern labor histories offer a solid conceptual foundation on which to construct a new study of Texas's most important labor dispute of the 1920s. The Galveston longshoremen's strike provides a unique opportunity to throw off exceptionalist blinders and begin answering larger questions that connect organized labor in Texas to more broadly conceived studies of American labor history. Previous studies of the strike do not go far enough in their analyses, leaving gaps in the historiography. First and foremost, this thesis situates the longshoremen's strike within the larger national narrative as an example of business and state hostility toward organized labor in the 1920s. Before the strike ended, this atmosphere of antagonism for organized labor resulted in the formation of a powerful alliance between Texas business interests and government officials in Austin dedicated

to breaking union power. Governor Hobby's declaration of martial law in June 1920 was the most visible manifestation of this alliance. Requested by a committee of businessmen, the military occupation of Galveston imposed anti-labor open-shop policies on the city. The legislature's passage of the Open Port Law in October 1920 provided even more evidence of this growing hostility. Proposed by Governor Hobby and championed by state businessmen, the bill effectively outlawed labor strikes in several key industries. This study argues that such methods fit a pattern of labor repression that characterized United State labor relations following World War I and on through the 1920s.

In addition to this main argument, the pages that follow also examine two themes in more detail. As it does in any labor conflict, the public's attitude toward the strike and its participants played an important role in determining its outcome. Focusing primarily on businessmen and elites, previous scholars have argued or implied that most Galvestonians opposed the strike because it damaged public interests. Using many of the same sources, this study argues that middle and lower class Galvestonians responded to the events of the strike more ambiguously than these old southern labor historians would allow. Rather than blindly accept the leadership of Galveston's powerful business interests and aristocratic families, local merchants, municipal officers, and ordinary citizens frequently demonstrated their disapproval of the high-handed methods used throughout the strike. Although the motives of these classes differed, each exhibited at least indirect support for the cause of organized labor. Their actions suggest that a great many southerners did not always hold "progress" in as high regard as some of these

older historians once argued.²⁴

The second theme analyzes the relation between the racially segregated longshore locals and their black and white members during the strike. Borrowing heavily from the arguments of Arnesen and Letwin, the evidence suggests a brief but rather intense instance of biracial solidarity between the segregated longshoremen in response to the use of Mexican and African-American strikebreakers. In spite of this cooperation, the shipping companies eventually used the race question to divide the strikers and end the conflict on open-shop terms. Contrary to prevailing notions of Jim Crow social acceptability, the shipping companies' open-shop policy of non-discrimination in hiring temporarily worked for rather than against black longshoremen. The companies forced Galveston's dominant white workers to either submit to racial integration on the docks, or find work elsewhere, and in the process, incurred the public wrath once more.

To fulfill its objectives, this study relies heavily on primary research, especially contemporary newspapers and labor journals, and archival resources. In order to minimize the bias and emotion often seen in newspaper accounts of local events, both local and non-local papers are examined extensively, especially the *Galveston Daily News*, the *Houston Post*, and the *Houston Press*. Secondary sources set the stage for this primary research, providing origins and background information, as well as conceptual frameworks on which to base less concrete aspects of the strike, such as race. This study begins by examining political and economic conditions in Galveston and Texas during the early twentieth century to discover their effect on organized labor. Chapter II

includes brief histories of waterfront organization in Galveston, including the Screwmen's Benevolent Association (SBA) and the ILA, and early confrontations between capital and labor in Galveston. The third chapter looks at the early days of the strike, starting with the events that led up to it and a brief description of longshore work. The attitudes of Galveston's various economic classes toward the striking longshoremen also receive treatment. This chapter concludes in early June 1920 by looking at a few early instances of strike-related violence and the effect that this had on the declaration of martial law.

Chapter IV looks at the administration of martial law as established by Governor Hobby and Brigadier General Jacob F. Wolters. Besides presenting the most revealing evidence of a business-state alliance directed against organized labor, this chapter also helps reveal the ordinary Galvestonian's attitude toward organized labor and its antagonists. Chapter IV concludes with an examination of some of the National Guard's less constructive actions, including numerous accidents and examples of repression, which eventually led to the withdrawal of troops from the city in October 1920.

The fifth chapter examines the issue of race in the Galveston strike and the efforts of the segregated coastwise locals to work together in the era of Jim Crow. It begins by looking at instances of biracial solidarity in the strike, especially in connection to the employment of Mexican strikebreakers on the Mallory line docks. Chapter V proceeds through the end of the strike in December 1920 and February 1921, when the shipping companies invoked the open-shop principle of non-discrimination in hiring to divide the segregated locals and break the strike. This leads into the sixth and final

chapter, which details the aftermath and effects of the strike, beginning with the passage of the Open Port Law in October 1920. This incident provides final evidence of the devastation caused by the strike and its impact on the subsequent history of Texas.

Notes

- ¹ Galveston *Daily News*, March 20, 1920.
- ² George B. Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 350-53, 523, 538-39. Surprisingly, Tindall's predecessor C. Van Woodward, writing in the same multivolume series sixteen years earlier, reached a different conclusion about southern labor. Focusing mostly on the periods of the Knights of Labor and the Populists, Woodward concluded, "Southern labor was not going to accept the Old South labor philosophy of the New South leaders—not without a fight, anyways." These words, however, were the exception to the rule in studies of the South. See C. Van Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), 234.
- ³ Rick Halpern, "Organized Labor, Black Workers, and the Twentieth Century South: The Emerging Revision," in *Race and Class in the American South Since 1890*, ed. Melvyn Stokes and Rick Halpern (Oxford: Berg, 1994), 43-44, 47.
- ⁴ Sterling Spero and Abram Harris, *The Black Worker: The Negro and the Labor Movement* (1930; reprint, New York: Atheneum, 1969), 74, 131.
- ⁵ Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 360 (quote); and F. Ray Marshall, *Labor in the South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 34-35. Though less muted, these conclusions are also seen in Tindall, *Emergence of the New South*, 318-53. In Texas, Ruth Allen represented the old southern labor history in her work *Chapters in the History of Organized Labor in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1941). For more recent studies, see Stanley B. Greenberg, *Race and State in Capitalist Development: Comparative Perspectives* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980); and William H. Harris, *The Harder We Run: Black Workers Since the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).
- ⁶ James C. Maroney, "The Galveston Longshoremen's Strike of 1920," *East Texas Historical Journal* 16 (1978): 34-38. Also see Maroney, "Organized Labor in Texas, 1900-1929" (Ph.D. diss., University of Houston, 1975), 210-21.
- ⁷ Harry Krenek, *The Power Vested: The Use of Martial Law and the National Guard in Texas Domestic Crisis, 1919-1932* (Austin: Presidial Press, 1980), 5-32.
- ⁸ William D. Angel, Jr., "Controlling the Workers: The Galveston Dock Workers' Strike of 1920 and its Impact on Labor Relations in Texas," *East Texas Historical Journal* 23 (1985): 14-26.
- ⁹ Marshall, *Labor in the South*, 4, 7.

¹⁰ Walter Buenger and Robert Calvert, “The Shelf Life of Truth in Texas,” in *Texas Through Time: Evolving Interpretations*, ed. Walter Buenger and Robert Calvert (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1991), xiii, xviii, xx, xxx-xxxii. In addition to their argument about state identity, Buenger and Calvert also offer an economic explanation for Texans’ continued refusal to reexamine their past. As members of a colonial economy in which outside businessmen exported raw goods, Texans’ “memories of the frontier past saved the society from looking deeply into the bleakness and poverty of much of the historical period through the 1930s.” The pair also contends that an uninterrupted line of influence flowing from giants of Texas historical studies such as Eugene C. Barker and Walter Prescott Webb has retarded the formation of new conceptual frameworks.

¹¹ Buenger, “Flight From Modernity: The Economic History of Texas since 1845,” in *Texas Through Time*, 310; and Buenger and Calvert, “Shelf Life of Truth,” xxxi.

¹² For examples, see James V. Reese, “The Evolution of an Early Texas Union: The Screwmen’s Benevolent Association of Galveston, 1866-1891,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 75 (October 1971): 158-85; and Allen Clayton Taylor, “A History of the Screwmen’s Benevolent Association from 1866 to 1924” (M.A. thesis, The University of Texas, 1968).

¹³ Many works provide evidence suggesting that the 1920s were difficult years for organized labor throughout the nation. For examples, see David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 370-464; Robert Justin Goldstein, *Political Repression in Modern America: From 1870 to 1976* (Urbana: Illinois University Press, 2001), 167-91; and Lizabeth Cohen, *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 159-210.

¹⁴ Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); and James Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest, 1895-1943* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978).

¹⁵ F. Ray Marshall, “Some Reflections on Labor History,” *Southwestern Historical Quarterly*, 75 (October 1971): 137-57; and Eric Arnesen, “Biracial Waterfront Unionism in the Age of Segregation,” in *Waterfront Workers: New Perspectives on Race and Class*, ed. Calvin Winslow (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 19-61.

¹⁶ Mark V. Wetherington, “The Savannah Negro Laborer’s Strike of 1891,” in *Southern Workers and Their Unions, 1880-1975: Selected Papers, The Second Southern*

Labor History Conference, 1978, ed. Merl E. Reed, Leslie S. Hough, and Gary M. Fink (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1981), 4.

¹⁷ Eric Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics, 1863-1923* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 74-118; and Daniel Rosenberg, *New Orleans Dockworkers: Race, Labor, and Unionism, 1892-1923* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1988). Union power in New Orleans, especially after the establishment of organizations like the Cotton Men's Executive Council and the Dock and Cotton Council, shared many similarities with such strongly organized cities as San Francisco. See Michael Kazin, *Barons of Labor: San Francisco Building Trades and Union Power in the Progressive Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987). For an example of the old southern labor history's coverage of New Orleans, see Spero and Harris, *The Black Worker*, 183-192.

¹⁸ See Daniel Letwin, *The Challenge of Interracial Unionism: Alabama Coal Miners, 1878-1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); and Brian Kelly, *Race, Class, and Power in the Alabama Coalfields, 1908-1921* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001).

¹⁹ The class-versus-race dichotomy has been an important issue in all new labor history. In his examination of the life and letters of black union activist Richard L. Davis, Herbert Gutman argued that the powerful United Mine Workers had a much more lenient racial policy than most historians believed. By arguing that class interests superseded racism in American unions, Gutman turned the old southern labor history's notions of race on its head. Nearly twenty years later, Barbara J. Fields challenged this conclusion in another influential article. She argued that "race and class are concepts of a different order; they do not occupy the same analytical space, and thus cannot constitute explanatory alternatives to each other." Fields' mutually exclusive definitions of race and class became hugely popular among new southern labor historians. Herbert G. Gutman, "The Negro and the United Mine Workers of America: The Career and Letters of Richard L. Davis and Something of Their Meaning: 1890-1900," in *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History* (New York: Random House, 1976), 121-208; and Barbara J. Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History," in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Van Woodward*, ed. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (New York: Oxford, 1982), 143-77. For another important response to Gutman, see Herbert Hill, "Myth-Making as History: Herbert Gutman and the United Mine Workers of America," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 2 (Winter 1988): 132-200.

²⁰ Robert Zeiger's introduction in his edited volume, *Organized Labor in the Twentieth Century South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 3-12, offers an adequate summary of the new southern labor history. Also see Halpern, "Organized

Labor, Black Workers,” 48-76.

²¹ Halpern, “Organized Labor, Black Workers,” 44; Letwin, *Challenge of Interracial Unionism*, 40 (quote); and Kelly, *Race, Class, and Power*, 12 (quote).

²² Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers*, x, 74, 95, 255. Also see Rosenberg, *New Orleans Dockworkers*, 41. Addressing those scholars who lament the existence of segregated union locals, Arnesen argues that “[African-Americans], like their white counterparts, lived in a world in which thinking in terms of race was so pervasive, membership within racial groups so obvious and natural, and social separation along racial lines appropriate and inevitable, that the formation of all-black or all-white unions barely required comment, much less debate.” See Arnesen, “Following the Color Line of Labor: Black Workers and the Labor Movement Before 1930,” *Radical History Review* 55 (Winter 1993): 68.

²³ Ernest Obadele-Starks, *Black Unionism in the Industrial South*. (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000), 37-52; and Howard Kimeldorf and Robert Penney, “‘Excluded’ By Choice: Dynamics of Interracial Unionism on the Philadelphia Waterfront, 1920-1930,” *International Labor and Working Class History* 51 (Spring 1997): 50-71. Also see Bruce Nelson, *Divided We Stand: American Workers and the Struggle for Black Equality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

²⁴ For the most well know example, see Woodward’s *Origins of the New South*.

CHAPTER II

DISCOVERING ALLIES AND ENEMIES

Home to the state's very first and most powerful unions, Galveston exemplified the trends of Texas's historically-successful labor movement. The success of unionization in the Island City stood unmatched in the South, due in no small part to its most important group of workers, the longshoremen. Through their efforts, the port became one of the most strongly unionized in the country—only the waterfronts of New York and New Orleans surpassed it. Occasionally, this strength translated into state and local political victories. While organizations like the Texas State Federation of Labor extracted progressive legislation and reforms from Austin lawmakers, labor-friendly politicians in Galveston fought the selfish interests of local aristocrats and their business allies. Although exaggerated, the belief of many contemporaries that Galveston belonged to the longshoreman contained some truth.

In spite of its political strength, organized labor could not overcome the economic effects of World War I in Texas. Dragged into a statewide depression, Galveston's dockworkers suffered unemployment, low wages, and dizzying inflation throughout the war. When the armistice ended this downturn, the longshoremen hoped their wartime political advances would help provide working Galvestonians with a greater share of the wealth they produced. Much to their dissatisfaction, however, local employers entertained other ideas about the economic future. Supported by state political leaders, open-shop advocates, and a growing national hostility to unions, local shipping companies charted a course to destroy Galveston's waterfront labor movement.

* * * *

The state of Texas thrived in 1920. Texans were extremely proud of their high agricultural production and the national prestige it bestowed on their home. Although its crown had begun to tarnish, King Cotton stood behind much of this economic progress. From 1900 to 1920, the cotton crop in Texas accounted for fully one quarter of the nation's total production.¹ Increased quantities of wheat, rice, and sugar cane supplemented this growth.² More than agriculture explained the state's prosperity, though. In the early twentieth century, Texas also began expanding its industrial sector. The first moves in this direction occurred in the Piney Woods of East Texas, where the timber industry grew significantly. Led by the increased demand for lumber and building materials that accompanied the migration from the countryside to the cities, Texas controlled 5.5 percent of the national timber market by 1907.³ The most significant advance in the Texas industrial economy came in 1901, when the Spindletop gusher inaugurated the state's legendary oil boom. The drilling and refining industry that ensued catapulted the state into national economic prominence. By 1921, Texas's industrial output exceeded the value of its agricultural production.⁴

Galveston played a major role in bringing about this statewide prosperity. Although it ranked as only the sixth largest city in Texas, Galveston was by far the most important shipping center in the state. In 1920, the port exported \$637.5 million in cargo and imported \$30.9 million, up from \$464.2 million and \$17.7 million the year before. The first year of the new decade also saw 400,000 more bales of cotton pass over the city's docks than in 1919. Out of forty-nine United States ports reporting, Galveston

ranked second in total tonnage, eighth in exports, and eleventh in imports.⁵ Along with cotton and consumer goods, tourists and beachgoers also poured into the city. As the decade progressed, the economy of Galveston relied more and more heavily on tourism and its beachfront resort status. With its lax liquor laws and widespread gambling, the self-proclaimed “Playground of Texas” became one of the state’s most popular destinations in the self-indulgent decade after World War I.⁶

In spite of its economically-sound position at the start of the decade, Galveston’s fortunes had not always been so bright. Events earlier in the twentieth century nearly destroyed the port’s business and the city itself. As everyone living along the Gulf Coast knows, hurricanes constantly threaten the area. To this day, the Great Storm of 1900 remains the most legendary of these. This massive hurricane nearly removed the city from future maps. The shifting sandbar that is Galveston Island offered its inhabitants little protection from the fury of nature. Besides killing several thousand local residents, the storm caused millions of dollars in property damage to the island and its port. Together with the privately-owned Galveston Wharf Company and its allied business interests, ordinary Galvestonians quickly placed their city back on its feet after this terrible tragedy, most notably through the construction of the island’s massive seawall. Nature continued to wreak havoc, however, and smaller storms in 1908 and 1915 had similar, if less catastrophic results. The publicity these tempests received from state and national media did not make Galveston an attractive prospect for businessmen hoping to protect their investments.⁷ “Galveston’s fate,” argued a local historian, “was shaped by technology, location, and human reason. It was too risky, too reckless, and too

uneconomic [sic] to place extensive businesses or population on an unstable edge of nature.”⁸

The years of World War I also damaged the city’s economy. Unlike most areas of the country, Texas fell into an economic slump during the war. As the nation’s political situation grew more uncertain, so did the state’s economy. In some skilled professions, unemployment rates skyrocketed as high as 55 percent. Despite “Buy-It-Made-In-Texas” campaigns designed to create new jobs and local industry, Texas workers continued to suffer. Galvestonians began to feel the effects of this depression in 1916. Wanting to be closer to the European theatre and the established industrial centers of the Northeast and Great Lakes region, shipping companies left the Gulf Coast and concentrated their business in various Atlantic ports. The port of Galveston languished and its deep sea and coastwise shipping fell to drastically reduced levels. Thousands of unemployed Galvestonians found themselves without means of support during these inflationary years.⁹

As millions celebrated peace in November 1918, Galveston’s shipping industry and state businessmen simply hoped for a brighter future. The import and export totals for 1920 indicate that they did not have to wait long before realizing this wish. To their relief, the brief postwar economic depression that engulfed the nation overlooked both the state and its premier port.¹⁰ This bust and boom cycle impacted the attitudes of Texas’s business interests significantly. Unwilling to repeat the economic disaster of the war years, their number one concern became sustaining the newfound prosperity. The question on everyone’s mind was at whose expense.

* * * *

Organized labor also welcomed the return of better days to the state. In Galveston, no one was happier than the longshoremen. The hard times of World War I represented a low point in their historically high fortunes. Most scholars know of the role played by Texans in the agrarian revolts of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. There has been much written about the Farmer's Alliance, Populism, and agrarian Socialism in Texas.¹¹ Fewer people, however, know of organized labor's lengthy history in the state, especially in Galveston. Through their unions, the workers of Texas achieved a degree of power that matched many of the nation's most strongly organized cities and industries.

Prior to the Civil War, the labor movement in Texas followed a pattern seen across the nation. Workers in Texas could not boast of any energetic labor activism because none existed outside of a few scattered ethnic benevolent societies. In 1857, Houston and Galveston led the state's first attempts to form a comprehensive workingmen's mutual aid association. Due to the general lack of industry, a scattered workforce, and widespread distrust of labor organizations as "Yankee innovations," such early efforts failed and severely retarded union growth during the antebellum period.¹² Soon after the end of the war, this situation changed. Much like their counterparts throughout the country, skilled workers in the South began organizing their crafts.¹³

In Texas, the efforts began on the Galveston docks with a small group of specialized workers known as screwmen. Wielding large jackscrews, these laborers compressed and stowed bales of cotton within the holds of ships. A good gang of

screwmen could “jam” up to 15 percent more cotton than a gang of regular hand loaders. Because the profitability of a voyage depended entirely on how many bales they loaded, southern shippers relied heavily on these skilled men. Galveston’s white screwmen recognized the value of their craft, and in October 1866, they formed Texas’s first and most successful labor union of the nineteenth century, the Screwmen’s Benevolent Association (SBA).¹⁴

As the name suggests, the SBA began as a mutual benefit society. An inherently conservative association, it showed little concern for improving working conditions or relieving class conflict throughout its early years. Instead, the SBA created a sense of fraternity among its exclusive membership, organizing social activities, purchasing elaborate uniforms, and providing sickness and death benefits. In response to greater competition from black screwmen, who formed the Colored Screwmen’s Benevolent Society (CSBA) in 1883, the SBA adopted a doctrine of “pure and simple” unionism designed to improve its members’ economic fortunes. After amending its constitution and creating more lenient entrance policies, the SBA’s membership grew substantially. With these new numbers and the leverage they provided, the organized screwmen began making greater demands on the shipping companies to insure that their black competition did not undercut them. The skill of its members and their position in the port allowed the SBA to quickly exert a significant amount of control over work rules, hours, general conditions, hiring, and pay.¹⁵

Throughout the rest of the century, the SBA maintained a great deal of this power, not to mention the goodwill of most Galvestonians. To reassure the latter of its

members' loyalty, the union strictly observed two policies: the maintenance of strict neutrality in the political affairs of the community, and the policing of its members' activities away from the docks. The SBA employed both strategies to guard against behavior that might tarnish the union's image in the eyes of a public still wary of labor organizations. Besides forbidding religious and political figures from addressing their meetings, the aristocratic SBA also refused to affiliate with other longshore unions or city-wide labor assemblies. On the few occasions that the screwmen reached across job lines, their cooperation only lasted briefly. In 1883, for example, the SBA helped form the City Trade and Labor Assembly, but when the new organization began calling for such controversial actions as a strike fund and the endorsement of political candidates, the screwmen quickly dissolved their connection.¹⁶ In spite of its official political aloofness, the SBA still commanded considerable attention in city affairs. Local politicians, most of whom had financial interests in the shipping and cotton industries, could not ignore the SBA and the potential profits its members controlled. This indirect influence made the screwmen a very powerful force in the early history of Galveston and Texas labor.

The SBA's apolitical nature notwithstanding, labor disputes occasionally struck the Galveston waterfront in the nineteenth century. One particularly violent episode took place in 1898, when black longshoremen of Federal Labor Union No. 7147 walked off their jobs at the Mallory docks demanding higher wages. In the conflict that followed, the company imported strikebreakers along with a company of artillery from Houston to protect them. After several instances of violence, including one in which the

mayor and police shot and killed a striker and an innocent bystander, the union men returned to work without realizing their wage demands. The dead bystander, Thomas H. Baker, was a longtime member of the SBA. His funeral procession brought together not only the SBA, but also the majority of the city's approximately fifteen hundred white and black longshoremen.¹⁷ The incident illustrated the growing strength and solidarity of the Galveston longshore unions. Labor activists and unions across the country would have found their pattern of action and the subsequent reaction by authorities familiar.

The early twentieth century represented a major turning point for organized labor in Galveston and Texas. Surprisingly, the continuing expansion of the cotton industry throughout the final years of the nineteenth century actually hurt the SBA. Although its entrance qualifications became more lenient as the years progressed, the union's membership remained low. This made it unable to provide enough men during the busy seasons. Constrained by its numbers and facing greater competition from the CSBA and independent longshoremen, the screwmen began losing control over their craft. Much the same as in countless other trades, technology finally sealed the fate of the SBA. Early in the century, shipping companies introduced the high-density cotton press and large steel steamships into the industry. Both "advances" made the screwman's skilled labor superfluous and steadily undermined his privileged position on the docks. By 1902, the changing situation forced the SBA to give up its long-cherished independence and affiliate with a new force in the Galveston labor movement, the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA).¹⁸

In 1877, an Irish immigrant named Dan Keefe founded the ILA on the docks of

Chicago. Instead of practicing the craft autonomy found in most nineteenth century labor unions, Keefe quickly moved toward industrial unionization, organizing semi-skilled black and white longshoremen throughout the ports of the Great Lakes and East Coast. In 1900, the ILA issued its first Texas charter to the general longshoremen of Galveston, who became Local 310. Aided by the creation of overarching organizations such as the Galveston Dock and Marine Council, the ILA quickly gained strength throughout the port. Although it remained fiercely independent, the weakening position of the SBA forced it to join the international as Local 317 several years later. Following this, black screwmen chartered Locals 329 and 851, in 1911 and 1913, respectively. According to the Maud Russell, a historian of the ILA, the white Southern Pacific longshoremen in Local 385 had “the largest local in the South and probably one of the largest in the country.”¹⁹ With its high membership and commitment to the organization of black and white workers, the ILA spread rapidly to other ports in Texas and the South, but Galveston’s status as the most organized Gulf port made it the jewel in the union’s southern crown. When the ILA decided to form a South Atlantic and Gulf Coast District 1911, it chose Galveston as its new headquarters, evidence that the union highly valued the city.²⁰ Though the port has since declined in importance, this symbolic proof of Galveston’s historical significance to the labor movement is still located on the Strand just two blocks from the waterfront.

The hiring method practiced on the Galveston docks provides another significant indication of the union’s strength. Due to the infrequent nature of longshore work, most companies in the early twentieth century only employed longshoremen by the day.

When ships finally made port, most hiring took place by means of the infamous “shape up.” As hundreds of men “shaped up” in a crude semicircle at the head of each dock, the foreman, usually employed directly by the company or a stevedoring firm, proceeded to choose however many he thought necessary for working the vessel. Because this individual maintained total control over the entire process, hiring remained arbitrary and subject to corruption long into the twentieth century.²¹ On the docks of Galveston, employers used a different method of employment. As in most other Texas ports, the railroads and their allied shipping companies in the city employed regular freight handlers. Instead of the casual shape up, Lester Rubin argues that the ILA “controlled hiring and saw fit to rotate the gangs assigned to work to insure that the work was spread evenly among all members.” This system of employment produced the first “de-casualized” ports in the nation and demonstrated the considerable power enjoyed by the longshoremen’s unions within the port of Galveston.²²

The general state of the labor movement in Texas during the early twentieth century also aided the ILA along the Gulf Coast. One of the most important advances for organized labor occurred with the formation of the Texas State Federation of Labor (TSFL). Created in 1900 at Cleburne, a town whose place in the history of working class activism is well known to scholars of Populism, the TSFL fought to improve the plight of workers through labor reforms. The twenty-three original delegates of the Federation brought together farm groups, organized labor, and various middle-class elements into a progressive alliance that affected a great deal of positive change. Although affiliated with the American Federation of Labor, the TSFL eschewed its

parent organization's voluntarism in favor of a more politically active platform reminiscent of the Knights of Labor.²³

In January 1903, this progressive mentality culminated in the creation of the Federation's Joint Labor Legislation Board. Through this new board, the TSFL essentially became a political lobbying group for the workingmen and women of the state. The Federation supported typically progressive measures, such as laws limiting child and convict labor and regulation of working hours and safety conditions. Of particular significance to the state's longshoremen, the TSFL-sponsored "Spider Bill," named for the foreign objects frequently found in cotton bales, protected their hands from "metal ties, buckles, bands, and splices." The board also kept a watchful eye on Texas legislators, publishing their voting records for all working people to see. Dockworkers could point with pride to the presidency of the Federation, occupied from 1907 to 1910 by a longshoreman from ILA Local 307 in Galveston, J.H. Fricke. Until about 1910, a receptive and progressive legislature hostile toward non-native industries helped the TSFL achieve many of its goals.²⁴

The second decade of the twentieth century witnessed the first major setbacks for Texas's historically sound labor movement. Beginning in 1911, a succession of anti-labor governors and less-than-friendly legislators entered the capitol building in Austin. The TSFL's influence declined dramatically as a result.²⁵ World War I did little to alleviate these growing problems. Contrary to those who cite the era as a "Golden Age" for unionization and the American working class, the war hurt Texas labor, especially in Galveston. Scholars that view 1914-1918 as a watershed for unions usually point for

evidence to the accomplishments of Woodrow Wilson. The president's desire to maintain high production and a vigorous war effort led him into a close alliance with the labor movement administration. In late 1917, the longshoremen of the nation gained what appeared to be a powerful ally when the administration created the National Adjustment Commission (NAC) to deal with labor problems on the nation's wharves.²⁶ In Galveston, however, the statewide economic slump meant that dockworkers had no jobs to defend with this newfound political voice. On the occasions that the NAC managed to successfully arbitrate grievances for Texas's dockworkers, their employers usually sidestepped the most onerous provisions. Holding this power, many businessmen begin hiring women and children at reduced wages once again. The vicious oil field strike that began in November 1917 cured many of the illusion that capital and labor could work together in Texas. When the war ended a year later, the government-union alliance collapsed almost overnight. As the war agencies faltered and failed, organized labor—in Texas and throughout the country—quickly realized that the future contained many bitter days.²⁷

* * * *

In spite of the seemingly ominous economic horizon, Galveston labor continued to enjoy a good deal of local political influence after World War I. To understand this requires a brief trip back to the turn of the century and an explanation of the city's municipal government. In the aftermath of the 1900 hurricane, a group called the Deep Water Committee (DWC) proposed rewriting the city's charter and doing away with the city council form of government then in place. Created in 1882 to promote harbor

improvements, the elite-controlled DWC had a vested interest in the recovery of Galveston's commercial operations. After a short battle, voters accepted the "Galveston Plan" and watched the establishment of a new commission form of government. Instead of a mayor and city council representing local citizens of different precincts, five city commissioners elected at-large every two years ran the city. In addition to the mayor, the charter created separate commissioners for finance and revenue, police and fire, waterworks and sewerage, and streets and public improvements.²⁸

Although on paper the commission form of government appeared to be more egalitarian than its predecessor, Galvestonians quickly learned that practice does not always follow theory. Each commissioner gained legislative and executive powers in his area, but because they had no obligation to cooperate with their colleagues, the new government operated rather inefficiently. The creation of a complicated and unproductive municipal government by a city hoping to regain its footing seems counterproductive at first sight. The motive behind this decision, however, becomes clear when considering the affiliations of the DWC—over half the members of this committee maintained ties to the powerful and privately-owned Galveston Wharf and Cotton Press Company.²⁹

Established under the leadership of wealthy entrepreneurs in 1854, the Wharf Company enjoyed a virtual monopoly on all port activities. By 1860, the Company owned seven of Galveston's ten wharves and controlled all local tariffs and port fees. With little regard for the city or its ordinary citizens, its directors frequently raised or lowered these duties in order to benefit themselves and their investors. Recalling the

national railroad scandals of previous decades, many Texans began labeling the Company the “Octopus of the Gulf.” Thomas Barker maintains that the history of the corporation “became one” with the city following the storm.³⁰ With this history no doubt in mind, many residents saw through the Company’s apparent altruism and recognized the new government as another attempt to control Galveston. The city commission stood as the culmination of the local business aristocracy’s divide-and-conquer strategy. One contemporary Galvestonian argued that the commission “constituted an attempt by upper-class, advanced professional and large business groups to take formal political power from the previously dominant lower- and middle-class elements that they might advance their own conceptions of desirable public policy.”³¹

How then did organized labor and its working class membership benefit from this arrangement? By the time of the war, cracks began appearing in the city government as the commissioners, not all of whom had economic interests in the waterfront, came into conflict with the Wharf Company over financial matters. In 1917, Isaac H. Kempner and George Sealy won the positions of mayor and commissioner for finance and revenue. Representing Galveston’s leading families, both Kempner and Sealy had strong ties to the DWC and Wharf Company. Filled with the progressive spirit of the time and unwilling to endure the dominance of private interests any longer, several groups came together and challenged these aristocrats. Calling themselves the City Party, an independent ticket of candidates temporarily broke the Company’s stranglehold on the citizenry by defeating Kempner and Sealy in 1919. With the approval of local voters, the City Party successfully amended the municipal charter in

May 1920. The new document included such progressive provisions as recall of city officials, eminent domain, and authorization for the city government to purchase and sell up to two-thirds of the Wharf Company's total value. According to the pro-business *Galveston Daily News*, the charter amendments met with greatest favor in the precincts occupied by laboring men. In a statement made two months later, the popular commission argued that their electoral reversal abolished special privilege in the city. They increased tax revenue at the expense of under-assessed corporations, firms, and wealthy individuals, while eliminating taxes on sewerage and lowering streetcar prices. In this rebellious atmosphere, at-large elections provided dockworkers and their fellow workingmen a significant amount of leverage in city politics. In the hands of the City Party, Galveston's municipal government became a friend of the working class.³²

Despite the local support it commanded in 1920, organized labor met a less congenial reception in state politics. The progressive days of the century's first decade had long since passed. "A more tolerant attitude toward corporate enterprise marked Texas society after the war," argued historian Lewis Gould. "Businessmen responded to the doctrines of cooperation that the war fostered and supported the burgeoning Chamber of Commerce movement," thus tying the prosperity of state and local governments to their own. The business community's constant attacks on the Texas Industrial Welfare Commission indicated the growing hostility toward labor activism. Two years after the creation of this progressive agency, the 1921 legislative session repealed the law creating it and deprived workers of a potentially useful ally.³³

Distraction with other issues partly explains this ambivalence toward the plight

of workers in the state. Since the turn of the century, a significant number of Texas Democrats had joined their southern neighbors in the moral crusade for prohibition. Writing to the governor in 1905, T.W. Carlock stated that “the position of public men upon the question has invited or repelled their following more than their view upon all other questions combined: when the issue becomes acute it dominates every other issue.”³⁴ The enactment of national prohibition in January 1920 allowed Texas’s crusaders to solidify their position, but the issue continued to fester. The issue had particular significance in Galveston since the city’s status as a pleasure destination lent itself to the unimpeded flow of intoxicating beverages. Although there is no direct evidence, the connection traditionally made between workers and alcohol consumption may have adversely effected the image of Galveston’s longshoremen. Rather than diverting the attention of state officials, prohibition may have actually served to focus greater concern on the proverbially drunken longshoremen of Galveston.³⁵

Creating an even greater diversion, the “Invisible Empire” of the Ku Klux Klan reappeared in Texas at the Confederate Veterans Parade of October 1920. By the spring of 1921, organizers established local Klans throughout southeast Texas, including one in Galveston. As the Klan gained strength and ventured into politics, their emphasis on “100 percent Americanism” and the promotion of Anglo-Saxon Protestant morality distracted further attention from the plight of organized labor in the 1920s. Further complicating matters, the Klan continually expressed its hostility toward the labor movement. The industrial unionism and race-mixing practiced by the ILA did not leave a favorable impression on the organized longshoremen’s white-hooded opponents.³⁶

The growing atmosphere of anti-labor sentiment seen across the nation after World War I only added to these political problems. After offering its military aid to crush the massive steel and coal strikes of 1919, the federal government led the charge in a new and intensely repressive Red Scare aimed at working-class activism. Soon, even the most conservative unions found themselves under scrutiny for any trace of radicalism. Such investigations made it obvious to workers that their employers and one-time allies in Washington had already begun to forget their friendly wartime attitude toward the labor movement. The revitalization of open-shop doctrines in 1919, euphemistically renamed the “American Plan” by its business sponsors, eventually proved even more serious. Organized labor quickly recognized the unity and commitment that open-shop advocates had to breaking the American worker’s tenuous power. This new force made its first appearance in Texas during the fall of 1919; by the time the strike began, its anti-union ideology had spread into most of Texas’s largest cities.³⁷ The wartime marriage of labor, business, and government soon gave way to a decade of bitter struggles for control of the American workplace.

* * * *

As they stepped into the 1920s, organized labor and the business interests of Galveston found themselves in an ambiguous position. At the local level, labor seemed to enjoy an advantage politically. Lined up against the unions, Galveston’s shipping interests possessed powerful, if slightly distracted allies of their own in the state and national capitals. Economically, both groups hoped for better days in the wake of wartime depression. The longshoremen fully expected that mediation commissions such

as the NAC would help maintain this prosperity to the benefit of both employer and employee, but local and state businessmen had other plans. Only by weakening organized labor and silencing its newfound political voice could they guarantee their future economic success. To even the casual observer, a showdown between these antagonistic forces of capital and labor seemed inevitable. The final split occurred on March 19, 1920, when sixteen hundred longshoremen walked off Galveston's docks demanding an increase in wages. The watershed struggle that ensued eventually revealed who would control Texas's economic fortunes for the remainder of the decade.

Notes

- ¹ This percentage is derived from figures found in Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 29.
- ² John S. Spratt, *The Road to Spindletop: Economic Change in Texas, 1875-1901* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955), 278.
- ³ Ruth Allen, *East Texas Lumber Workers: An Economic and Social Picture, 1870-1950* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1961), 23-24; and Pratt, *Road to Spindletop*, 282-83. In the value of its product, the lumber industry ranked third in the state.
- ⁴ Pratt, *Road to Spindletop*, 283-84. As an indication of the oil boom, the authorized capital for oil companies (\$240 million) was six times greater in 1901 than for all companies chartered in the previous twenty years.
- ⁵ Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920—State Compendium: Texas* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1925); *Galveston Daily News*, January 1, 1921, Year-end Business Supplement; and *Houston Post*, November 16, 1920, Annual Industrial Number.
- ⁶ Thomas Barker, “Partners in Progress: The Galveston Wharf Company and the City of Galveston, 1900-1930” (Ph.D. diss., Texas A&M, 1979), 168-69. During the 1920s, Galvestonians subtly shifted their attention away from the commerce of the port and focused more intently on their position as a tourist center—for the most part, this trend has continued into the twenty-first century.
- ⁷ Barker, “Partners in Progress,” 1-43. Outside aid to Galveston was also forthcoming, with donations sent from as far away as London and Liverpool. Coercion also played a role in the city’s recovery—days after the storm, the city council adopted a resolution stating that any able-bodied man who refused to clean up debris would not be fed.
- ⁸ David G. McComb, *Galveston: A History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 68.
- ⁹ James Maroney, “Organized Labor in Texas, 1900-1929” (Ph.D. diss., University of Houston, 1975) 181-87; and Barker, “Partners in Progress,” 94-96. Revolutions in Mexico also added to Galveston’s woes, halting the large amounts of imports from the Mexican trade that traditionally came through the port.

¹⁰ Barker, "Partners in Progress," 96-108.

¹¹ The best studies of these movements are Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); and James Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest, 1895-1943* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978).

¹² James V. Reese, "The Early History of Labor Organizations in Texas, 1838-1876," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 72 (July 1968): 4-9.

¹³ F. Ray Marshall, "Some Reflections on Labor History," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 75 (October 1971): 142-44. Marshall also maintains that organized labor in Texas grew at the same pace as elsewhere in the country.

¹⁴ James V. Reese, "The Evolution of an Early Texas Union: The Screwmen's Benevolent Association of Galveston, 1866-1891," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 75 (October 1971): 158-61; and Allen Clayton Taylor, "A History of the Screwmen's Benevolent Association from 1866 to 1924" (M.A. thesis, The University of Texas, 1968), 7, 45.

¹⁵ Reese, "Evolution of an Early Texas Union," 160-66, 179-84; and Taylor, "History of the Screwmen's Benevolent Association," 49-81, 87-95. As its influence spread, the SBA secured wages of \$5 to \$6 a day for its members. In contrast, railway men and streetcar operators, both considered aristocrats of southern labor, made no more than \$2.50 a day. The seasonal nature of the screwmen's work, however, probably made their annual income less than these wages suggest.

¹⁶ Reese, "Evolution of an Early Texas Union," 167-170. The apolitical and aristocratic nature of the SBA stands in direct contrast to the conclusions reached by Michael Kazin in *Barons of Labor: The San Francisco Building Trades and Union Power in the Progressive Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 278-90.

¹⁷ "An Account of the Mallory Line Strike of 1898," Labor Movement in Texas Collection, Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin (hereafter cited as CAH); and "Baker's Funeral," Political Broadside and Circulars, Galveston and Texas History Center, Rosenberg Library, Galveston, TX.

¹⁸ Taylor, "History of the Screwmen's Benevolent Association," 87-107; and Reese, "Evolution of an Early Texas Union," 185. In spite of their decline, it is interesting to note that the ILA still lists several Galveston locals as composed of screwmen and cotton jammers.

¹⁹ Maud Russell, *Men Along the Shore* (New York: Brussel & Brussel, 1966), 85. Although it presents a romantic image of longshore workers and their union, Russell's work is the most comprehensive study of the ILA written. Also see "Dock and Marine Council of Galveston," Labor Movement in Texas Collection, CAH. Committed to inter-union solidarity, the DMC acted as a mediator in disputes and protected all longshoremen from unfair treatment by employers.

²⁰ Russell, *Men Along the Shore*, 84-88.

²¹ On the shape up system, see Charles Barnes, *The Longshoremen* (New York: Survey Associates, 1915), 60-62; and James W. Kelley, "Labor Problems of Longshoremen in the United States" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1941), 67-68, 86-87. Also, see Chapter III below. Along with their proximity to vice-ridden waterfront districts, it was this system of casual labor and the loafing time it provided that probably led outsiders to believe all longshoremen were lazy drunkards.

²² Lester Rubin, *The Negro in the Longshore Industry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974), 123-25. Eric Arnesen's work upholds Rubin's conclusion about the hiring practices on the Galveston docks. See "Biracial Waterfront Unionism in the Age of Segregation," in *Waterfront Workers: New Perspectives on Race and Class*, ed. Calvin Winslow (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 32-33.

²³ Grady Lee Mullenix, "A History of the Texas State Federation of Labor" (Ph.D. diss., The University of Texas, 1955), 12-48; Maroney, "Organized Labor in Texas," 50-58; and Ruth Allen, *Chapters in the History of Organized Labor in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1941), 124-166.

²⁴ Mullenix, "History of the Texas State Federation of Labor," 157-163; Maroney, "Organized Labor in Texas," 59-66, (quote 65-66). Although unrelated to the current study, it is interesting to note that "the Federation passed a resolution condemning the action of Texas A&M College in sending student machinists to Palestine to replace striking machinists in the shops of the International and Great Northern Railway...they also condemned the 'so-called technical school for teaching the trades as unfair unless under the supervision of competent union mechanics.'" Mullenix, "History of the Texas State Federation of Labor," 81.

²⁵ Mullenix, "History of the Texas State Federation of Labor," 165-238.

²⁶ Joseph McCartin, *Labor's Great War: The Struggle for Industrial Democracy and the Origins of Modern American Labor Relations, 1912-1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 75. McCartin's work is a good example of the numerous studies that see World War I as a positive turning point in U.S. labor relations. For the opposite view, see Christopher L. Tomlins, *The State and the Unions:*

Labor Relations, Law, and the Organized Labor Movement in America, 1880-1960 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). Tomlins argues that state intervention harmed organized labor because it allowed an economically-minded national government to control the movement's course and tactics.

²⁷ Maroney, "Organized Labor in Texas," 181-87; and McCartin, *Labor's Great War*, 173-75. On the Texas-Louisiana oil field strike, see Maroney, 186-99 and Chapter IV below.

²⁸ McComb, *Galveston*, 134-35; Susan Wiley Hardwick, *Mythic Galveston: Reinventing America's Third Coast* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 110-11; and Barker, "Partners in Progress," 36-39.

²⁹ Hardwick, *Mythic Galveston*, 110-11; and Barker, "Partners in Progress," 3. Of the fifteen DWC members, nine owned stock in the Wharf Company, while the remaining six were all engaged in business on the company's property.

³⁰ Hardwick, *Mythic Galveston*, 54-56; and Barker, "Partners in Progress," 2. Hardwick argues further that the conservative, controlling style of the port's leadership played into the hands of Galveston's economic rivals, especially those in Houston. These competitors began to outpace Galveston by the turn of the twentieth century.

³¹ Hardwick, *Mythic Galveston*, 109-10 (quote); and McComb, *Galveston*, 135. McComb supports Hardwick's statement, arguing that the commission government "placed the elite in temporary control to carry out their plans for long-range recovery of the city and protection of their economic base."

³² *Galveston Daily News*, May 4, 5, July 16, 1920; Barker, "Partners in Progress," 108, 111-13; and McComb, *Galveston*, 166. Despite this brief show of strength, the labor movement in Galveston never achieved the long-term political power occasionally seen elsewhere. For examples of this, see Kazin, *Barons of Labor*; and Eric Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics, 1863-1923* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

³³ Lewis L. Gould, *Progressives and Prohibitionists: Texas Democrats in the Wilson Era* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), 251.

³⁴ Gould, *Progressives and Prohibitionists*, 28 (quote); and Maroney, "Organized Labor in Texas," 70-73.

³⁵ On the so-called "Free State of Galveston," whose reputation as a wet city continued from the prohibition era until the final statewide repeal of anti-liquor laws in 1971, see McComb, *Galveston*, 150-87. The misconception about the drinking habits of

longshoremen is discussed in Chapter III.

³⁶ Charles C. Alexander, *Crusade for Conformity: The Ku Klux Klan in Texas, 1920-1930* (Houston: Texas Gulf Coast Historical Association, 1962); Casey Greene, "Guardians Against Change: The Ku Klux Klan in Houston and Harris County, 1920-1925," *Houston Review* 10 (1988): 3-20; and Norman D. Brown, *Hood Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug: Texas Politics, 1921-1928* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1984), 49-87, 211-252.

³⁷ David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987), chapters 7-9; Allen M. Wakstein, "The Origins of the Open Shop Movement, 1919-1920," *Journal of American History* 51 (Dec. 1969): 460-75; Jay Littman Todes, "Organized Employer Opposition to Unionism in Texas, 1900-1930" (M.A. thesis, The University of Texas, 1949), 19-80; and Maroney, "Organized Labor in Texas," 207-209.

CHAPTER III

UNFULFILLED PROMISES

As memories of the wartime depression began fading in March 1920, organized labor optimistically expected its alliance with government and business to continue into the new decade. The role labor played in the victory over German forces seemed to secure its recent gains. When the Galveston longshoremen's strike began later that month, most of the longshoremen believed that the existence of mediation boards like the National Adjustment Commission (NAC) and their contributions to the war effort would help bring about a quick and amiable resolution. In spite of these hopes, the men soon realized that their employers' stubbornness and the impotency of wartime labor boards stood in the way of the outcome they desired. Although the members of Locals 385 and 807 enjoyed the support of many traditionally-minded Galvestonians, the shipping companies and their business allies intended to force a showdown with organized labor. The bitter and sometimes violent conflict that ensued indicated to the longshoremen that whatever visions their employers had for the future, it did not include them or their unions.

* * * *

Although many viewed theirs as an unskilled profession, longshoremen had a dangerous and physically demanding job that required a great deal of competence. On-the-job injuries and deaths occurred all too often on the country's docks. Many of the worst accidents happened around open hatches, where a longshoreman might fall or be crushed to death by improperly loaded or swinging cargo. Extremely long work hours

and the shipping companies' lack of concern for safety precautions caused most of these incidents. Because the profitability of a journey depended on how much time a ship spent in port, the nation's longshoremen usually worked extremely long hours. In his classic study of the New York longshore industry, Charles Barnes stated that longshoremen often worked continuously from fifteen to forty hours, barely receiving time enough to eat, let alone sleep. This concern for profit offered little incentive for companies to provide safety measures that might slow the process of loading or unloading. The longshoremen suffered from this calculation—53 percent died between the ages of thirty-five and fifty-four, as compared to just 34 percent in all other occupations.¹

Besides accidents, the profession proved detrimental to physical health in other ways as well. For men loading 300 pound bags of sugar and 500 pound bales of cotton, fatigue was constant. Since the job required them to work outdoors in all types of weather conditions, longshoremen had a high risk of becoming sick. Those working between damp docks and refrigerated ships or handling easily airborne cargo (grain or cement, for example) frequently fell victim to ailments such as pneumonia and tuberculosis. In Texas, weather conditions often affected the comfort of dockworkers. Anyone living along the Gulf Coast knows how oppressive the humidity and heat can be after a summer shower. The near tropical atmosphere quickly became unbearable in the poorly ventilated hold of steel steamships. In their relentless drive for profit, many shipping companies even refused to provide drinking water under such circumstances. Instead, the foreman deducted a small sum of money from the men's paychecks, usually

a nickel or dime for each day worked, in exchange for a community bucket of ice water.²

If asked to name the worst characteristic of their industry in the early twentieth century, most dockworkers would have answered the infrequency of work. Because of their connection to the unpredictable schedules of ocean-going vessels, longshoremen accepted a certain amount of casualness in their daily work schedules, regularly interspersed with long periods of unemployment. Although the replacement of the sailing vessel with the steamship made regularly scheduled voyages more predictable, casual work continued to plague the professional longshoreman. The arbitrariness of hiring under the shape-up system did nothing to alleviate this. Even in ports like Galveston where longshore unions enjoyed a voice in employment decisions, men did not receive paychecks when the port contained no ships. A general oversupply of labor only added to this problem. Although certain aspects of the job required knowledge and skill, a person only truly needed physical strength to perform longshore work. Hard times usually attracted laborers from other occupations, providing more competition for professional longshoremen already hard pressed to make ends meet.³

Casualness had two important effects on dockworkers. First, social commentators and scholars frequently characterized the longshoreman as a lazy, immoral drunkard unwilling to hold steady employment. In order to obtain work, the longshoreman spent lengthy hours loafing about in shabby waterfront districts waiting for new ships to arrive. Observed by less penetrating eyes, such necessary behavior invited the formation of unsavory stereotypes.⁴ No doubt some of the men embraced this reputation, but most simply ignored it. They could not, however, overlook the effect

that casual work had on their earnings. Even though longshoremen received relatively high wages compared to other unskilled laborers, the infrequency of work and long periods of unemployment made it difficult for them to earn a decent living. On the docks of New York, the average wage of \$0.33 an hour in 1914 compared favorably to that received by unionized machinists, but the infrequency of work resulted in weekly paychecks smaller than that of a common steel-mill laborer.⁵ The president of ILA Local 385, O.A. Anderson, confirmed this difficulty in the first days of the Galveston strike, stating that “the wages we received would not be so bad if the work was steady, but as it is, we only work about four days a week and we do not make enough to live on.” Rising inflation, which plagued the nation during and after World War I, did little to alleviate this problem.⁶

While Galveston’s longshoremen struggled to regain their economic footing after the recent wartime slump, waterfront workers across the country found themselves sliding into a postwar depression. Casual work, unemployment, and low earnings only made such times more trying. All of these problems finally reached their breaking point in March 1920. Following the example set by thousands of New York dockworkers, coastwise longshoremen in almost every major port from Boston to the Rio Grande took action and walked off their jobs. This mass rebellion of labor represented the culmination of a half year’s worth of frustration and failed negotiation on the part of the country’s coastwise dockworkers.

The final descent into industrial conflict began on September 19, 1919. At a meeting held in New Orleans, various southern locals of the ILA met in New Orleans

and formulated wage demands which they intended to present to their companies. One week later, the individual unions contacted their stevedores, contractors, and steamship lines, giving them fifteen days to comply with the new demands. In Galveston, union representatives from Locals 385 and 807 presented the Morgan-Southern Pacific and Mallory steamship lines with a demand for an increase in wages from \$0.60 to \$0.80 straight time and \$0.90 to \$1.20 overtime. At the request of the companies and their affiliates, the longshoremen agreed to place the matter before a hearing of the NAC, to take place in New Orleans from October 28 to November 1.⁷

The year 1919 was a period of transition for the NAC. Although created to function for the duration of the war only, the commission's success in mediating longshore labor disputes convinced officials in Washington to reorganize it on a permanent basis during peacetime. Just prior to the longshoremen's September meeting they achieved this goal, but reorganization remained incomplete. Neither the United States Railroad Administration, which controlled most of the country's coastwise lines during the war, nor the remaining private coastwise lines would agree to become parties in the reconstructed NAC. This refusal had an important impact on the outcome of the New Orleans meeting. Although all classes of longshoremen sent representatives to the hearing, the commission could only reach wage settlements for those engaged in deep sea operations. This adjustment included cotton screwmen, general longshoremen, and timbermen, but not the country's coastwise longshoremen.⁸ Instead, the commission passed the buck and told the coastwise representatives it did not have time to consider their demands, but would meet again as soon as possible to reopen the matter.⁹

The hearing and its outcome quickly became a point of conflict among the nation's coastwise longshoremen. Wage parity with the traditionally higher paid deep sea longshoremen had long been a demand of the coastwise workers, and during the war, many achieved this. The NAC meeting, however, once again created wage differentials between the different classes of longshoremen. Depending on the port, this disparity ranged from \$0.15 to \$0.30 an hour. Having become accustomed to wage equality, the coastwise men saw this as an injustice that required remediation as quickly as possible. Most were understandably excited when the NAC followed through on its recent promise and convened a second adjustment meeting in Washington, D.C. from December 5 to 6.¹⁰

This optimism quickly turned into disappointment and anger upon their arrival in the national capital. Almost immediately, the commission informed the union representatives of the coastwise shipping companies' refusal to enter official negotiations. Instead, the meeting would be nothing more than an informal wage conference between the parties and its decisions neither final nor binding. This impotency carried over into the meeting's outcome. The shipping companies agreed to raise wages only if the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) first granted them an increase in freight rates. Much to labor's dismay, the ICC denied this request and the longshoremen returned to their home ports "having been given the regularly prescribed dose of promises that something would soon be done."¹¹

As the holidays came and went, both the NAC and the shipping companies refused to address the coastwise longshoremen's grievances. With their patience

beginning to wear thin, various coastwise locals wired ILA president T.V. O'Connor on January 15, 1920 with a threat to strike if the NAC did not take action within ten days. Hoping to call the locals' bluff, the NAC waited until the January 25 deadline to issue a response. B.M. Squires, the executive secretary of the commission, urged the longshoremen not to leave work and said he would take up the matter in Washington the next day. The locals also received a letter from NAC chairman William Z. Ripley, promising to contact them with either a decision or further information by February 3.¹²

As promised, the NAC sent word to the locals on February 3, but the news it sent once again disappointed the longshoremen. For a second time, the commission informed the unions that the shipping companies refused to make any concessions without an increase in freight rates, making an adjustment impossible at present. In a feeble demonstration of its waning power, the NAC attempted to distance itself from the situation by placing responsibility for all future agreements squarely on the shoulders of the coastwise companies, which returned to private ownership on March 1. Labor swiftly and decisively protested this new insult. The night of the commission's announcement, members of Local 385 voted to walk off the Morgan-Southern Pacific docks the next morning in protest of the commission's decision. ILA headquarters ordered the Mallory Line workers not to involve themselves in the strike, but gave no reason for this decision. The only noteworthy event of this two-week long strike occurred on February 5 when twenty-five hundred longshoremen in New Orleans voted to join the men. Galveston's aggrieved workers simply remained at home, neither picketing nor demonstrating during the short walkout.¹³

With the end of their reluctant vacation on February 20, the men returned to work with further promises that action would follow sometime between March 5 and 15. Wary of these oaths after so many recent disappointments, coastwise locals in New York anticipated the worst and walked out on March 12. Showing a bit more restraint, their counterparts in Galveston gave the NAC and their employers the benefit of the doubt until March 19. When they received no word from the shipping companies, the men “at last woke up to the fact that their loyalty to the city and country had caused them to allow their employers to play with them for a period of six months and then be told that there was nothing doing.” That night in their separate union halls, the members of Locals 385 and 807 voted to quit work until the coastwise lines met their wage demands.¹⁴

* * * *

In its first few weeks, the strike drew relatively little attention from the local press. Considering the companies’ recent record and the brevity of the February walkout, few Galvestonians believed that this incident would be any different. Both parties to the strike followed strategies identical to before: the longshoremen stayed at home and the company docks remained idle. Commentators elsewhere, however, recognized the potential trouble that could result from shutting down one of the nation’s most fundamental industries. On March 29, the NAC released a statement calling for an immediate end to the conflict. According to Chairman Ripley, the strike threatened to cut off vital northern lumber supplies needed for the upcoming building season and halt the movement of perishable goods from the South. This would devastate truck farmers

and guaranteed higher prices for consumers across the country.¹⁵

Ripley's attempt to assign blame for the strike was even more interesting. In a wonderful display of bureaucratic smoke-and-mirrors, he exonerated the shipping companies of any guilt. Although Ripley defended the demands of the longshoremen and agreed that the rising cost-of-living made higher wages necessary, he also accepted the shipping companies' argument that adjustments in their stagnant industry had to await an increase in freight rates. "Relief can only come when the Interstate Commerce Commission increases railroad rates. The coastwise lines may then once more thrive," he said. "Until then, if it be cheaper to tie up the boats than to run them, there is but one choice to the [strikers]. Grievous as the hardship may be, they must either return to work at the existing rates or seek employment elsewhere."¹⁶ This statement showed the tacit assumption that the men, not the companies, would have to sacrifice if they hoped for any agreement on wages. Considering their recent victories in World War I, Ripley's words indicated a reversal of fortunes for organized labor and the restoration of the prewar status quo. Its need for them satisfied, the federal government quietly began abandoning the country's labor unions and the workers they represented.

As expected, labor responded indignantly to Ripley's statement. An editorial in the *Union Review*, the official journal of Galveston's Labor Council and Dock and Marine Council, provided the chairman with a friendly reminder that the longshoremen had attempted to place their grievances before the NAC for nearly six months, but the shipping companies and the commission thwarted every effort at adjustment. The editorial went on to argue that Congress should give the ICC the power to grant such

increased freight rates if doing so would affect a settlement. “The railroads have been guaranteed a reasonable income,” said the paper, “and if it is impossible, as is claimed, for the steamship companies to pay an increase in wages without an increase in freight rates, then why should not this increase be granted in preference to asking men to sweat their lives away for wages that forces [sic] them to practice the utmost economy in order to provide for their families only the bare necessities of life?”¹⁷

Following Ripley’s statement, Secretary of Labor William B. Wilson called a conference hoping to settle the strike. Taking notice of the NAC chairman’s warnings, Wilson too feared the effects that a strike would have on food supplies to northern cities. The same day the *Union Review* published its editorial, three representatives of the Galveston longshoremen met with their colleagues and various shipping companies in Washington, D.C. Dissolved later that afternoon, the conference failed to yield positive results as the shipping companies continued to stand stubbornly by their earlier position. Labor especially resented the outcome. Not only had they sent representatives across the country at great expense, but they also continued to receive censure and condemnation from business interests claiming to speak for the larger public. The dissolution of the conference provided yet another indication of the labor-government alliance’s fragility. A week later, the Galveston locals voted to continue the strike indefinitely until they received their wage demands.¹⁸

On April 16, Mallory’s Galveston shipping agent, F.T. Rennie, released a statement regarding the strike. “This company’s relation with its labor at Galveston has been good and we would like to have our regular labor return to work,” he announced.

“But if they will not resume their duties, we will be compelled to get other labor.”¹⁹

Rennie no doubt had in mind the steamship *Alamo*. In good times, this coastwise vessel would have been unloaded and underway with a full cargo in several days, but the strike had forced the ship to remain idle on the docks for nearly a month. Rennie’s words indicated the companies’ willingness and intention to use strikebreakers for the first time. Four days after its agent’s statement, the Mallory line began running advertisements in the *Galveston Daily News* calling for longshoremen at the rate of \$0.60 an hour straight time and \$0.90 overtime. Two days later, the Morgan-Southern Pacific lines followed this example and began printing its own notices in the local press. Both shipping companies quickly expanded their coverage, placing ads in newspapers across Texas. After interviewing some of their potential replacements, striking longshoremen discovered that many had responded to notices published as far away as Alabama and Kansas City.²⁰

Rennie’s words and the advertisements signaled a new willingness to end the strike through all the means at the companies’ disposal. Initially, these efforts failed to have much success. In the week following Rennie’s announcement and the first advertisements, no more than twenty men showed up each day on the Mallory docks. Coming from outside Galveston, many of these strikebreakers refused to continue working the *Alamo* after learning about the conflict. By the end of the month, the labor press reported that the coastwise docks only employed a handful of men and set no date for the completion of the work. Despite the companies’ escalation of the conflict, the striking longshoremen remained on their best behavior, quietly “going about their

business” and offering no interference that might cause them to lose the respect of the community.²¹

The longshoremen recognized the importance that strict attention to this strategy of non-interference carried. As the labor press and both Ripley and Wilson indicated earlier, public opinion greatly impacted the course of the strike. The unfortunate truth for labor unionists, especially those in key industries such as shipping, was that the effectiveness of their strikes stood inversely proportional to the amount of hardship they tended to impose on the American public. The more damage a strike did to the consumer, the less likely the strikers would receive sympathy or support from those not involved.²²

The shipping companies quickly recognized this and used the anxiety of Galveston business interests to their advantage. On May 6, Mallory officials announced that two steamers en route from New York had changed course to dock in the rival city of Port Arthur rather than Galveston. Additionally, several ships already in port would leave immediately to receive their cargo elsewhere. Eight days later, Rennie declared that the Mallory line intended to cease operations in Galveston indefinitely and move its offices and terminals to Port Arthur. J.B. Denison, vice president of the company, stated, “I don’t know if the Mallory line will ever return to Galveston, but in case it does, conditions making it possible for vessels to be worked unhampered by strikers must prevail.” Morgan officials held their tongues, but on May 17, rumors leaked into the press that they too might relocate their affairs to either New Orleans or Sabine. Trying to capitalize on this fear, the Southern Pacific’s general agent H.M. Wilkins refused to

confirm or deny these reports.²³

Adding urgency to these announcements, Houston business interests began offering inducements to the Morgan and Mallory lines to leave the island. With the completion of its Ship Channel through Galveston Bay in 1915, the port of Houston became a serious rival to the Island City. According to the *Houston Post*, Mallory's move to Port Arthur afforded "a concrete illustration of the folly of strikes." The striking longshoremen had done irreparable damage to the port of Galveston and local and statewide business interests, not to mention themselves and their families. On May 31, various Houston civic clubs, including the Young Men's Business League, the Salesmanship Club, the Advertising Association, the South Texas Automobile Association, and the Retail Merchants Association, issued a resolution denouncing Galveston as a longshoremen's town and suggested a local bond issue to secure funds for new dock facilities on the Ship Channel. Houston labor, they claimed, remained satisfied and shipping companies did not have to worry about strikes and unrest.²⁴

The actions of the coastwise lines had mixed effects. Initially, the threatened relocation appeared as a small victory for the longshoremen. It seemed to indicate that the strike was having its intended effect upon the shipping companies' business. As proof, the longshoremen called attention to the *Alamo*, which lay idle for over a month before a handful of inefficient strikebreakers could work it. The shipping company's threat to permanently evacuate the island, however, proved much more powerful as propaganda and drew a significant amount of attention to the strike. The shipping companies immediately began to gain many powerful allies in their fight against the

strikers. One of the first converts was the local press. With its numerous sister papers, many Texans viewed the *Galveston Daily News* as the state's unofficial newspaper. The paper used the opportunity provided by the relocation announcements to declare its hostility to the strike. The arguments and grievances of the longshoremen notwithstanding, the strike trapped vital public business interests in the middle, the paper said, and should therefore be subject to settlement through mandatory arbitration. If this proved ineffective, the city had a duty to take over the docks and allow its merchants to break the strike by loading their own goods.²⁵

Mallory's decision to place several privately-employed armed guards on their docks beginning the morning of May 6 proved even more effective at casting a shadow over the strikers. Lacking any precedent of violence by the longshoremen, the company gunmen sought to associate the strikers with violence in the eyes of the local and state community.²⁶ Chief of police W.J. Sedgewick upheld the peacefulness of the strike, stating that all Mallory property stood uninjured and would remain that way. Recognizing the company's motives, organized labor immediately issued a warning to the longshoremen and the shipping companies. The action "can only be construed as an invitation to the men on strike to depart from their peaceful methods of conducting their affairs and start a campaign of violence against the armed guards." The longshoremen then reaffirmed their pledge to only demonstrate within the confines of the law. Having declared their belief in nonviolence, a spokesman for the strikers noted ominously, "Should some individual member of the organization so far forget himself as to become involved in a difficulty with some of these armed guards, organized labor emphatically

refuses to assume any responsibility for the trouble and this responsibility must rest solely on the shoulders of the men who brought these guards into Galveston.”²⁷

Neither the companies nor the unions waited long for the gunmen to have their intended effect. On May 11, the imported strikebreakers completed the work of unloading the *Alamo* and left the Mallory docks accompanied by their guards. Followed by a jeering crowd, the strikebreakers made their way to the train station and boarded the Houston-Galveston interurban. As the train made its way towards the causeway connecting the island to the mainland, the crowd began throwing rocks and other debris at the car, breaking several windows. Several minutes later, unidentified persons fired into the train, striking the change box of conductor C.W. Fan. George Harrison, a Galveston police detective guarding the train’s rear platform, received a more serious injury to his shin. Bystanders rushed the officer to John Sealy Hospital, where he eventually recovered.²⁸

The Interurban Affair brought swift reactions from labor and its supporters. The labor press immediately attempted to put distance between the longshoremen’s unions and this violence. Regrettable as these actions were, organized labor reminded the public that no evidence existed directly linking the strikers or their supporters to the shootings. Much to their surprise, the longshoremen received support from the police department. Galveston’s fire and police commissioner A.P. Norman stated, “If I were the Mallory Line people, I would keep my ships away from here until the thing is over.”²⁹ Chief Sedgewick responded similarly, saying that he believed the affair to be the work of “disturbers,” not the strikers. Unless the longshoremen committed

themselves to more pronounced acts of violence, Sedgewick said, he would not increase the number of police officers on the waterfront beyond those already present. Other commentators blamed the incident on an “alleged German radical.” Originally employed as a guard, this man apparently crossed the picket lines and began inciting the strikers to violence against the government shortly before the shooting. Believing this to be a propaganda trick devised by the companies, organized labor turned the alleged agitator over to the police. The Department of Justice wasted little time and deported him to Germany as an undesirable citizen several days later.³⁰

With this new air of militancy surrounding the strike, outside business interests began lending their support to the shipping companies’ struggle. On May 22, a five man committee named by the Houston Chamber of Commerce arrived in Galveston carrying instructions to determine a solution for removing idle merchandise on the docks. When Mallory officials told them to take the matter up with the longshore unions, the committee decided that Houston merchants should import their own labor to Galveston and retrieve the cargo themselves. Enjoying police protection and special shipping rates from the Houston Interurban and American Wharf companies, numerous merchants began transporting approximately 700,000 pounds of freight from the Mallory docks to Houston. Its patience for the strike exhausted, one pro-business Houston newspaper argued that “[the] businessmen of Houston and other cities are not to be blamed if they propose unusual measures for procuring their property.”³¹

Despite the shipping companies’ efforts to weaken them, the longshoremen deflected much of this negative press with their own propaganda and continued to

maintain the support of influential Galvestonians. The island's community of small merchants frequently demonstrated their allegiance to organized labor. Responding to suggestions that this group should volunteer to move freight from the struck docks, an editorial in the *Union Review* reminded its readers and small business owners that the strike resulted from the shipping companies' intransigence. Loyal citizens, the men had only grudgingly quit work after months of failed negotiation and did not intend to harm the community. Rejecting subtlety, the editorial went on to argue that continued prosperity for local merchants depended entirely on the dockworkers. "It is hoped," warned the writer, "[that] the majority of the merchants will not forget the cordial relations that have existed between the business interests in Galveston and organized labor in the past and not take any action that would jeopardize a continuance of the same cordial relations in the future."³² The power of labor's purse convinced many local merchants to take the longshoremen seriously throughout the strike.

Providing spiritual sanction to the dockworkers, religious figures also lent their support to the strike. On May 23, the Reverend D.B. Titus delivered a sermon tinged with pro-labor rhetoric. The pro-business *Daily News* did not miss the sermon's message, euphemistically reporting its theme as "Settling the Strike." According to the minister, the laws and officers of society showed too much concern for the right of property and had forgotten the more sacred right of human life. "If there is cause for pessimism today," said Titus, "it is not because of strikes and deranged industrial conditions. It is because we still refuse to recognize that life should be the first concern."³³ The sermon granted a certain amount of legitimacy to the dockworkers. In a

system that overlooked the plight of the workingman, strikes existed as a necessary evil. Combined with the support received from local merchants and the police force, as illustrated in the days following the Interurban Affair, Titus' words indicated that the longshoremen enjoyed the backing of a large segment of the community.

The support the shipping companies received from state and local businessmen requires little explanation. Because their financial and economic interests overlapped, a decline in profits for one group could quickly involve all the others. Similarly, labor problems in the longshore industry might provide an example to workers elsewhere. Eager to leave memories of wartime depression and government-sponsored unions behind, Texas's business interests openly supported the shipping companies' struggle and lent their aid in breaking the strike. Only by destroying organized labor's power could businessmen insure their own economic future.

Explaining the longshoremen's support is a bit more difficult. The answer lies in Texas's transformation from rural agrarianism to urban industrialism. By 1920, the state was well on its way in the proverbial move from the country to the city, from farm to factory. Increasingly, businessmen and state politicians put their faith in industrial capitalism and its perceived ability to transform the state's historically colonial economy into an independent economic powerhouse. This process of transformation, however, did not automatically create a new social order. On the contrary, it encountered preexisting local groups with established relations and ways of thinking. According to Herbert Gutman, "economic power was not easily transformed into social and political power, and...the changes resulting from rapid industrialization stimulated sufficient

opposition to the industrialist to deprive him of the status and the authority he sought and needed.” Alongside organized labor and other members of the working-class, many middle-class elements—in this case, merchants, city officials, and at least one member of the religious community—resisted the emerging system of industrial capitalism. The municipal elections of 1918 and charter amendments of 1920 also demonstrated these groups’ lack of support. In both cases, the established lower orders asserted themselves and turned the system to their advantage despite their opponent’s aristocratic status and ties to the island’s most powerful business interests. By supporting the strike, Galveston’s non-elites rebelled once more against what they saw as an unknown and dangerous new social order.³⁴

* * * *

The recognition that the Galveston police supported the longshoremen represented a major turning point in the strike. Following the violence of May 11, the shipping companies’ supporters began to advocate increasingly drastic measures for ending the strike. Apparently forgetting that an officer received wounds escorting the interurban and its strikebreaking passengers, local and outside business-interests accused the police force of neglecting its duty. Time and again, they said, individual officers refused to protect either the strikebreakers or merchants attempting to work the docks. One report went so far as to claim that a police officer actually gave the signal for the mob to attack the interurban.³⁵ As representatives from his city prepared to visit Galveston, H.C. Eargle of the Houston Chamber of Commerce issued a warning soon echoed by many others in the local and statewide business community. His words

contained an ominous forecast for the longshoremen: if local police refused to guard the Galveston docks, then the city and the shipping companies should obtain protection from state or federal authorities.³⁶ It did not take long for Eargle's threat to become reality. In less than three weeks time, state troops arrived in Galveston, their sole purpose to break the strike and destroy organized labor's power.

Notes

¹ Charles Barnes, *The Longshoremen* (New York: Survey Associates, 1915), 130-137; James W. Kelley, "Labor Problems of Longshoremen in the United States" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1941), 88-94, 109-113; Gilbert Mers, *Working the Waterfront: The Ups and Downs of a Rebel Longshoreman* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988); and David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 99. A longshoreman and member of both the ILA and IWW from 1928 to the early 1980s, Mers provides a wonderful account of longshore work conditions and the mainstream and radical union movements during the years of the Great Depression.

² Montgomery, *Fall of the House of Labor*, 97; Kelley, "Labor Problems of Longshoremen," 113; and Mers, *Working the Waterfront*, 30, 43. These deductions paid for the ice used by the men. Incidentally, the practice of drinking from a community bucket and dipper helped spread sickness among the working longshoremen.

³ Barnes, *The Longshoremen*, 55-75; Kelley, "Labor Problems of Longshoremen," 80-87; and Montgomery, *Fall of the House of Labor*, 98-99.

⁴ Kelley's work, for example, largely accepts the negative stereotype and classifies most longshoremen in its light. Barnes, on the other hand, places the blame for this reputation on a class of workers he calls "shenangoes." Lacking families and the desire to do anything but earn enough money with which to drink, shenangoes found the casual, day-to-day employment of the docks particularly inviting. While there were no doubt many workers who fell into this category, the majority of longshoremen were honest, hardworking men trying to support families. See Barnes, *The Longshoremen*, 14-15; and Montgomery, *Fall of the House of Labor*, 99.

⁵ Barnes, *The Longshoremen*, 76-92; Kelley, "Labor Problems of Longshoremen," 94-100; and Montgomery, *Fall of the House of Labor*, 97-98.

⁶ *Galveston Daily News*, March 21, 1920.

⁷ *Galveston Daily News*, March 21, 1920; and *Union Review*, May 21, 1920.

⁸ There are two general types of longshore work: coastwise and deep sea. Coastwise longshoremen work strictly on domestically-owned ships that operate between U.S. ports. Deep sea longshoremen are responsible for handling the cargo of both foreign and domestic ships engaged in international trade.

⁹ *Galveston Daily News*, March 21, 1920; *Union Review*, May 21, 1920; and

International Longshoremen's Association, *Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth Convention*, (1921), 45.

¹⁰ *Galveston Daily News*, March 21, 1920; *Union Review*, May 21, 1920; and ILA, *Proceedings of the Convention*, (1921), 46.

¹¹ *Galveston Daily News*, March 21, 1920 (quote); and *Union Review*, May 21, 1920.

¹² *Galveston Daily News*, March 21, 1920; and *Union Review*, May 21, 1920.

¹³ *Galveston Daily News*, February 5, 6, 9, 19, 20, 1920. Although there is no evidence to support this conclusion, the ILA's order for Local 807 not to strike may have been based on racial considerations. By excluding such a large number of black workers from striking, the ILA was perhaps hoping to keep press coverage to a minimum.

¹⁴ *Galveston Daily News*, March 20, 21 (quote), 1920. Also see *Union Review*, March 26, May 21, 1920.

¹⁵ *Galveston Daily News*, March 30, 1920.

¹⁶ *Galveston Daily News*, March 30, 1920.

¹⁷ *Union Review*, April 2, 1920. The editorial went on to censure Ripley for blaming the longshoremen, saying "it ill behooves Mr. Ripley to attempt to place responsibility for the strike...on the workers when he, as chairman of the National Adjustment Commission, is thoroughly familiar with the efforts made by the employees to reach a settlement of the question, and knows full well that the responsibility for the strike rests squarely on the shoulders of those in authority who have continuously refused to allow the Adjustment Commission to pass on the merits of the demands made by the coastwise workers."

¹⁸ *Galveston Daily News*, March 31, April 1, 3, 1920; and *Union Review*, April 16, 1920.

¹⁹ *Galveston Daily News*, April 16, 1920.

²⁰ *Galveston Daily News*, April 20, 22, 1920; and *Union Review*, April 30, 1920. For an example of non-local advertisements for strikebreakers, see *Houston Post*, May 7, 1920.

²¹ *Galveston Daily News*, April 20, 26, 1920; *Union Review*, April 23, 30, 1920; and Mark Wetherington, "The Savannah Negro Laborers' Strike of 1891," in *Southern*

Workers and Their Unions, 1880-1975: Selected Papers, The Second Southern Labor History Conference, 1978, ed. Merl E. Reed, Leslie Hough, and Gary Fink (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 8-9.

²² Wetherington, "Savannah Negro Laborers' Strike," 8-9; and Robert E. Zeigler, "The Workingman in Houston, Texas, 1865-1914" (Ph.D. diss., Texas Tech University, 1972), 233. Contrary to this, Neil Draper argues that "[southern] unions had the greatest chance of success when they practiced a strategy of escalation." By shifting the arena of conflict and bringing in others with more resources, southern workers could defeat their adversaries. There is little evidence of this occurring in Galveston, however. See Draper, "The New Southern Labor History Revisited: The Success of the Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers' Union in Birmingham, 1934-1938," *Journal of Southern History* 62 (February 1996): 107.

²³ *Galveston Daily News*, May 6, 7, 14, 16 (quote), 17, 1920. Also see *Houston Post*, May 13, 1920.

²⁴ *Houston Post*, May 14, 1920; and *Galveston Daily News*, June 1, 1920. According to Robert Zeigler, Houston's laborers were decidedly unsatisfied after 1914. He argues that the values of Houstonians—conservatism and law and order—worked against organized labor. See Zeigler, "Workingman in Houston," 233.

²⁵ *Galveston Daily News*, May 22, 24, 1920.

²⁶ Robert Justin Goldstein, *Political Repression in Modern America: From 1870 to 1976* (Urbana: Illinois University Press, 2001), 11-12. The only instance of violence to occur since the beginning of the strike was a small "affray" between two whites, a black, and a Mexican near the Mallory docks on April 25. Although the reporting police officer felt the fight was strike-related, the combatants were not apprehended and this charge was never proven. See *Galveston Daily News*, April 26, 1920.

²⁷ *Union Review*, May 7, 1920 (quotes); and *Galveston Daily News*, May 6, 9, 1920.

²⁸ *Galveston Daily News*, May 12, 1920; and *Houston Post*, May 12, 13, 1920.

²⁹ *Galveston Daily News*, May 12, 1920 (quote). Mark Wetherington argues that southern strikers saw non-violence as essential to their cause. It served both to prevent the use of state militia by business interests and to assure a good public image for labor unionists. See Wetherington, "The Savannah Negro Laborer's Strike," 8-9.

³⁰ *Galveston Daily News*, May 12, 1920; *Houston Post*, May 13, 1920; and *Union Review*, May 21, 1920.

³¹ *Houston Post*, May 22 (quote), 23, 26, 27, 1920; and *Galveston Daily News*, May 22, 27, 1920.

³² *Union Review*, April 30, 1920.

³³ *Galveston Daily News*, May 24, 1920.

³⁴ Walter Buenger and Robert Calvert, “The Shelf Life of Truth in Texas,” in *Texas Through Time: Evolving Interpretations*, ed. Buenger and Calvert (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1991), xviii-xix; and Herbert Gutman, “Class, Status, and Community Power in Nineteenth Century American Industrial Cities,” in *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History* (New York: Random House, 1976), 234-60 (quote 258).

³⁵ *Houston Post*, May 12, 1920.

³⁶ *Galveston Daily News*, May 22, 1920.

CHAPTER IV

LABOR UNDER SIEGE

*Forth went the Hobby mandate
Throughout this Texas land
To mobilize the National Guard,
That was his stern command.
Ho! Martial law and war declared,
“By my halidom,” said he,
“I’ll humble that Galveston,
Galveston by-the-sea.”*

*“Oh, Liberty! Oh, Liberty!”
Once cried a famous dame;
“Alas! Alas! The awful crimes
Committed in thy name!”
‘Tis thus may cry Galveston
As to tyranny she bends her knee
For outraged homes and human rights—
Galveston by-the-sea.¹*

Penned at the end of June by an anonymous writer, these verses illustrate the frustration of organized labor in Galveston. The strike was not going well for the longshoremen. Day after day, hundreds of strikebreakers worked an increasing number of ships tied up along the Morgan and Mallory docks. After June 10, these non-union workers received support from a new force in Galveston: the Open-Shop Association. With its anti-strike message, this organization quickly gained allies among Galveston’s business interests. A question inevitably arises from this turn of events: why did the Island City, for decades a stronghold of workers and their unions, suddenly fall into the hands of organized labor’s enemies? The answer, invoked in the poem above, was simple and tragic. On June 7, Governor William Pettus Hobby took control of the strike situation and declared martial law in Galveston. With support from the governor’s

mansion and the guns of the National Guard, Texas's business interests did more than cripple the strike—they helped launch the capitalist-state alliance that proved so disastrous for organized labor in the 1920s.

* * * *

“When companies were unable to suppress labor disturbances through the use of their own resources or local police,” argued political scientist Robert Justin Goldstein, “they rarely encountered difficulty in obtaining use of the state militia.” In the years between 1873 and 1937, American companies cast the National Guard in this role a minimum of 250 to 300 times. The 1920s witnessed a marked increase in this practice. During the first five years of the decade, strike duty accounted for about 90 percent of all National Guard activity.² Galveston's longshoremen had no difficulty confirming this statistic. The Texas National Guard's first major campaign of the new decade provided the Galveston strikers with a discomfiting prophecy of the years to come.

The initial steps on the road to martial law occurred immediately after the violence of the Interurban Affair. Despite their anxiety about the local police force, Galveston's business interests maintained at least one powerful ally within the city government. As a member of the Galveston Wharf Company's board of directors, Mayor H.O. Sappington maintained strong ties to the local business community. The day after the shooting, he issued a statement calling for the preservation of law and order no matter who the offenders might be. Two days later on May 14, four members of the Texas Rangers arrived in Galveston, requested by Sappington and assigned by Hobby to protect two new carloads of non-union laborers on the Morgan docks. Legends aside,

the Rangers held an infamous reputation when it came to dealing with labor unions and strikes.³ Their presence in Galveston provided the first indication that the shipping companies and their business supporters intended to use all the resources the state had to offer in breaking the strike.

Organized labor sharply rebuked Sappington for his actions. At a rally held on the steps of the courthouse May 18, approximately twelve hundred people gathered to hear O.A. Anderson condemn the mayor and reaffirm the peacefulness of the men involved in the strike. He charged that the Mallory and Morgan lines, thanks to their importation of strikebreakers and armed guards, shared the responsibility for all the violence that had occurred. Calling the companies' bluff, Anderson declared their withdrawal from Galveston to be a propaganda tactic. Both lines, he said, would ultimately return and remain on the island. The union chief also took the opportunity to skewer the *Galveston Daily News* with sarcastic remarks about its alliance to local business interests. The mass meeting concluded with a decision that the strike would continue until the companies met all the demands of the longshoremen.⁴

Despite these protests, the force of Rangers remained in the city and helped calm the situation. Under their watchful eye, a small band of strikebreakers housed and fed on the Morgan docks carried out the work of clearing the steamship *El Mundo*. The Mallory docks, meanwhile, remained quiet, attended to by only a few peaceful pickets. Despite occasional reports of violence against non-union workers, the *Daily News* optimistically printed at the end of May "Not as Much Freight Tied Up Here as Thought."⁵ The days that followed rudely shattered this optimism.

On Wednesday June 2, a committee from the Texas Chamber of Commerce arrived in Austin to meet with Governor Hobby. Louis Lipsitz of Dallas and H.H. Haines, general manager of the Galveston Commercial Association, joined the Chamber's president, J.G. Culbertson of Wichita Falls, in Austin. Together with three business representatives from the Island City—H.A. Treat, John Jacobson, and Peter Cummings—these men presented the governor with a petition asking him “to provide adequate protection to citizens of Texas in the port of Galveston while in the pursuit of their work, even to the extent of declaring martial law.” Thanks to the “utterly inadequate” and fully unionized police force, assaults occurred on an almost daily basis against these non-union American citizens. Repeated petitions to local authorities for protection had yielded no help either, causing a congestion of goods valued at \$5 to \$7 million. As a result, the inventories of many mercantile establishments in Texas and the southwest had grown short and the downward trend in prices seen elsewhere passed over the state. Hobby therefore had a constitutional duty to exercise his authority and offer state protection so that the operation of the docks could proceed in “a systematic, lawful, comprehensive fashion in the interest of the city, state, and nation.”⁶

The governor immediately sprang into action, issuing a telegraphic ultimatum to Mayor Sappington and Galveston County Sheriff Henry Thomas the next day. “[The strike] has reached proportions affecting the business interests and material welfare of Texas and the property rights of citizens to such an extent,” said Hobby, “that unless police protection is given...I shall, under the constitution and the laws of Texas, assume control.” He set the deadline for action as Saturday June 5 at nine in the morning.

Hobby then ordered Adjutant General W.D. Cope of the Texas National Guard to proceed at once to Galveston, directing him “to take such action as will be necessary to enforce the laws of the state without partiality, and to keep open those arteries of trade which are essential to the prosperity and uninterrupted conduct of business in Texas.” Twenty nine units of the National Guard, including three machine gun companies and four troops of Houston cavalry, assembled in their armories to await instructions from Cope and the Governor. Overriding the protests of several state senators and Galveston’s representative, the Texas legislature quickly appropriated \$100,000 to sustain the troops should they be sent to the port.⁷

Organized labor responded indignantly to the business committee’s widely publicized pilgrimage and Hobby’s subsequent actions. The *Union Review* argued that these “union labor haters” misrepresented the Galveston conditions to the governor, citing as an example the committee’s assertion that the strike delayed delivery of fifteen million bushels of grain. “Any one who knows anything about the coastwise traffic out of Galveston,” argued the journal, “knows that the coastwise ships of the Mallory and Morgan line carry no grain and never have.” Responsibility for holdups in the port’s grain traffic rested entirely upon the deep sea shipping companies and the rail lines that served them.⁸ I.M. Barb, president of the Galveston Labor Council, seconded this, saying that Hobby and the Austin committee overlooked the lack of arrests since the strike began. Barb stated that the actions of the Governor were “wholly uncalled for and entirely unnecessary.” J.H. Fricke, president of the South Atlantic and Gulf Coast District of the ILA, spared no words, calling the strike “the most peaceful, law-abiding

controversy in history.”⁹

The citizenry and municipal officials of Galveston echoed much of this criticism. Although they refused to be quoted, the *Daily News* reported that “several prominent business men of the city” expressed their disapproval at the threatened use of troops. Less guarded action emanated from the city commission on June 3, its members unanimously approving a resolution protesting Hobby’s actions and wiring it to Austin. According to the commissioners, the strikers had proven themselves, with few exceptions, as law abiding and peaceful citizens. For this reason, the strikebreakers did not need protection. If problems did arise, the local police force could deal with them itself. The commissioners also called a mass meeting for that evening at the city auditorium. In front of a crowd fifteen hundred, city attorney Frank S. Anderson and several labor leaders repeated the message contained in the city’s resolution—Galveston would view a declaration of martial law as an insult to its citizenry. The meeting ended with the adoption of a resolution denouncing Hobby’s actions.¹⁰

The mayor’s role in the controversy was somewhat more ambiguous than the protest resolution bearing his signature suggests. When word of Hobby’s intentions first reached Galveston, Sappington replied in a widely published telegram, “If you can move the freight under the constitution and laws of Texas, do it now; do not wait till Saturday. We will give you, as we have all others, police protection equal to that of all cities.”¹¹ It is difficult to reconcile the two parts of Sappington’s statement: on the one hand, he practically invited Hobby to take control, but on the other, he seems to have indicated that action was unnecessary. A closer examination of Sappington’s record and

background, however, reveals the superficial posturing contained in the latter half of this statement. As mayor, part of his job included upholding the dignity and honor of the city, but as a businessman with ties to the waterfront, he had vital material interests at stake. Considering the Mallory line's apparent evacuation of Galveston and the Morgan line's threat to follow suit, it was unlikely that Sappington would vigorously object to any action that might extricate the Galveston Wharf Company from further financial damage. As this telegram shows, he in fact did not. The mayor's actions—or rather, his lack thereof—throughout the remainder of martial law demonstrated his complicity in these events.¹²

On the morning of June 4, Cope arrived in Galveston accompanied by Major General John Hulen and Ranger Captain Joe Brooks. After meeting with city officials in a closed door session, Cope and his entourage attended a public hearing presided over by Sappington and the commissioners. The hearing, which featured speeches by Fricke and his fellow labor activist M.J. Gahagan of Local 385, presented Cope with the facts of the strike, reemphasizing its peaceful nature and the ability of the local police force to handle any situation that might arise. Sappington admitted denying police protection on two occasions, but justified these refusals with the argument that an armed presence would have only stirred up greater trouble. Commissioner A.P. Norman minced no words, branding the charges against his police force as “damn lies.” When Cope finally spoke, he neglected to mention the strike at all. Instead, he stressed that his only reason for visiting Galveston was to see the freight moved. Following this statement, the adjutant general left the meeting and proceeded to the docks to investigate conditions.

The fate of the city and the strike rested entirely in Cope's hands.¹³

Many Galvestonians received a surprise when the June 5 deadline passed without a declaration of martial law. After appearing on the docks that morning and observing the situation, Cope stated, "Freight is moving at the Mallory wharf and switchmen are at work moving empty freight cars and pulling out loaded ones. Additional workers are employed on the docks. The mayor and the chief of police have assured me that the fullest police protection will be given workers on the docks and going to and from their homes."¹⁴ After returning to his hotel from the docks, the adjutant general received a telegram from Hobby. The governor requested that Cope remain in Galveston and hold in readiness such troops as might be necessary to deal with any further holdups or threats of violence. According to H.H. Haines, this announcement pleased the business community. He believed that the threat of martial law would provide a sufficient guarantee of improvement in the port's operations. With the recruitment of additional labor, normal conditions would return shortly. Organized labor refused to comment on the decision, simply taking the opportunity to reaffirm their demands and commitment to the strike.¹⁵

Haines' words carried a grain of truth. The day after Cope's announcement, reports indicated that approximately eighty non-union men had shown up on the Mallory docks to move and load freight. The *Daily News* reported that this was "due solely to the presence of General Cope and a group of rangers"; nevertheless, the paper estimated that accumulated freight would be cleared within three or four days.¹⁶ Even more telling, on June 2 Southern Pacific agent C.J. Blackwell wrote a letter to Cope in which

he claimed that everything was running smoothly on the docks. His company employed about 150 laborers and brought in new hands every day. Blackwell also discussed the local police, saying, "There seems to be quite a lot of Dissatisfaction [sic] against the Police Department here, but all that we talked to seemed anxious to do anything they can to prevent any trouble."¹⁷ Blackwell's superior, H.M. Wilkins, stated the following day that increasing numbers of dockworkers came in voluntarily and that the company had no trouble procuring inland labor.¹⁸

Shipping totals upheld Blackwell and Wilkins' claims that freight was moving even before Cope arrived in the city. It is important to remember that shipping through the port increased substantially during the year of 1920. Statistics indicated that \$3.2 million and \$27.8 million in imported and exported goods passed over Galveston's wharves during May 1920, two months into the strike. These figures represented an increase over the previous May, when only \$2.1 million and \$27.5 million in merchandise visited the city.¹⁹

Taken together with the activity on the Mallory and Morgan docks, these numbers should have satisfied the demands of Hobby and the business interests who visited him. Whether they attributed it to Cope's presence or some other factor, none of these men could deny the movement of freight through the port of Galveston. What happened next, however, revealed what the business leaders opposed to the strike had in mind when they appealed to Hobby for assistance. On the afternoon of June 7, without warning or apparent provocation, one hundred cavalymen of the Texas National Guard disembarked from a train at Galveston's Union Station. The commander of the city's

new martial law zone, Brigadier General Jacob F. Wolters, accompanied them.²⁰

* * * *

What happened to cause this sudden, unexplained military intervention? Shipping totals and observers all indicated that freight was moving without any interference from the strikers. The action dumbfounded many Texans who had accepted such evidence. Eschewing all journalistic flourish, one paper simply reported a “hitch”—exactly what kind or who it originated with, the dumbfounded author did not care to speculate.²¹ Others pointed to rumors of a general waterfront strike, first threatened by O.A. Anderson at a May 30 meeting. This news provoked nervousness among business interests, even bringing to the attention of Hobby in their June 2 meeting.²²

Despite the anxiety that it caused for businessmen, the threat of a general strike rested on a weak foundation. At no point did the deep sea longshoremen, or any other labor organization, offer more than moral support to their coastwise comrades walking the picket line. Eager to break the strike, the pro-business *Daily News* would have reported any such agreement between the unions of Galveston with zeal, but on June 10, the paper declared exactly the opposite, reporting that “Other Crafts Will Not Be Called.” Following a joint meeting between the Galveston Labor Council and the Dock and Marine Council, even the city’s labor leaders publicly announced their hostility to a general strike. Such an expansion of the conflict, they argued, would only provoke further reaction from the state and thus play into the hands of the shipping companies and their business allies.²³ Martial law continued for another four months after this

reassurance, indicating that other motives were behind Hobby's decision.

The *Houston Press* articulated the best explanation for the governor's sudden change of heart in a June 7 headline: "Open Shop War is On."²⁴ In their resolutions and meetings with Hobby, the business interests of Texas repeatedly expressed their belief that the open-shop stood as the only solution to the strike. These interests found an ally in the governor's mansion ready to use his executive authority in breaking the power of organized labor and overturning the gains it made during the heady days of World War I. Simply put, the motive behind the declaration of martial law was the establishment of an open-shop in Galveston.²⁵

Feeding off the patriotism fostered by World War I, open-shop advocates attempted to hide their anti-union message in a guarantee of all men's right to work regardless of whether or not they paid union dues. According to them, employment existed as a contract between an employer and an individual employee, not the union. If conditions appeared unsatisfactory, every worker had the right to find another job or negotiate individually with his employer, but strikes, no matter how small, endangered vital public interests. In April 1919, the Beaumont Retail Merchant's Association became the first group in Texas to declare itself in favor of the open-shop. Soon thereafter, they formed the Southwestern Open-Shop Association and within two months, the entire city of Beaumont operated on the same principles. As a clearinghouse for local groups in Texas, New Mexico, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and Louisiana, the Southwestern Association became particularly successful at spreading this anti-union doctrine. Supported by civic leaders, municipal governments, and businessmen of all

stripes, other organizations soon emerged throughout the state. In Dallas, the Chamber of Commerce sponsored the city's new "Square Deal" Association. By the beginning of 1920, the open-shop was a force to reckon with in Texas.²⁶

Not surprisingly, these businessmen saw the longshoremen's struggle as a perfect opportunity to bring this influence to the Island City. Breaking the power of organized labor in such a strongly unionized town as Galveston would be a spectacular victory for the open-shop. The first mention of this new force relative to the longshoremen's strike came just as events began to spin out of control in mid-May. On May 22, the same day that the committee of independent Houston businessmen arrived in Galveston to unload their merchandise, the Southwestern and Square Deal open-shop associations announced that they would offer whatever assistance they could in relieving the freight congestion. In pledging their aid, these two groups claimed to have the cooperation of similar organizations in twenty-one cities across the state.²⁷ One week later, the Southwestern Association sent its head, F.O. Thompson, to Galveston with the goal of adding another city to this list. In a meeting with local civic and business leaders, the open-shop leader outlined plans for inaugurating a new movement on the island. The public did not receive details of this closed session.²⁸

Prior to Thompson's trip, the open-shop gained a powerful partner by enlisting the Texas Chamber of Commerce to its cause. At a May 29 meeting, the Chamber's board of directors adopted a resolution opposing strikes, picketing, the minimum wage, boycotts, and "class rule by either labor or capital." "We are, therefore, in favor of the 'open-shop'," the Chamber announced, and then proceeded to establish the three-man

committee that visited Austin several days later.²⁹ Following their fateful meeting with Hobby, Chamber representatives and their associates from Galveston issued a lengthy statement addressing the strike. The committee declared, in no uncertain terms, “In line with the conclusion reached by New York interests and the steamship concerns engaged in coastwise traffic, Galveston has determined to organize and operate an open-shop policy on these coastwise docks as the only solution to a serious and expensive obstruction to traffic and commerce.”³⁰ Still in Galveston, Thompson supported this declaration, stating “the only solution of the strike situation at Galveston as at other ports where the union men have quit work lies in the establishment of open-shop conditions.”³¹

These advocates of the open-shop were quite fortunate to have a man like William Pettus Hobby in the governor’s office. The son of a Reconstruction-era state senator, this East Texas native made a name for himself at the age of twenty-nine as editor of the *Beaumont Enterprise*. Hobby used the paper to promote civic improvement and commerce in his adopted city, championing everything from a deepwater port to improvement of the surrounding roads. Such actions led his overly-admiring biographer to conclude that Hobby believed “Transportation...was the key to human progress.” In 1914, the young editor made the transition into politics as the state’s lieutenant governor. Following Governor James Ferguson’s impeachment for misappropriation of funds in 1917, Hobby became Texas’s supreme executive authority on September 25. Supported by the state’s Democratic Party and a long-honored tradition that all governors serve two terms, the election of 1918 returned Hobby to office in his own right. A dynamic

political leader by Texas's standards, Hobby threw his gubernatorial weight behind such issues as women's suffrage, prohibition, and education reform. He also placed the foundering highway department on its feet, an indication that his biographer's assessment contained some validity.³² Given his obsession for transportation and economic improvement, it was little wonder that Hobby responded to the strike as he did. Despite his reputation for progressivism, the governor could not afford to sympathize with striking workers in an industry as intimately connected to his obsession with commerce as longshoring.

More important than this background and legislative record, however, was Hobby's willingness to use force in maintaining law and order throughout his term. The governor's first experience with martial law occurred during the Texas-Louisiana oil field strike that began in November 1917. Although evidence indicated that the strike had proceeded peacefully, Hobby succumbed to reports of radical activity and requested federal troops in the area around Humble. With the army's help, the oil producers crushed the strike in January 1918.³³ Hobby also played the role of commander-in-chief during the so-called "Red River War" between Texas and Oklahoma in mid-1919. Hoping to assert the state's claim to oil found in the riverbed, the governor sent Rangers to the north Texas town of Burkburnett. Before leaving office in 1921, Hobby placed nearly the entire state police force along Texas's northern frontier.³⁴ Like his actions in the oil fields, the Red River affair illustrated Hobby's propensity for using force when he perceived the economic interests of the state to be in danger. This made him quite susceptible to the propaganda and appeals for military intervention presented by the

open-shop committee and business interests of Texas.

Many Texans, especially those with ties to business, supported Hobby's action in declaring martial law. The Young Men's Progressive League, chambers of commerce and Rotary Clubs from across the state, including Galveston's, sent congratulatory telegrams to the governor. Hobby's days as a journalist and editor also gained him much support from the local and statewide press. The *Daily News* defended Hobby's martial law decision, editorializing, "[Governor Hobby] has acted with wisdom and courage in doing this. He is asserting the superior rights of the people of Texas over whatever may be those of all others involved in the controversy...It was clearly his duty to do so."³⁵ The *Houston Post* echoed this, claiming that those who "who have the deeper interests of Galveston at heart" would recognize the necessity of declaring martial law. Over the next few days, arguments appeared stating that the striking longshoremen had no reason to protest the coming of troops. These men had only come to Galveston to dispel fears of violence against non-union workers, not break the strike. Since most of the longshoremen had already found other jobs, such arguments claimed, technically no strike existed and the employment of non-union labor did not threaten the longshoremen's livelihood.³⁶ All of these commentators carefully kept the issue of the strike and the open-shop separate. They did not want to provide organized labor with any opportunity to support their claims against Hobby or the business interests who exhorted him to act.

Supporters of the striking longshoremen did not wait long to voice their opinions and take action of their own. Galveston city officials telegraphically denounced

Hobby's declaration as "the biggest outrage ever to be perpetrated on a peaceful community."³⁷ Demonstrating his uncertain attitude towards the strike once again, Sappington refused to endorse the telegram. Despite the mayor's lack of support, the remaining commissioners instructed city attorney Frank S. Anderson to begin injunction proceedings against the National Guard to prevent it from bivouacking in Menard Park. Located within sight of beachfront attractions and the most popular bathing areas, the commission was concerned that a military camp in the park would adversely affect the busy summer tourist season. Hoping to appease his less-than-cordial hosts, Brigadier General Wolters voluntarily removed the camp to a vacant property further down the seawall, which several unacknowledged private parties donated for his use. One commentator joked that the beautiful beachfront location of the new Camp Hutchings, "will to an extent compensate [the guardsmen] for the enforced military duty that they are under."³⁸

For Galveston's labor advocates, however, the situation was far from comical. On the evening of Hobby's announcement, the Galveston Labor Council and the Dock and Marine Council organized a joint session. This "indignation meeting" resulted in a strongly worded resolution accusing of being Hobby misinformed and ignorant of the facts of the strike. "We resent with all the manhood we possess," the resolution stated, "the humiliation and insult which we have been forced to suffer through the action taken by the governor." The joint meeting also charged the troops with assisting the establishment of an open-shop in Galveston.³⁹ The local labor press and its supporters abroad offered this same assessment of Hobby's action. Most carried headlines

declaring the open-shop motives behind martial law. The *Union Review* stated, “Thus has the reputation of our city been assassinated, the character of its citizenship besmirched, and the fair name of Galveston prostituted before the world by the actions of the smallest governor of the largest state in the nation.” The Houston Labor Council even went so far as to call for Hobby’s impeachment should an independent investigation confirm that he abused the power of his office by aiding business over labor.⁴⁰

The legislative debates over funds for the military demonstrated the overwhelming support that lawmakers showed for Hobby. To the displeasure of the majority, a handful of representatives did take the opportunity to denounce the governor and his business allies on the floor of the House. “I resent the subsidizing of state troops of this state [sic] to jog down the throats of its citizens the Open-Shop Association,” cried Representative Lee Brady of Galveston County. Brady went on to denounce the committee who visited Hobby, stating that they did not represent city, county, or state officials. Representative Don H. Biggers of Eastland County affirmed, “I am not dominated by union labor. I am standing here as a free American, or as free as John D. Rockefeller and that bunch will let me be. I vote this way because I do not want to be dictated to by a bunch who have not given a reason for their so doing.” Ultimately, the legislature paid little attention to these protests, voting 69 to 6 in favor of a \$100,000 appropriation effective through January 1921.⁴¹

Many individuals uninvolved with the labor movement joined these legislative outcasts to voice their disapproval of both the martial law declaration and its open-shop

motives. G.V. Sanders, editor of the *Houston Press*, editorialized, “Governor Hobby has been led into a number of bonehead plays during his administration, but his declaration of martial law is by far the worst of all.”⁴² In Galveston, an anonymous “large businessman” stated that 90 percent of the city’s employers were satisfied with their employees and opposed to the open-shop. They had no desire to stir up labor trouble. Even some of the national guardsmen appeared to be dissatisfied with Hobby’s decision. In Houston, officials issued arrest warrants for forty-nine soldiers who refused to report for duty in Galveston. When asked why, many of the men stated they had signed up to fight overseas, not against strikers in their own state.⁴³

These protests received no response from either state officials or business interests. Not only did Hobby refuse to lift his orders, but on June 10, Galveston’s business interests chartered the city’s first open-shop association. The announcement finally confirmed the suspicions of organized labor. Although it refused to make public the names of its members, the new association included approximately one hundred businessmen. The directors inaugurated the open-shop with a telegram to Lieutenant Governor W.A. Johnson announcing their opposition to “autocracy...of labor or capital.” The indiscretion of this wire helped reveal the economic interests that business and state leaders shared.⁴⁴

Strengthened by this support, the shipping companies of Galveston gained the upper hand in their battle against the striking longshoremen. Within days, the Mallory line resumed its operations in the port, employing no less than 200 men to load the recently arrived steamship *Comal*. Company vice president J.B. Denison, in Galveston

for nearly four weeks, felt enough confidence in the situation that he decided to return to New York following the formation of the open-shop association. “More men applied this morning than we really needed,” he stated, “but we decided it would be a good policy to take them on.”⁴⁵ Following Denison’s words and the general condition of the port, the *Daily News* confidently proclaimed two days later “Crisis Believed Over in Strike Situation.”⁴⁶ Subsequent events proved this optimism unfounded—the crisis had only just begun.

* * * *

In calling forth the Texas National Guard, the business interests of the state fully intended to use it in establishing the open-shop in Galveston. Time and again, these men and the organizations they represented expressed the belief that the longshoremen’s strike and the freight congestion it caused could only be resolved by operating the docks on open-shop principles. In his official declaration of martial law, Hobby declared “there is now imminent danger of insurrection, tumult, riot, and breach of the peace, and serious danger to the inhabitants and property of citizens in the territory described.” According to the resolution, the constitution and laws of Texas clearly demanded that the governor assume control of the entire city of Galveston. And assume control he did. By the evening of June 8, a total of 947 enlisted men and 71 officers from across the state occupied the city. The military district they controlled included the entire island and its waterfront, as well as Pelican Island and portions of Bolivar Peninsula and the mainland lying within Galveston County. All of these soldiers were either dismounted cavalymen or infantrymen assigned to provisional duty. More ominous, military

officials designated three troops of cavalry as machine gun squads and equipped each with an amazing 500,000 rounds of ammunition. The business interests and their state allies intended to leave nothing to chance.⁴⁷

Galveston's new commander, Brigadier General Jacob F. Wolters, had been involved in his share of controversy prior to the longshoremen's strike. As director of the Anti-Statewide Prohibition Organization and attorney for the Texas Wholesale Liquor Dealers Association, Wolters stood at the forefront of prohibition debates in the 1910s. The Spanish-American War veteran also gained political experience in 1912, when he campaigned and lost as a conservative Democratic candidate for the Texas Senate. He vigorously opposed the nomination of Woodrow Wilson, but quickly grew silent following the incumbent president's reelection in 1916. Prior to the Galveston strike, Wolters gained a reputation as being something of a specialist in martial law. The general gained valuable experience in the administration of military occupations at Rockport and Port Aransas, where he commanded troops following a hurricane in 1919.⁴⁸ Wolters was definitely the right man for the job in Galveston. Despite all the official rhetoric about citizens' rights and the sanctity of law and order, neither the National Guard nor its commanding officer played a neutral role in the strike situation. From the day the troops arrived, their orders and the actions they took showed that they came down decisively on the side of Texas's business interests.

Wolters first action in Galveston involved securing the city and the waterfront. After a quick survey, the troops established several outposts, two of which commanded a direct view of all activity on the Morgan and Mallory docks. Three officers, fifty

enlisted men, and two machine guns garrisoned each outpost, maintaining communications with Camp Hutchings by telephone. Military police under the command of the new Provost Marshal, Colonel Billie Mayfield, began patrolling day and night. An intelligence department consisting of several plain clothed officers supplemented this police force. Wolters also ordered the construction of a “bull pen”—a detention center surrounded by double barbed wire—in which to keep anyone arrested by the Guard.⁴⁹

Declared immediately by Wolters, General Order No. 1 insured that the bull pen would soon contain inhabitants. Several provisions of the order revealed the true motives behind martial law and the National Guard’s partiality:

3. Interference with persons in the pursuit of their occupations will not be permitted, and any person who does interfere or who attempts to interfere with any person in the pursuit of his or her occupation will be placed under arrest.
4. Loitering or loafing upon the streets is prohibited.
5. Crowds will not be permitted to congregate upon the streets. Two or more persons constitute a crowd.
6. All assemblages in streets, parks or commons, wither by day or by night, are prohibited. It is not, however, the intention of this order to prohibit the usual and customary use of the beach for pleasure purposes.
7. Any person found on the streets who appears to be habitually idle and without visible means of support will be placed under arrest.⁵⁰

Although General Order No. 1 applied to the entire city, Wolters clearly had the strikers in mind when he issued it. Denied the right to assemble, converse with strikebreakers, or even remain unemployed, Wolters severely circumscribed the longshoremen in their campaign against the shipping companies. His order attempted to make the strike illegal within the military district of Galveston.⁵¹

Dock activity responded quickly to the military presence. Within days, the

coastwise shipping companies each employed several hundred hands who, despite their inexperience, moved freight with little interruption. “In a few days more,” the *Daily News* reported, “conditions on the docks here, it is believed, will be practically normal.” Given these circumstances, many were optimistic when the governor’s personal secretary Ralph Soape made a trip to the island on June 15. Authorized by Hobby to call off martial law if conditions warranted, Soape interviewed strikebreakers, company officials, and military authorities. Apparently refused an audience with Soape, the striking longshoremen were conspicuously absent from these meetings. The pro-business interviewees he did meet provided the secretary with predictable assessments of the situation, charging that conditions did not warrant the removal of soldiers. Soape responded to this evidence by declaring the indefinite continuation of martial law.⁵²

Soape’s visit coincided with an even more important event. On the morning of June 15, assistant judge advocate Major C.H. Machem began hearing testimony from dozens of witnesses, mostly strikebreakers and company representatives, confirming reports of violence and intimidation against non-union workers. G.V. Sanders offered a very astute observation of this investigative commission, arguing, “The governor’s henchmen are busily engaged in getting together the ‘dope’ which the governor DID NOT have to back him up when he took over the city.” Machem’s findings did not bode well for those opposed to the occupation. The final report noted at least thirty-five instances of intimidation directed at strikebreakers, shipping officials, and open-shop advocates, ranging from verbal threats to physical assaults and property damage. The commission also hurled charges at the police, accusing them of neglecting their duty and

taking the longshoremen's side in the conflict. Together with Soape's visit, the investigative commission conferred legitimacy on Hobby's actions and Wolters' continued presence in Galveston.⁵³

Wolters' draconian orders made him unpopular in the city. The first major showdown occurred two weeks after the promulgation of General Order No. 1. Surprisingly, it did not involve the longshoremen's unions directly. On June 19, the city commissioners published a notice in the local papers calling a mass meeting to take place two nights later in the City Auditorium. Municipal officials intended to condemn Hobby's actions and demand the withdrawal of all troops. City Attorney Anderson declared that General Order No. 1 violated the guarantee of peaceful assembly. Wolters paid little attention to this argument, publishing his terse response the same day: "There will be no mass meeting." After reading the general's words and receiving four copies of an order prohibiting the meeting, Anderson and the commission cancelled the meeting, saying, "We recognize the power of superior force." Still anticipating trouble, Colonel Mayfield placed a detachment of men outside the auditorium with orders to arrest the city officials and any organizing leader who should appear.⁵⁴ A week later, Wolters struck once more, interrupting a regular meeting of the Galveston Labor Council and forcing it to adjourn. The headline of the *Union Review* adequately expressed labor's frustration: "Why Have a Constitution?"⁵⁵

Local merchants and the police force also felt Wolters' presence. Responding to reports that shopkeepers along the waterfront and in Galveston's downtown business district refused to deal with the hundreds of strikebreakers residing on the island, the

commanding officer issued General Order No. 6 on June 14:

1. No corporation, individual, firm or association...shall refuse or fail to sell, rent, or serve at the same price charged the general public, any person because such person does or does not affiliate with any labor, trade or other union, association, organization or club incorporated or unincorporated.
2. Any person who by words spoken or written, or by any act, token or sign, attempts to intimidate, or place in fear or terror of any bodily harm, or injury to the business of, any person in the territory affected by martial law...will be arrested by the military authorities.⁵⁶

The first person arrested under this new order was police officer William Mihovil, accused of telling a group of strikebreakers that they would be dealt with after the troops left. The guardsmen turned Mihovil over to civil authorities, who revoked his commission. Wolters' victory proved brief, however; one week later, the same officials acquitted the patrolman and reinstated him onto the force.⁵⁷ Such episodes of support must have been quite heartening to the longshoremen. Rather than simply speaking out against martial law and the open-shop, ordinary members of the community uninvolved with the strike actively fought against them. In doing so, they contested the growing power of local and state business leaders.⁵⁸

The National Guard received even more opposition from Galvestonians when it attempted to control the tourist-filled beaches. On June 15, a group of businessmen and ministers approached Police Chief Sedgewick and Police Commissioner Norman to request the closure of beachfront concessions, citing their use for gambling purposes. Both officials denied this appeal. Although there is no direct evidence, it appears that the rejected petitioners approached and enlisted the support of Wolters to their cause—on June 18, the commanding general shut down all concessions and midway games along the beachfront. Reaction to these high-handed tactics came swiftly. W.L. Roe,

secretary of the Galveston Beach Association, indignantly expressed “Since the troops have been here the city’s business has been cut down to one fifth of normal. People are afraid to come here with these men butting into everything we do...*Galveston is being used as a political football by a crowd of politicians who are attempting to put the city administrators in bad.*” The following day, Wolters capitulated and reopened the concessions, but not before issuing new orders closing all bars, brothels, and gambling houses.⁵⁹

Roe’s concluding statement recalls the controversy surrounding the charter amendments and the popularly elected City Party. Many Galvestonians believed that Wharf Company interests and the local aristocracy were using Wolters and the National Guard to reestablish themselves as the city’s undisputed rulers.⁶⁰ The general’s new moral crusade indicated that these suspicions had some basis in reality. By labeling Galveston a “wide open city,” Wolters created a powerful piece of propaganda against his opponents on the city commission. As the military occupation carried on into July, the general’s denunciations grew louder. In a July 4 announcement dismissing 525 officers and enlisted men needed at home for the upcoming harvest, Wolters took the opportunity to condemn municipal officials. “It is necessary to keep [the remaining 500 troops] here because the city officials are backing up the strikers,” he declared. “If we leave every non-union man here will either be run out of town or killed.” Wolters went on to claim that the administration owed its election to the city’s African-American voters, who he called “the worst and most insolent in Texas.”⁶¹ There could be little doubt that Wolters was trying “to put the city administrators in bad.” Along with strike-

related violence and vice, the general now added black Galvestonians to the list of things municipal authorities were unable or unwilling to control. Accusations such as this would not go unnoticed for long in the tense, postwar racial climate of the Jim Crow South.

The seeds of this propaganda soon bore bitter fruit that confirmed the suspicions of many Galvestonians about the military's true intentions in their city. Following a conference in Austin with Wolters and Adjutant General Cope, Hobby issued a proclamation suspending civil authority in Galveston on July 15. The new order made specific reference to Mayor Sappington, all four commissioners, City Attorney Anderson, the judge of the city court Henry Odell, and the entire police force, including Chief Sedegewick. The order "suspended and restrained [all officials] from performing or discharging any duty appertaining to their respective offices, with respect to enforcing the penal laws of the State of Texas and the City of Galveston, during the pendency of martial law."⁶² "The laws of this state are not being faithfully executed," proclaimed Wolters, "nor can they be...so long as the above named city officials are permitted to remain in their respective offices and use the power and influence of their official position in aiding and encouraging the lawless element of the city." On Wolters' orders, Colonel Mayfield and the Provost Guard took control of police headquarters and all police functions for the city. The shipping companies' "special marine policemen" retained their positions under military jurisdiction. Violators of state laws would receive trial in a competent civil court, and Captain O'Brien Stevens, Provost Judge for the military, would try violations of all local ordinances.⁶³

Galveston's official response to this new insult was predictably indignant. In a statement released the same day and signed by everyone but Sappington, the commissioners charged that their displacement and the declaration of martial law were political moves "for the avowed purpose of establishing the 'open-shop', destroying union labor and taking over the city government." They denied once more that any strike-related violence ever took place and affirmed their ability to handle the situation. These men also hurled countercharges of repression and autocratic treatment at the guardsmen, citing as an example the imprisonment of an elderly tailor for "profiteering" when the latter refused to sew a sergeant's chevrons on his uniform at reduced price. Even more serious, municipal officials charged soldiers with responsibility in the death of Mrs. W. Auderer, who had been struck by a stray bullet in her home near Camp Hutchings. "Any further encroachment upon the right of the people of this city to govern themselves," warned the commissioners, "will be resisted by application to the federal courts, where we may reasonably expect the constitutional guarantees to be respected and enforced."⁶⁴ Two weeks later, Anderson followed through on this threat, filing a suit to enjoin Hobby and Wolters from any further maintenance of martial law. Robert G. Street, presiding judge of the 56th District Court, rejected the injunction application, upholding the constitutionality of martial law and declaring the governor to have exclusive jurisdiction in the matter.⁶⁵

The suspension of civil authority prompted Hobby's first and only visit to Galveston on July 21. Accompanied by Soape, Adjutant General Cope, and Attorney General C.M. Cureton, the governor met behind closed doors with a small group of local

judges and lawyers to discuss a plan for ending the occupation. The *Daily News* speculated that the proposal involved setting up the local judiciary as a central committee, which would then direct the efforts of Texas Rangers and a new citizen's police force in protecting strikebreakers, but could not confirm these reports. Whatever the topic of discussion, Hobby apparently left the meeting unimpressed. When asked what it would take to have the troops removed, he responded "I must have absolute assurance—no, to put it stronger than that, an absolute demonstration that Galveston can care for the situation here so as to insure the uninterrupted movement of freight through this port and the protection of all workers connected with shipping."⁶⁶ Responsibility for ending the occupation lay squarely in the hands of Galveston itself.

* * * *

Throughout the first month and a half of martial law, the state troops stationed on the island remained on good behavior. The few incidents that occurred created little public reaction or were quickly resolved by military officials. The inactivity and silence of the striking longshoremen mirrored this. Unable to picket, most of the men found temporary jobs on deep sea piers and activity on the Morgan and Mallory docks went on with little interruption. By the end of July, the situation had become so quiet that Walter J. Rowe, one of the Texas Rangers still stationed in the city, requested a transfer to another post. Soon thereafter, four steamships lay tied up on the Mallory docks, the first time so many vessels had been present since the strike began. Away from the outposts and daily drills of the National Guard, few visitors would have suspected any kind of conflict in the city.⁶⁷

Wolters' assumption of civil authority quickly changed this peaceful atmosphere. Following the July 15 declaration, the actions of the National Guard generated a great deal of negative publicity. Whether accidental or intentional, these events negatively affected the way most people viewed the occupation. The first such incident occurred on July 30. Shortly after midnight, a sentry near Camp Hutchings, Private J.C. Tyer, signaled an approaching car to halt. When the vehicle failed to stop, the young guardsman fired a single shot, striking its drunken operator Herbert A. Robertson in the back. A captain in the National Guard recently called to duty on the island, Robertson died an hour later in John Sealy Hospital. Military authorities placed Tyer under arrest pending an investigation of the shooting. Justice of the Peace E.B. Holman issued a warrant charging Tyer with murder, but Wolters refused to turn him over. Supporting his general, Hobby said that the incident lay within the exclusive jurisdiction of the Guard. At his court martial, the young private testified that he intended to shoot out the automobile's tire, but missed and hit Robertson. After receiving word of his acquittal by the court martial, the Galveston County sheriff arrested Tyer, who left the island after petitioning for a change of venue.⁶⁸

The subsequent fate of Private Tyer was less important than the effect that his actions had on public opinion. Robertson's shooting became the most recent in a string of accidental deaths known or suspected to be associated with the National Guard. Days before, Private Abe Ginsburg unintentionally shot himself in the face while showing his revolver to his sister-in-law. The mysterious death of Mrs. Auderer preceded both these incidents. During her autopsy, medical examiners extracted a steel-jacketed bullet

suspiciously similar to the ones used in the guardsmen's high-powered rifles. The spilling of blood added another dimension to what many already viewed as a shameful crime perpetrated against Galveston. Many people questioned the competency of state troops and their ability to maintain law and order on the island. Instead of seasoned police officers, "green, untrained, irresponsible youths of the Texas National Guard, bearing loaded army rifles and pistols, have been charged with the maintenance of order and the enforcement of the law," claimed the *Houston Press*. In light of these three incidents, more and more people began to question the ultimate usefulness of maintaining martial law in Galveston.⁶⁹

Throughout the month of August, the military presence incurred further public disfavor through the high-handed actions of its soldiers and officers. Eyewitnesses began to report that many of the guardsmen, instead of following Wolters' orders to rid the city of vice, were in fact partaking in it. Captain Robertson's inebriated condition at death indicated that the general's clean up plan did not quite have its full, advertised effect. In an unrelated case, a grand jury report upheld the persistence of Galveston's vice problem, indirectly implicating the martial law regime.⁷⁰ Shortly after this, Wolters received a visit from a representative of Fox Film News wanting to use the guardsmen to shoot a picture about the Galveston strike. The general obliged and provided his soldiers as actors, while cameras caught the action in a staged "battle" between strikers and soldiers at Union Station. This transparent propaganda did not amuse city officials. After condemning the film for its misrepresentation of Galveston, they quickly received word of its cancellation from the studio. Even the Galveston Commercial Association

and the Young Men's Progressive League, both of which favored the presence of state troops, joined the commissioners in denouncing the picture.⁷¹ Besides upsetting prominent Galvestonians, including some of his most adamant supporters, Wolters' decision to allow the film once again indicated his lack of neutrality in the strike.

The National Guard's most spectacular and damaging indiscretions involved the *Houston Press* and its editor G.V. Sanders. Since the declaration of martial law, almost every issue of this progressive paper carried news of the Galveston strike. Although the paper reported many exaggerated and obviously propagandistic stories—in the wake of the Guard's cleanup campaign, for example, front page stories accused soldiers of drinking hair tonic—Sanders' criticisms of Wolters and Hobby were often quite perceptive. He rarely missed an opportunity to skewer either of them for their actions. In one particularly incendiary front page article, the paper compared Wolters to General Ludendorff, the German army's supreme commander in World War I.⁷² Remarks such as these aroused anger among military officials and made the *Houston Press* unwelcome in the martial law zone. The day after Robertson's death, the National Guard arrested H.E. Bunch for doing nothing more than selling the paper. Several weeks later, Sanders' comments apparently got the better of Major Julius Dorrenfield, who assaulted *Press* correspondent John H. Regan. When asked at his court martial why he attacked the reporter, Dorrenfield responded that he had simply defended the honor of the National Guard against the paper's false statements.⁷³

No sooner had this occurred than a much more serious incident took place. On the night of August 30, Sanders had just left the Houston Country Club when a large

man in plain clothes approached him. After mumbling something about an arrest warrant, two others joined the man and attempted to force Sanders into a nearby car. Several bystanders, many of them prominent Houston city officials and businessmen, quickly intervened and Sanders escaped. Once the situation calmed down, the would-be abductors revealed their identities: all three held commissions as lieutenants in the National Guard stationed at Galveston. Before returning to their proper jurisdiction on the island, Lieutenant J.A. Dempsey presented an order from Colonel Mayfield which read, "You are ordered to arrest Sanders, editor of the *Houston Press*, for writing and circulating highly incendiary literature calculated to precipitate serious trouble in the zone of military law, both among civilians and soldiers."⁷⁴

The response to this bungled seizure was tremendous. Attempting to shield himself from criticism, Wolters declared that although he had issued instructions to arrest Sanders, the guardsmen acted on their own in taking the matter outside Galveston. Houston City Attorney Kenneth Krahl turned his anger towards Hobby, saying "I have been convinced for some time Texas had a fool for governor. If he doesn't take proper action to clean out the whole bunch guilty of [this] outrage, I will be convinced that we have a knave for governor." The mayor of Houston, A.E. Amerman, called the affair "a very foolish stunt" and wired his objection to Austin. Despite these protests, the governor remained publicly silent about the affair.⁷⁵ The *Houston Labor Journal* argued that the attempted arrest resulted from "something in the military calling that challenges the stability of reason, of mental equipoise, and sound judgment."⁷⁶ Many pro-business newspapers joined the *Journal's* editors in denouncing the high-handed action. "Even if

the military authorities had attempted to execute their warrant in the military zone of Galveston,” the *Houston Post* editorialized, “it would have been an unwarranted abuse of military authority...there is or ought to be no military despotism in this State.”⁷⁷

Sanders meanwhile devoted almost the entire energy of his paper to attacking Wolters, Hobby, and the military occupation of Galveston. The editor also filed charges of false imprisonment against the three officers with the Harris County sheriff. Perhaps on the orders of his commanding officer, Colonel Mayfield attempted to control this damage and Sanders’ allegations with a September 1 announcement that he accepted full responsibility for the failed arrest. Wolters immediately relieved Mayfield of his duty as Provost Marshall and confined him to quarters. The commanding general then notified civil authorities that he would not allow them to arrest any of the officers involved. Instead, a court martial composed entirely of National Guard officers convened on September 7 to decide the four men’s fate. The court martial cleared the three lieutenants of all charges, accepting the argument that they had only followed orders. Mayfield, on the other hand, proclaimed his guilt in ordering the action. He continued to believe that the arrest lay within his jurisdiction since Sanders’ articles aroused tension among both the soldiers and citizenry. After three days of testimony from witnesses, including Sanders, the court martial reached a verdict. Before making their decision public, however, the officers sent sealed copies to Austin for Hobby to approve. The *Houston Press* cried foul, labeling the trial a farce. Two weeks later, Hobby proved these suspicions correct by announcing Mayfield’s acquittal and recommission in the Guard.⁷⁸

Although the evidence is scant, it seems that the bad press garnered by Mayfield's actions and the National Guard's indiscretions may have given Hobby a reason to consider withdrawing the troops. A cryptic statement carried in the *Dallas Dispatch* and reprinted by the *Houston Press* quoted the governor as saying that "a crisis is expected in Galveston soon [and] there may be no further need of troops there."⁷⁹ What Hobby meant by this statement and whether it was connected to recent events is unclear. One thing, however, is certain. On the afternoon of September 18, Hobby and city officials made public the terms of an agreement to end martial law.

Since the beginning of September, a committee consisting of religious leaders, local businessmen, labor representatives, and the mayor and commissioners had been in meetings to formulate a plan for removing troops. On September 16, Hobby received a copy of their suggestions signed by committee president Jacob Singer and Mayor Sappington. The committee requested that the governor send an experienced Ranger officer to command the police department and exercise authority over all peace officers in the city. To assuage anxieties about police neglect, the commissioners pledged "to suspend temporarily and remove from office permanently...any officer of the city of Galveston who attempts in any way to impede, obstruct, or interfere with the protection of workers and the enforcement of the law." In addition, the citizen's committee would continue in an advisory capacity with the purpose of bringing about "a more amicable understanding between employers and employees in the city."⁸⁰

Embarrassed perhaps by the National Guard's recent actions, Hobby announced his satisfaction with the plan and ordered Ranger Captain Joe Brooks to Galveston,

where he would assume police control once martial law ended on October 1. All troops would leave the island between October 5 and 10. Hobby carefully qualified both announcements, however, stating that he would not hesitate to re-implement martial law if the situation once again deteriorated. Keeping these words in mind, the displaced mayor and city commissioners abruptly regained their executive authority at midnight on October 1. That same night, Captain Brooks and thirty five Rangers replaced General Wolters and the National Guardsmen as Galveston's police authority. In a final indication of the motives behind martial law, local businessmen hosted a banquet for the remaining soldiers at the luxurious Hotel Galvez. These "representative citizens" presented Wolters with a silver loving cup whose inscription read "An Unpleasant Duty Well Performed." On the morning of October 8, the remaining 500 troops left the island without further ceremony, ending Galveston's four month long encounter with military occupation.⁸¹

* * * *

In the midst of all the controversy over martial law, Congress made an important decision regarding the nation's shipping industry. On August 1, federal lawmakers consented to an increase in the freight rates of all railroads, electric railways, and coastwise steamship lines. The decision overjoyed the longshoremen. With the obstacle to their wage demands removed, a settlement of the strike seemed to be at hand. Less than three weeks later, thousands of coastwise workers in New York began returning to their jobs after their employers agreed to submit all grievances to arbitration. Galveston Locals 385 and 807 had every reason to believe that they would receive similar

treatment when they petitioned the Morgan and Mallory lines to arbitrate a settlement. The companies' response quickly shattered this optimism. In order to be considered for reemployment, members of the striking unions needed to agree to three conditions: the employment of clerks and foremen at company, rather than union, discretion; prohibition of all union delegates from the docks; and non-discrimination in hiring. This final condition was the most onerous. It meant that no man—union or non-union, black or white—would receive preference on Galveston's coastwise docks. The strikers voted unanimously to reject these blatantly open-shop terms.⁸²

 Martial law had its intended effect. With the help of the National Guard and Governor Hobby, local and statewide business interests threw open the doors on Galveston's closed-shop. In O.A. Anderson's words, "Texas is a corporation representative, ruled by a corporation governor." Deriving inspiration from the success on the docks, members of the new Open-Shop Association quickly spread their message across the island. On July 24, thirteen of Galveston's cotton compress companies informed their union workers that they henceforth would operate on open-shop principles. Soon thereafter, members of the Marine Checkers Union, the Machinists Union, and the Cooks and Waiters Union received similar news from their employers.⁸³ Texas's business interests now needed only two more things to consolidate their position—a successful conclusion to the longshoremen's strike, and legal assurance that it would never happen again.

Notes

- ¹ Excerpts from a poem contributed anonymously to the *Union Review*, June 25, 1920.
- ² Robert Justin Goldstein, *Political Repression in Modern America: From 1870 to 1976* (Urbana: Illinois University Press, 2001), 13-14, 184.
- ³ Minute Book, January 2, 1911-December 14, 1926, Galveston Wharf Company Records, Galveston and Texas History Center, Rosenberg Library, Galveston, TX (hereafter cited as GTHC); and *Galveston Daily News*, May 15, 1920. For examples of the Texas Ranger's anti-labor activities, see Gilbert Mers, *Working the Waterfront: The Ups and Downs of a Rebel Longshoremen* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988), 90-91, 95-100.
- ⁴ *Galveston Daily News*, May 19, 1920; *Union Review*, May 21, 1920; and *Houston Labor Journal*, May 22, 1920.
- ⁵ *Galveston Daily News*, May 28, 1920.
- ⁶ *Galveston Daily News*, June 2, 3, 1920.
- ⁷ *Galveston Daily News*, June 3 (quote), 4, 5, 1920; Hobby to Adjutant General Cope, June 3 (quote), 1920, Letterpress Books, Records of William P. Hobby, Texas State Library and Archives Division, Austin, TX (hereafter cited as TSLAD); *Houston Post*, June 3, 4, 1920; *Houston Press*, June 3, 4, 1920; and *Houston Labor Journal*, June 5, 1920.
- ⁸ *Union Review*, June 4, 1920.
- ⁹ *Galveston Daily News*, June 4, 1920.
- ¹⁰ *Galveston Daily News*, June 4, 5, 1920.
- ¹¹ See for example *Galveston Daily News*, June 3, 1920; *Houston Press*, June 3, 1920; and *Houston Labor Journal*, June 5, 1920.
- ¹² Minute Book, January 2, 1911-December 14, 1926, Galveston Wharf Company Records, GTHC.
- ¹³ *Galveston Daily News*, June 5, 1920; *Houston Post*, June 5, 1920; and *Houston Press*, June 4, 1920.

- ¹⁴ *Houston Press*, June 5, 1920.
- ¹⁵ *Galveston Daily News*, June 6, 1920; *Houston Post*, June 6, 1920.
- ¹⁶ *Galveston Daily News*, June 7, 1920.
- ¹⁷ Letter, C.J. Blackwell to Adjutant General Cope, June 2, 1920, Adjutant General's Correspondence, TSLAD.
- ¹⁸ *Galveston Daily News*, June 4, 1920.
- ¹⁹ *Galveston Daily News*, January 1, 1921, Year-end Business Supplement.
- ²⁰ *Galveston Daily News*, June 8, 1920; *Houston Post*, June 7, 1920; and *Houston Press*, June 7, 1920.
- ²¹ *Houston Post*, June 7, 1920.
- ²² *Galveston Daily News*, May 31, June 3, 1920. The Chamber's resolution read, "The operation of an open-shop coastwise docks in Galveston undoubtedly means the drawing into the struggle of all Galveston shipping and the consequent closing of the port to the commerce of Texas."
- ²³ *Galveston Daily News*, June 10, 1920.
- ²⁴ *Houston Press*, June 7, 1920. Also see *Union Review*, June 11, 16, 1920; and *Houston Labor Journal*, June 12, 1920.
- ²⁵ The establishment of martial law also indicates the shipping companies' lack of social and political power in Galveston. Herbert Gutman argues that the use of state troops in industrial disputes "may have resulted from the low status and power the industrialist had in his local community. Unable to gain support from locally elected officials and law enforcement groups and unable to exercise coercive power in the community, he reached upward to the state level, where direct local pressures were felt less strongly." See Herbert Gutman, "Class, Status, and Community Power in Nineteenth-Century American Industrial Cities," in *Work, Culture, and Society in Industrializing America: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History* (New York: Random House, 1976), 256.
- ²⁶ Jay Littman Todes, "Organized Employer Opposition to Unionism in Texas, 1900-1930" (M.A. thesis, The University of Texas, 1949), 50-78; Allen M. Wakstein, "The Origins of the Open-Shop Movement, 1919-1920," *Journal of American History*

51 (December 1969): 460-75; and James C. Maroney, "Organized Labor in Texas, 1900-1929" (Ph.D. diss., University of Houston, 1975), 207-209.

²⁷ Todes, "Organized Employer Opposition," 77-78; and *Galveston Daily News*, May 23, 1920.

²⁸ *Galveston Daily News*, June 2, 1920.

²⁹ *Galveston Daily News*, May 30, 1920 (quotes); and *Union Review*, June 16, 1920.

³⁰ *Galveston Daily News*, June 3, 1920.

³¹ *Galveston Daily News*, June 3, 1920.

³² James A. Clark, *The Tactful Texan: A Biography of Governor Will Hobby* (New York: Random House, 1958), 56, 79-81, 117-20. A personal friend and staunch admirer of Hobby, Clark's biography is unabashedly biased; nevertheless, it is the only work written on the former governor's life.

³³ Maroney, "Organized Labor in Texas," 186-99; and George B. Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 334-36. Following their defeat, the oil field workers chartered a new local of the International Association of Oil Field, Gas Well, and Refinery Workers of America, but divisions plagued the union and it was not effective until the New Deal years.

³⁴ Clark, *The Tactful Texan*, 120-21.

³⁵ *Galveston Daily News*, June 8, 12, 1920.

³⁶ *Houston Post*, June 9, 1920; and *Galveston Daily News*, June 9, 11, 1920.

³⁷ *Galveston Daily News*, June 8, 1920.

³⁸ *Galveston Daily News*, June 8, 1920 (quote); *Houston Post*, June 8, 9, 1920; *Houston Press*, June 7, 8, 1920; and Harry Krenek, *The Power Vested: The Use of Martial Law and the National Guard in Texas Domestic Crisis, 1919-1932* (Austin: Presidential Press, 1980), 11.

³⁹ *Galveston Daily News*, June 9, 1920; and *Union Review*, June 11, 1920 (quote).

⁴⁰ *Union Review*, June 11, 1920; *Houston Labor Journal*, June 12, 1920; and

Galveston Daily News, June 17, 1920.

⁴¹ *Galveston Daily News*, June 12, 1920.

⁴² *Houston Press*, June 7, 1920.

⁴³ *Houston Post*, June 11, 1920.

⁴⁴ *Galveston Daily News*, June 11, 1920.

⁴⁵ *Galveston Daily News*, June 11, 1920.

⁴⁶ *Galveston Daily News*, June 13, 1920.

⁴⁷ *Galveston Daily News*, June 8, 1920 (quote); *Houston Press*, June 7, 1920; and Krenek, *The Power Vested*, 7-8.

⁴⁸ *Galveston Daily News*, June 13, 1920; Lewis L. Gould, *Progressives and Prohibitionists: Texas Democrats in the Wilson Era* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), 66, 168; and Krenek, *The Power Vested*, 7.

⁴⁹ Jacob F. Wolters, *Martial Law and its Administration* (Austin: Gamel's Book Store, 1930), 58, 60. Because its author was a lawyer by trade, this work contains brief studies of numerous legal cases regarding the declaration of martial law. Although the Galveston affair occupies a sizable portion of the work, Wolters also reminisces about his numerous martial law experiences prior to and following the longshoremen's strike. Wolters intended the book to serve as an instructional manual for fellow military commanders.

⁵⁰ Wolters, *Martial Law*, 59. On June 8, 1920, the *Galveston Daily News* published General Order No. 1 in its entirety.

⁵¹ Mass, indiscriminate arrests of strikers and strike sympathizers was a frequently used technique of military forces during strike duty. See Goldstein, *Political Repression*, 14.

⁵² *Galveston Daily News*, June 16, 1920; *Houston Post*, June 15, 1920; and *Houston Press*, June 14-16, 1920. Soape played a significant role throughout the strike, frequently visiting Galveston and acting on behalf of Hobby.

⁵³ *Galveston Daily News*, June 17, 29, 1920; *Houston Post*, June 17, 19, 29, 1920; and *Houston Press*, June 17 (quote), 29, 1920. The final report indicated several instances of interracial violence perpetrated against white strikebreakers. This apparent

racial solidarity will receive greater attention in Chapter V.

⁵⁴ *Galveston Daily News*, June 20, 1920 (quotes); *Houston Post*, June 21, 1920; and Wolters, *Martial Law*, 70.

⁵⁵ *Union Review*, July 2, 1920; and Goldstein, *Political Repression*, 14-16. The *Review* went on to express, “Members of organized labor resent such insults with every ounce of manhood they possess and yet they calmly stifle their resentment, submit to the humiliation and endure the insult rather than play into the hands of the traducers.”

⁵⁶ Wolters, *Martial Law*, 67-68; and Krenek, *The Power Vested*, 15-16. The real significance of General Order No. 6 is what it attempted to prevent. The shopkeeper’s attitude towards strikebreakers is another indication of the power held by organized labor in Galveston and the support they received from various uninvolved classes. See Gutman, “Class, Status, and Community Power,” 234-60.

⁵⁷ *Galveston Daily News*, June 20, 25, 1920; *Houston Post*, June 26, 1920; and *Houston Press*, June 22, 25, 1920.

⁵⁸ Gutman, “Class, Status, and Community Power,” 234-60.

⁵⁹ *Houston Press*, June 19 (quote, emphasis added), 20, 1920; *Houston Post*, June 19, 1920; and *Union Review*, June 18, 1920. By the time he closed beach concessions, Wolters had already used his authority to begin raiding ships suspected of carrying alcohol. These actions eventually caused Wolters some trouble. After raiding an Italian ship, the U.S. Secretary of State reprimanded Hobby and his commanding general for their actions. See Wolters, *Martial Law*, 68.

⁶⁰ At one point, the pro-business *Daily News* editorialized “what Galveston preeminently needs is a getting together...we believe that the discord is due in large measure to *wrong leadership, indefinite leadership, or perhaps the absence of leadership*. What is needed is that a man in *whom the citizenship of Galveston in general have confidence*.” This seems to indicate that local business interests were discontent with the city commission and provides evidence of the political motives behind martial law. See *Galveston Daily News*, July 17, 1920. Emphasis added.

⁶¹ *Galveston Daily News*, July 5, 1920; *Houston Post*, July 5, 1920; and *Houston Press*, July 5, 1920 (quote). Although Jim Crow laws disqualified most black residents from participating in elections, a very small group of middle class African-Americans enjoyed the right to vote in Galveston. Parties labeling the Island City as vice-ridden often used this fact as ammunition and will be dealt with more thoroughly below in Chapter V.

⁶² The full text of the proclamation is printed in *Galveston Daily News*, July 16, 1920. Also see *Houston Post*, July 16, 1920; and Wolters, *Martial Law*, 71-72.

⁶³ *Houston Press*, July 16, 1920; *Houston Post*, July 16, 1920; *Galveston Daily News*, July 16, 1920; *Houston Labor Journal*, July 17, 1920; Goldstein, *Political Repression*, 11-12; and Krenek, *The Power Vested*, 17. Serving as a judge in Houston prior to the strike, Captain Stevens was allegedly nicknamed “Maximum Stevens” because of his penchant for assessing the maximum penalty in all of his court cases.

⁶⁴ *Galveston Daily News*, July 16 (quotes), 17, 1920; *Houston Post*, July 17, 1920; and *Houston Press*, July 16, 17, 1920. Wolters continually denied the Guard’s responsibility in Mrs. Auderer’s death and no arrests were ever made.

⁶⁵ *Galveston Daily News*, July 31, August 11, 1920; *Houston Post*, August 1, 11, 1920; and *Houston Press*, July 31, August 10, 11, 1920. Anderson planned to appeal Street’s decision, but by the time the State Court of Appeals opened in October, Hobby had recalled the National Guard from Galveston.

⁶⁶ *Galveston Daily News*, July 20, 22 (quote), 1920; *Houston Post*, July 22, 1920; *Houston Press*, July 21, 22, 1920; and *Houston Labor Journal*, July 24, 1920. There is no evidence that Hobby visited the docks or discussed the situation with any representatives from organized labor.

⁶⁷ Letter, W.J. Rowe to Adjutant General Cope, July 26, 1920, Adjutant General’s Correspondence, TSLAD; and *Galveston Daily News*, August 7, 1920.

⁶⁸ *Galveston Daily News*, July 31, August 1, 3, 1920; *Houston Post*, July 31, August, 2-4, 6, 7, 1920; and *Houston Press*, July 30, 31, August 2-4, 6, 1920. Following his removal for trial to Fort Bend County, local papers contain no indication of Tyler’s fate.

⁶⁹ *Houston Post*, July 27, 1920; and *Houston Press*, July 30, 1920.

⁷⁰ *Houston Press*, August 6, 9, 1920.

⁷¹ *Houston Press*, August 19, 20, 1920; and *Houston Labor Journal*, August 28, 1920.

⁷² *Houston Press*, August 6, 9, 1920. This comparison was based on a statement made by Wolters to the Galveston Rotary Club.

⁷³ *Houston Press*, July 31, August 23, 1920; *Galveston Daily News*, August 26,

1920; and *Houston Post*, August 23, 27, 1920. In the wake of the National Guard's campaign against the Houston paper, union member W.A. Lee also became the victim of state repression. On August 24, military authorities arrested him for "making incendiary remarks about General Wolters and the National Guard." Lee was the first and only union member arrested since the beginning of martial law. See *Houston Press*, August 25, 1920.

⁷⁴ *Galveston Daily News*, August 31, 1920 (quote); and *Houston Press*, August 31, 1920. The other two officers involved in the attempted arrest were Lieutenants Jule R. Smith and Robert E. Abbott.

⁷⁵ *Houston Press*, August 31, 1920.

⁷⁶ *Houston Labor Journal*, September 11, 1920.

⁷⁷ *Houston Post*, September 1, 1920. The editorial went on to proclaim the similarities between martial law and the military phase of Reconstruction, still a very powerful memory in Texas.

⁷⁸ *Houston Press*, August 31, September 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 9, 1920; *Galveston Daily News*, September 2, 8-10, 1920; *Houston Post*, September 2-4, 9, 10, 19, 1920; and *Houston Labor Journal*, September 25, 1920. Mayfield's tactics might have been an indication of things to come. With the Ku Klux Klan's reintroduction to Texas, Mayfield became an active supporter and published a well known Klan journal, *Colonel Mayfield's Weekly*. Sanders later brought a \$25,000 lawsuit against Mayfield and the officer involved in his attempted kidnapping. At the request of Hobby, Assistant Attorney Generals E.F. Smith and C.L. Stone defended the colonel against this suit. See *Galveston Daily News*, December 17, 1920.

⁷⁹ *Houston Press*, September 8, 1920. Hobby may also have had financial considerations in mind when announcing the end of martial law. On August 4, the *Galveston Daily News* reported that the state had spent \$150,000 on the troops in less than two months. Because this was \$50,000 more than the notoriously stingy legislature had appropriated, the state had to obtain deficiency warrants from private banks.

⁸⁰ Letter, Jacob Singer to Hobby, September 16, 1920 (quotes), Adjutant General's Correspondence, TSLAD; *Galveston Daily News*, September 19, 1920; *Houston Post*, September 19, 1920; and *Houston Press*, September 20, 1920.

⁸¹ Letter, Hobby to Adjutant General Cope, September 21, 1920, Adjutant General's Correspondence, TSLAD; *Galveston Daily News*, September 19, 30, October 1, 3, 9, 1920; *Houston Post*, September 19, 30, October 5, 9, 1920; *Houston Press*,

September 19, 30, October 1, 8, 1920; and Wolters, *Martial Law*, 79. The businessmen also presented all the soldiers with medals to thank them for their service in fighting a large dock fire that broke out on September 29. See Krenek, *The Power Vested*, 25-27.

⁸² *Galveston Daily News*, August 1, 16, 19-21, 1920; *Houston Press*, August 21, 1920; and International Longshoremen's Association, *Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth Convention* (1921), 52.

⁸³ *Houston Press*, June 15, 1920 (quote); *Union Review*, August 27, 1920; *Houston Labor Journal*, August 7, 1920; and *Galveston Daily News*, August 1, 4, 1920.

CHAPTER V

RACE, UNION, AND DEFEAT

Jim Crow ruled the South in 1920. Virtually all southerners embraced the system of racial hierarchy and segregation that characterized their society. In Galveston, few places illustrated the island's racial tensions more strongly than the segregated waterfront. Most of the time, an uneasy equilibrium existed between black and white dockworkers. Each went about his business with little concern for the other. When their paths did cross, conflict and struggles for control of the docks inevitably resulted. Occasionally, however, these segregated workers disregarded social norms, uniting in brief but astonishing displays of class solidarity. The Galveston longshoremen's strike was such an episode. Unwilling to disrupt the delicate biracial balance they had forged on the docks, the longshoremen came together in protest of the Morgan and Mallory lines' apparent indifference to race in the employment of strikebreakers. "Born of economic necessity and strategic considerations," argues historian Eric Arnesen, "biracial unionism...served to bridge some gaps between blacks and whites by creating an arena for interracial contact, deliberation, and collaboration." The true test of this solidarity lay in its ability to withstand the pressures of the strike.¹

* * * *

The southern waterfront has long been a meeting place for blacks and whites. This history began in slave times, when African-Americans made up a significant portion of the waterfront labor force. White owners believed that the abilities of their human chattel were naturally suited to the occupation's backbreaking physical labor. In

many ports, unfree blacks comprised a majority on the docks, working uneasily alongside their free white counterparts. With emancipation and the end of the Civil War, propertyless blacks and whites flooded southern waterfronts hoping to make a living in the relatively unskilled longshore profession. As the industry and its workforce expanded, calls for union organization grew as well. Either by themselves or with the help of organizers, African-Americans began forming separate unions alongside those of their white counterparts. Economic equality and cooperation between segregated locals stood at the heart of biracial unionism. With its long history of race mixing, the longshore industry was particularly well-suited to this arrangement. Because they traditionally associated African-Americans with waterfront work, white longshoremen did not generally share the same feelings of encroachment that unionists in other industries often decried. Most contemporaries, as well as historians, pointed to New Orleans as the South's most successful example of biracial unionism. In 1880, Crescent City longshoremen established the Cotton Men's Executive Council, an organization that brought together black and white dockworkers through work sharing agreements and united contract negotiations. Despite setbacks and name changes over the years, this powerful council benefited waterfront union members of both races and exerted a significant amount of control on the New Orleans levee.²

Along the Upper Texas Gulf Coast, biracial alliances between longshoremen did not occur as frequently and had less staying power when they did. In contrast to New Orleans, where strong African-American unions developed independently, black organization in nineteenth century Galveston began in response to the formation of white

unions unwilling to associate with them. Galveston's first waterfront union, the Screwmen's Benevolent Association (SBA), did not allow African-Americans in its ranks, resolving soon after its formation not to work for anyone "who shall employ to work on shipboard persons of color."³ As cotton production and the demand for labor to handle it increased, these white screwmen faced greater competition and began actively protesting the employment of blacks. To counter such attacks, respected black politician Norris Wright Cuney organized the Colored Screwmen's Benevolent Association (CSBA) in 1883. Hoping to secure a monopoly on waterfront employment for blacks, Cuney approached the Mallory line for a contract and urged CSBA members to undercut white longshoremen by accepting their traditional jobs for less pay. The SBA responded by striking, but the start of the busy season forced the white screwmen to resume work. The shipping companies soon overshadowed this antagonism by employing non-union black labor. This cheap workforce and the competition it brought to the trade forced both organizations to reconsider their strategies and collaboration between the SBA and CSBA increased dramatically during the 1880s and 1890s. Still in its nascent stage, the Galveston waterfront's first biracial alliance would not reach the level of solidarity found in New Orleans for another twenty years⁴

Part of the reason this racial cooperation lagged behind that found on the levees of the Mississippi lay in Galveston's employment structure. Because the railroad companies and their allied shipping lines hired regular freight handlers, different docks quickly became the exclusive enclaves of black or white workers. Although this system transformed Galveston into one of the nation's first "decasualized" ports, it also impeded

biracial unionization. As long as everyone stayed at his respective dock, there was little incentive to organize or unite across racial lines. Those supporting biracialism usually confined their efforts to maintaining the status quo. In more specialized and competitive occupations like cotton screwing, collaboration occurred even less frequently. Here, racially divided workers followed a pattern of undercutting and strikebreaking that older historians often cited as evidence of the southern labor movement's failure.⁵

The turn of the century brought significant changes to Galveston's docks. More than anything else, the introduction of the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) dramatically increased the number of union members in the port. Unlike many unions affiliated with the American Federation of Labor (AFL) in the early twentieth century, the industrial ILA committed itself to the organization of both black and white longshoremen. Although this decision may have had its basis in a progressive ideology, pure and simple pragmatism played an even more important role. In 1910, African-Americans accounted for nearly 74 percent of the longshoremen in eight southern states. Texas blacks made up just over 35 percent of the waterfront workforce.⁶ If it hoped to be successful, the union could not ignore this great mass of workers. At the founding convention of the Gulf Coast and South Atlantic district held in September 1911, ILA president T.V. O'Connor stated, "[this meeting] was called for the purpose of bringing about a united longshoremen's organization in the South." O'Connor went on to express his belief that if properly organized, the new district could affect industrial parity, though not social equality between black and white longshoremen across the South. The same meeting also carried resolutions from a number of southern locals urging the union to

organize black dockworkers. White workers had begun to realize that the southern labor movement's only hope for success was to include the large numbers of potential African-American competitors within its ranks.⁷

In 1912, the ILA achieved its first major biracial success in Galveston with the acceptance of an amalgamation agreement between the port's cotton locals. The so-called "50-50 Plan" aimed to reduce competition between African-American and white longshoremen by dividing work in the port equally. Members modeled the plan after a similar agreement formed and used intermittently in New Orleans since 1886. Initially, the 50-50 Plan created as many problems as it solved. Whites complained that blacks received too much work, while blacks claimed that their numerical superiority entitled them to more than half of the jobs. The white screwmen, Galveston's traditional waterfront aristocrats, especially resented the agreement. Forced to sign by the growing technical superfluity of their craft, the SBA's successors in Local 317 repudiated the plan less than a year later and negotiated contracts with local stevedores that undercut their African-American colleagues. Following an appeal by the black screwmen in Local 329 to the ILA's Grievance Committee and a visit from O'Connor, Local 317 reluctantly accepted the amalgamation agreement once more. By the time of the ILA's 1914 national convention, however, O'Connor again reported that neither the white locals nor the company contractors had upheld the renewed agreements. After stripping Local 317 of ILA recognition, the union grudgingly agreed to amalgamate for the third time. "Embraced reluctantly by many of the parties," Arnesen argues, "Galveston's new biracial system was but a weak reflection of New Orleans." Racial solidarity in the port

of Galveston was never so sacred that it could not be broken if either group felt some benefit could be derived from doing so.⁸

The years leading up to the coastwise strike supported this conclusion and made the need for greater biracial cooperation on the waterfront even more obvious. As statewide economic conditions deteriorated during World War I, Galveston's shipping companies became less willing to uphold the racial status quo on the docks and began hiring whoever would work the cheapest. The United States' entry into the war in 1917 exacerbated this tension. As millions of southern blacks migrated to northern industrial centers and their understaffed munitions factories, Texas employers took the opportunity to begin widespread hiring of non-union labor once again. In the longshore industry, many of the jobs went to African-Americans who stayed behind during the Great Migration or moved to various Texas ports. The issue of migration also became more sensitive, especially after companies began hiring imported Mexican laborers as strikebreakers. Many Texas unions, including the ILA, expressed a greater interest in organizing these "replacement" groups of blacks, Mexicans, and women.⁹

Rising African-American political activism during and immediately following the war also hurt the efforts of biracial unionization advocates. Due to migration and the draft, blacks enjoyed a significant amount of leverage in the labor scarce South. The traditional demands for better wages and work conditions became wedded to broader hopes of expanded political and civil rights for a great many of these African-Americans. In Texas, the black press urged its readers at home to exercise the same assertiveness shown by their sons and brothers fighting in France. Blacks in Texas also

began organizing branches of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) beginning in 1918. Many of these activists gained experience in the labor movement and it is likely that working-class members constituted the core of NAACP membership in the state. In November, black longshoremen of ILA Local 807 chartered Galveston's first branch of the association. By the time the strike began in March 1920, this chapter boasted well over two hundred members. A small number of more militant African-Americans took the NAACP's agitation for equality even further. In 1919, federal investigators reported that several witnesses had seen Galveston's black screwmen storing high-powered rifles in their union hall. Although such reports were infrequent and remained largely unsubstantiated, they guaranteed tensions between race conscious workers in all industries.¹⁰

White Texans reacted vigorously to the rising militancy of African-Americans. Censorship, repression, and violence greeted black activists and newspapers across the state. White vigilante committees arose to defend Texas against the suspected race war, terrorizing blacks in many locations throughout the state. In August 1919, the state attorney general subpoenaed the NAACP's records after its members made public appeals to end segregation. Shortly after, John Shillady, an official of the association visiting Austin, received a vicious public beating from a group of men that included a Travis County judge and constable. When the New York office of the NAACP protested these actions, Governor Hobby's response revealed the anxieties of white Texans: "Your organization can contribute more to the advancement of both races by keeping your representatives and their propaganda out of this state than in any other way."¹¹

In such a tense atmosphere, the organization and maintenance of biracial unions on Galveston's docks proved difficult. White longshoremen likely kept a watchful eye on the activities of their colleagues in Local 807. The fact that the local NAACP chapter also included black workers from other occupations did little to dispel fears of a racial conspiracy directed against whites. The ILA's strict policy of refusing to discuss social equality between the races did not prepare white unionists for the growing militancy of their black colleagues. Any association attempting to inject the social equality question into public discourse threatened to disrupt the delicate balance forged on the Galveston waterfront. As the coastwise longshoremen of the Island City, both black and white, began preparing for the strike in the months leading up to March 1920, these issues and the waterfront's troubled past were no doubt on their minds. The race question quite literally divided the port in two. Peace prevailed uneasily only as long as the black workers of Local 807 employed on the Mallory docks stayed away from the white workers of Local 385 and Morgan-Southern Pacific property. The strike tested this system by forcing the two races into closer proximity with one another, not socially or geographically, but in terms of its outcome and each group's economic future. If Galveston's reputation among business interests as a longshoremen's town was to endure, the resolution of the strike had to include both races.

* * * *

When Galveston's sixteen hundred coastwise longshoremen walked off the job on March 19, it is doubtful that few, if any, believed that race would figure prominently in the strike. Brought about by the rising cost-of-living and the shipping companies'

intransigence on wages, the striker's demands mentioned nothing about amalgamation or social equality or any other controversial racial topic. Even maintenance of the racial status quo did not emerge as an important theme in most early reports on the strike. Perhaps attempting to minimize racial conflict, the local press upheld contemporary stereotypes about stratification and African-American behavior in its accounts of the industrial dispute. The *Daily News* reported that white longshoremen, ostensibly demonstrating southern politeness and the superiority of their race, notified the Morgan-Southern Pacific line of their intent to strike the evening of March 18. In contrast, less thoughtful African-American workers simply walked off the Mallory docks following lunch. Similarly, the *Union Review* announced that white Local 385 had voted unanimously to quit work, whereas Local 807 only did so "by large majority," and then only as an offer of assistance to "other interested Locals." The labor journal went so far as to report each union's actions in separate articles, the white longshoremen receiving top billing, of course.¹²

For the first month of the strike, such prejudicial reports offered the only indication that racial questions might be involved. Black and white longshoremen stayed away from the docks in their respective neighborhoods of the city with little apparent contact between them. Given the racial tensions that followed World War I, non-intercourse and the preservation of racial stratification seemed like the most effective approach, at least to the port's white workers. This situation began to change, however, in mid-April with the Mallory line's announcement that it intended to use strikebreakers to move the rapidly accumulating freight on the waterfront. The

importation and hiring of non-union labor forced the segregated longshore unions to reevaluate their overall strategy. With the shipping companies using all the means at their disposal to break the strike, economic necessity and the desire for a successful resolution of the conflict brought Local 385 and Local 807 together in protest of these policies.

The first manifestation of this biracialism occurred soon after the Mallory line's decision to use non-union labor in late-April. In order to coordinate union actions, the locals established joint executive boards between themselves. These boards prepared reports pertaining to the strike and then sent them to the regular meetings of each local for their members to approve.¹³ On May 5, a group of imported strikebreakers resumed work on the Mallory steamship *Alamo*, protected by a small force of private armed guards. In response to this provocation, longshore representatives called a mass meeting of the black and white coastwise locals for the next evening.¹⁴ Approximately two thousand men attended the gathering, voting unanimously to remain on strike until they received their wage demands. The president of Local 385, O.A. Anderson, spoke to the crowd, cautioning his audience to remain on their best behavior and perpetrate no violence against the strikebreakers. "We are accused of violence when not a single case of the kind can be cited," he announced. "We have neither threatened nor committed violence and are opposed to guards being stationed at the docks, as such is entirely unnecessary and places us in the wrong light." Recognizing the necessity of maintaining favorable public opinion, black and white participants also adopted a resolution reaffirming their loyalty to the city of Galveston.¹⁵

As an indicator of racial solidarity among the port's longshoremen, this meeting was a very important. It demonstrated an emerging sense of economic unity between the black and white strikers. As the agreed upon domain of African-American workers, the employment of strikebreakers and armed guards on the Mallory docks should not have aroused any opposition from white union members, but Local 385's participation in the May 6 protest gathering indicated that it recognized a similarity between its own interests and those of Local 807. If the Mallory line could successfully associate seven hundred black strikers with violence, then the Morgan-Southern Pacific agents could do the same with nine hundred white strikers. Such a misrepresentation threatened to damage organized labor's image in the public eye and make it extremely difficult, if not impossible, for the striking longshoremen to achieve their demands. Economically, the white longshoremen could not afford to ignore the events occurring on the Mallory docks.¹⁶ This did not mean, however, that social equality had made the agenda. As the meeting's main speaker, the white Anderson reinforced the waterfront's racial hierarchy. The two races of longshoremen might come together through labor organizations to protest the shipping companies' tactics, but white union members would lead such movements. For the duration of the strike, whites upheld their supremacy through the simple act of speaking for all Galveston's coastwise longshoremen.¹⁷

Local and state business interests recognized the race question as a potentially dividing force and willingly played it to their benefit. Portraying the longshoremen and their organizations as forces of social equality between the races quickly became the most popular and effective method used. During their June 2 conference with Hobby,

the representatives of the Texas Chamber of Commerce and Galveston Commercial Association used the race question to advance their argument for martial law. Hoping to appeal to the governor's racial prejudices, the committee reported that five blacks and four whites controlled the powerful Dock and Marine Council, which in turn controlled the waterfront unions of the port. Hobby had to take control of Galveston before this unnatural and unreliable order spread throughout Texas. Organized labor vehemently denied these charges, stating that "no man who knows the slightest thing about the Dock and Marine Council and the waterfront locals in Galveston would deliberately tell such a falsehood" unless he had a hidden agenda.¹⁸

The pro-business *Daily News* also raised racial question in order to show its support for state intervention. Black strikebreakers working on the Morgan docks could not find shelter or food because "all the negroes living in Galveston are either members of or in sympathy with the unions and their houses are no sanctuary for non-union men." Because of this, troops needed to remain on the island. The paper also attempted to drive a wedge into the biracial solidarity of the longshoremen and weaken the strike. In response to the waterfront's growing number of black workers, white labor leaders were "trying to swing the balance of power further toward whites." The *Daily News* hoped that African-American workers would see their jobs on the Mallory line threatened by white unionists and abandon their fellow strikers. When this strategy did not work, the paper grew even more blatant, publishing news of a strike-related killing by black Philadelphians under the misleading front page heading "Strikebreakers Kill Innocent By-Stander." The intentions of the editor could not be more transparent. By associating

the black and white longshoremen with violence, public opinion would turn against their alliance and force a resolution.¹⁹

Despite such attempts, the striking longshoremen maintained their allegiance to each other. At another mass meeting held on June 4, a mixed crowd of fifteen hundred union members and local citizens adopted a resolution protesting the governor's intention of sending troops to Galveston. The protest, which also included approximately three to four hundred African-Americans, had little effect on Hobby's decision. Three days later, on June 7, more than a thousand soldiers arrived in the city and placed it under martial law.²⁰

Although Hobby's action proved damaging to the strike and organized labor in the long run, the military occupation of Galveston initially had the opposite effect on the biracialism of the longshoremen. Instead of dividing the strikers and bringing public wrath upon them, the arrival of the National Guard brought the segregated unions closer together. The growing militancy of the state's business interests and their allies in Austin helped forge an even stronger alliance between the black and white longshoremen of Galveston. Nothing illustrated this better than the dockworkers' attitude toward the shipping companies' use of Mexican strikebreakers.

Pragmatic considerations guided the biracial longshore movement in its dealings with Mexican strikebreakers. The white and black longshoremen of Galveston both stood to lose when a third race began appearing on the docks. Like most southern states, Texas considered itself a biracial society. By the 1920s, however, it became obvious to many that Mexicans had entered this system and did not intend to leave. Neither black

nor white culture showed much support for the members of this “in-between” race. Occupying an ambiguous position, Mexicans could enjoy the privileges of being white one day and suffer the worst features of Jim Crow segregation the next. During hard times and conflicts such as the strike, the presence of these foreigners became a particularly sensitive subject. For whites, Mexicans represented the deterioration of wages and conditions. For African-Americans, they were competitors standing in the way of economic and social advancement.²¹

Mexican immigration first became a heated issue in Texas during World War I, when labor shortages provided employers with the opportunity to import large numbers of these cheap workers. The debate found new life in the early months of the strike. At a regular meeting held in late April, the members of Local 385 voted unanimously to send a communication to Secretary of Labor William B. Wilson requesting an investigation of the state’s Mexican laborers. The men claimed that many of the Mexican immigrants brought into Texas as farm laborers violated their contracts and moved to the cities after finishing the harvest, taking industrial jobs and undercutting the wages and conditions of American workers. Local 385 wanted Secretary Wilson to investigate those Mexicans suspected of violating their contracts and deport them if found guilty.²²

Such charges gained even more support following Hobby’s declaration of martial law. Days after the troops arrived, the Mallory line hired over two hundred Mexican strikebreakers and put them to work on the steamship *Comal*. Although no one could provide conclusive evidence proving that these workers were imported from Mexico,

representatives of the longshoremen and the local labor movement spoke against their employment with a united voice. In a June 7 meeting, the Dock and Marine Council devised methods for determining the residency and citizenship status of the strikebreakers. The *Union Review* declared, in no uncertain terms, that “the wolf cry of a shortage of labor on the farms has been used as a subterfuge to get thousands of these cheap Mexican laborers into this country.” The labor journal concluded, “We are for America first, last, and all the time, and the best is not too good for Americans and we say send these people back where they belong until they are willing to uphold what we have fought many years to gain, and not allow themselves to be used as tools by some money-grabbing corporation to the detriment of American citizens.”²³ Higher authorities also supported the longshoremen in their protest. On June 14, the secretary of the AFL, Frank Morrison, announced his opposition to the importation of Mexicans and their use as strikebreakers. Fred Davis, Texas’s Commissioner of Agriculture, also joined in denouncing the practice.²⁴

Many who shared these sympathies tried using economic arguments to persuade the shipping companies to rethink their practices. Several commentators argued that the employment of Mexican strikebreakers cost more money than it would take to rehire the regular longshoremen. I.M. Barb, president of the Galveston Labor Council, stated that Mexicans were unsuited to longshore work. It took them a week to accomplish what union men did in three days. Using this same logic, Barb argued that it would be cheaper to employ one unionized, American worker at the slightly higher wage he demanded than three non-union Mexicans at pre-strike rates. Barb also believed that the

companies had purposefully colonized the country's industrial centers with Mexicans to help break strikes and lower wages.²⁵ Other interested parties opposed the use of imported foreign workers by raising concerns about public health. These critics claimed that many of the strikebreakers came from cities on the Gulf Coast of Mexico where bubonic plague epidemics had recently broken out. Allowing such workers to remain in Galveston seriously endangered the health of the entire community.²⁶

Supported by the National Guard and determined to maintain the movement of freight, the shipping companies and their business allies ignored these protests. After completing work on the *Comal*, the Mallory line called for more non-union laborers to unload the incoming steamship *Concho*. On June 15, Hobby's private secretary Ralph Soape made his first visit to Galveston. After investigating the docks and speaking with shipping officials, he confidently declared that all of the Mexican strikebreakers were long time local citizens and workers on the island. If any of them had been imported, "he did not hear of it." Soape also used the Mexican replacements to justify the continuation of martial law, ironically claiming that the unskilled strikebreakers brought in to improve the situation were in fact responsible for the port's poor shipping conditions.²⁷

After Soape's departure, the National Guard continued to collect evidence defending its presence in Galveston. Much of what it found revealed a strong current of biracial solidarity among the dockworkers, mostly directed against strikebreakers. Released on June 29, the final report of Major C.H. Machem's court of inquiry described several instances of violence against non-union workers. "On or about May 7," the

report indicated, “a crowd of men, white and black, assaulted a Mexican going from the Mallory docks...When asked by a citizen what the trouble was, a man in the crowd answered, “The _____ is a strikebreaker.”” Potentially more serious, numerous witnesses testified to having seen racially-mixed groups of strikers attacking whites. According to one report, “a crowd of men—black and white—beat up a young white man. He was knocked to the ground by two negroes while fifteen or twenty of the crowd stood by and saw it done. Asked by a citizen what the trouble was, one of them replied, ‘Just beating up one of the scabs coming from the Mallory Line.’” Machedem’s report indicated that economic interests had overridden, at least temporarily, the traditional antagonism that existed between Galveston’s black and white longshoremen.²⁸

Besides providing evidence in support of martial law, Machedem’s report also served as powerful propaganda against the alliance of Local 385 and Local 807. African-American radicalism in the preceding years made southern whites more sensitive than ever to accounts of black-on-white violence. By publishing the court’s findings, the National Guard attempted to use this widespread racial anxiety to its advantage. Attacks on white and Mexican strikebreakers could just as easily spread to other citizens, while biracial union cooperation seemed to raise the spectre of social equality.²⁹ By casting the strikers as racial outlaws, state authorities and their business allies hoped to ruin the longshoremen’s base of public support in Galveston. Doing so could quickly end the strike and severely weaken the waterfront labor movement.

No one understood this better than Brigadier General Jacob F. Wolters.

Throughout his troops' occupation of Galveston, the general repeatedly raised the issue of race in an effort to weaken the strike. Much of this propaganda was quite transparent. Wolters made little effort to hide his contempt for the city's African-American population, saying that "there is a class of negroes in Galveston more insolent and defiant than any [he had] met anywhere in Texas." The membership of so many disobedient blacks in the city's labor unions only made the strike situation more dangerous. Hoping to provoke white indignation, Wolters claimed that these same African-Americans elected his uncooperative opponents in city hall. Although this accusation had little basis in reality—only a small handful of black Galvestonians enjoyed the right to participate in local elections—it was an effective weapon to use against the municipal administration's supporters in the labor movement. By making it appear that the city government and its union advocates violated white racial supremacy, Wolters cast serious doubts on both and justified the Guard's continued presence. Labor representatives responded with a feeble statement proclaiming that none of the striking longshoremen were black. This bitter and misleading answer illustrated the tenuousness of waterfront biracialism. Whites might join with blacks as workers, but socially and politically, they still sought to uphold the superiority of their race.³⁰

Wolters also used white fears of African-American radicalism to his advantage in weakening the strike. On June 29, the general made a stunning announcement. Intelligence indicated that Galveston's black residents had recently begun gathering weapons and ammunition in large quantities. In light of this discovery, Wolters ordered the removal of all ammunition from the city's pawn shops. Galveston's African-

American population responded indignantly, denouncing the general for his attempt to “stir up race trouble” and vehemently denying all accusations. Outside of the black community, this propaganda failed to have its intended effect. Perhaps believing it to be false, leading white newspapers, including the *Daily News*, did not print the story. Although Galvestonians could not have known it at the time, the findings of federal investigators indicated that Wolters exaggerated his claims. Their reports showed that many blacks in Houston attempted to buy ammunition, but made no mention of similar purchases in Galveston. Although the record contains no direct evidence, the general may have been prompted to make his own announcement after receiving word of these discoveries by phone. Inaccurate or not, the danger of Wolters’ accusation lay in the public suspicions it generated against the strike. Whites simply could not afford to ignore any indication of African-American militancy, especially when many of the alleged perpetrator walked beside them on the picket line.³¹

The biracial solidarity of Galveston’s coastwise unions reached its climax in the midst of this battle for public opinion. As the end of summer approached, a resolution of the strike favorable to the longshoremen appeared unlikely. At an August 15 meeting between locals 385, 807, 1113, and 1024, the men agreed to resume work on two conditions: submission of their wage demands to arbitration, and, more importantly, the immediate discharge of all non-union workers. After the companies removed their strikebreakers, the regular black and white longshoremen intended to return to their separate racial enclaves at the Morgan and Mallory docks. With high hopes, the locals submitted this proposal to both shipping companies the following day.³²

On August 20, the companies responded with their own conditions for reemployment. Besides accepting their pre-strike wages, the longshoremen had to also agree to three terms if they wanted their jobs back: the employment of all clerks and foremen at company discretion, the removal of union delegates from dock activities, and an open-shop policy of non-discrimination in hiring. From now on, the companies declared, no one race could claim a particular dock as its private sanctuary. Black, white, and Mexican would have to learn to work alongside one another. These proposals shocked the strikers. Demonstrating a total disregard for white racial supremacy and social hierarchy, Galveston's shipping companies and the business interests they represented indicated once more that they intended to break the back of organized labor at all costs.³³

The striking longshoremen wasted no time rejecting this proposal and quickly reasserted their original wage demands. Representatives of organized labor responded just as vigorously. One union official declared, "I, for one, will never open my mouth in favor of agreeing to such un-American terms as those submitted by the steamship companies, which would displace American citizens in favor of alien peons who are absolutely without any desire for a decent standard of living, and who pass their lives huddled together under their filthy ponchos when they are not at work."³⁴ Another union member passionately claimed that anyone with the true interest of Galveston at heart would shudder at the employment of these "disease carriers." An article in the *Houston Press* offered perhaps the most astute commentary on the companies' proposal, saying that three races were now involved in a problem that previously concerned only two.

“The Mexican...comes to the island with the status of the white man and his privileges are the same in all public places,” the paper declared. “To win a point, the employers of Galveston are making strides. It is undeniable: but who can measure the cost?”³⁵

Neither company paid attention to these protests, rejecting the union demands without further discussion. On August 25, Mallory officials issued an ultimatum to the strikers. The conditions for reemployment would remain on the table, they declared, but no more negotiations would take place. If the men wanted their jobs, they must accept the open-shop conditions without debate. The fate of Galveston’s biracial waterfront unionism lay entirely in the hands of the longshoremen themselves.

* * * *

Since the beginning of the coastwise strike in March 1920, Galveston’s longshoremen confronted many challenges. Throughout the months, the island’s waterfront unions felt the iron heel of military repression, witnessed the establishment of an open-shop in their once strongly organized city, and became the targets of vicious racial propaganda. Few would contest that that the business interests behind these first two assaults had been successful, but the final question of race still appeared undecided. Biracial solidarity on the docks had withstood the slings and arrows of its opponents, culminating in August with the longshoremen’s rejection of the Mallory line’s ultimatums. In Texas’s racially charged atmosphere, however, this alliance could only endure for so long before it eventually broke.

The split finally occurred on December 13, 1920. Following two months of negotiation, representatives of Local 807 signed an agreement allowing their members to

resume work on the Mallory line. The Galveston citizen's committee, which had acquired significant standing in September after devising a plan for the removal of troops, stood at the heart of this resolution. Most of the terms in the new agreement mirrored those offered by the shipping companies in August. Pending their acceptance of non-discrimination in hiring, the prohibition of union delegates, and the employment of foremen and clerks at company discretion, the strikers could return to work at a rate of \$0.67 an hour regular time and \$1.00 overtime. The settlement also established new grievance procedures. In the future, all disagreements between the company and its employees would be immediately directed to the attention of the citizen's committee for arbitration. Two days later, over a hundred of the striking longshoremen returned to their jobs at the Mallory docks for the first time since March. Another large group of men followed this example the next day, prompting Mallory shipping agent F.T. Rennie to declare that "Conditions...are practically restored to normal."³⁶

In terms of its members success or failure in the strike, the agreement proved ambiguous for Local 807. On the one hand, the new grievance procedures severely weakened the union. Individual workers and the citizen's committee now acted as the arbiters of disagreements and replaced the union as the spokesperson for the longshoremen. Although wages increased, the new pay scale represented a defeat as well. Far from what the union originally demanded and carrying no provision for further arbitration, it would likely stand for sometime. In one respect, however, the strike settlement offered a partial victory for Galveston's black coastwise longshoremen. Contrary to its policy of non-discrimination in hiring, the Mallory line announced its

intention of employing only African-American labor on its docks. As a sign of good faith, the company discharged all Mexican strikebreakers on December 15. The members of Local 807 saw this as a minor triumph. Despite the damage done to their union, they retained possession of their traditional racial enclave. If the white longshoremen could obtain a similar resolution, biracial unionism might endure on the waterfront.³⁷

Events on the Morgan-Southern Pacific docks soon shattered this illusion. Shortly after the Mallory settlement, Morgan shipping agent H.M. Wilkins offered his striking workers identical terms. In exchange for a small increase in wages, the men of Local 385 had to agree to open-shop conditions if they wanted to be rehired. It is likely that had Wilkins followed Rennie's example and restored his company's former policy of employing only whites, a settlement would have been easily forthcoming. There seemed to be little hope that Local 385 could bring about a successful conclusion of the strike alone. Wilkins, however, entertained different ideas. Instead of offering to discharge its force of black and Mexican strikebreakers, the Morgan line stood firm on its policy of non-discrimination. Formerly the exclusive domain of white longshoremen, the Southern Pacific docks suddenly became a potential arena for racial mixing.³⁸

This challenge sounded the death knell of biracial waterfront unionism in Galveston. Willing to accept all of the company's other terms for reemployment, the members of Local 385 adamantly refused to return to work until they received a guarantee that blacks and whites would not be integrated. Wilkins offered a similarly stubborn response. "It was to our great regret that the white men left us as they did," he

declared, “but the present situation is one brought on by themselves.” At the Southern Pacific docks in New Orleans and the shops in Houston, black and white worked together without trouble, he claimed. The Morgan line did not intend to mix the races, but reserved the right to do so if conditions made it necessary. “Our present dockworkers, numbering several hundred men, less than ten percent of whom are white, voluntarily came to the rescue of the Morgan line and its patrons when the company was in distress,” Wilkins continued. Negotiating a contract that excluded either race from employment would not only be a violation of laws upholding the free pursuit of one’s business, but also an insult to the company’s recent saviors.³⁹

The Morgan line’s racial policies received strong denunciations from Local 385 and the citizen’s committee. Contradicting Wilkins’ claim, O.A. Anderson declared that Texas’s Jim Crow laws prohibited whites from working side by side with blacks. “The laboring men have agreed to every proposition asked by the Morgan line,” he announced, “but are not going to shoulder a truck with the negroes.” Other white union men argued that 80 percent of Galveston’s dockworkers would be black if the Morgan line opened its docks to all races. Such an imbalance threatened to overturn the port’s racial hierarchy. At a conference held January 22, a representative of Local 385 declared that “we pleaded with Mr. Wilkins, not as union men, but as white men” to reconsider the company’s position. The citizen’s committee also expressed its disapproval of the Southern Pacific’s actions, saying that it would be wrong for the people of Texas and Galveston to further protect the company if it insisted on mixing the races, “a fundamentally wrong and unsound practice.” “There can be no condition of

harmony existing here by the mixing of the races,” the committee declared.⁴⁰

Wilkins intransigence also drew the public’s wrath. The *Daily News* editorialized that the Morgan line should recognize the impracticality of race-mixing and end the strike by employing one group or the other exclusively. Because whites formerly worked the docks, “The News ventures to offer the hope that white men will be reemployed.” County Judge E.B. Holman argued that “the mixing of blacks and whites on the dock is bound to lead to trouble later on.” Blacks belonged in the cotton field, not “the white man’s town” of Galveston. Chief of Police Sedgewick agreed with Holman, declaring ominously that “to have negroes in a subordinate position will probably work to advantage, but to mix the whites in positions similar to those held by negroes and to work the gangs intermixed is a sure sign of racial trouble that will never be stamped out in the South.” The concern for this situation reached all the way to Austin, where the state’s newly inaugurated governor Pat Neff decided not to withdraw Captain Joe Brooks and his force of Texas Rangers until the Morgan line completely settled the strike and these racial questions.⁴¹

Despite the public opposition that this blatant disregard for contemporary racial standards caused, the Morgan-Southern Pacific line did not fear reprisal. Even after the members of Local 385 appealed to Governor Neff for assistance, the company stood steadfast behind Wilkins and its open-shop policy of non-discrimination. This unprecedented turn of events dumbfounded the white longshoremen. Although they had become aware months before that the strike would not be settled to their advantage, no one ever expected the waterfront’s racial order to be completely overturned. The only

leverage these men enjoyed—their whiteness—meant little to company officials eager to end the strike. By allowing African-Americans to dominate the coastwise workforce, the Morgan and Mallory lines successfully played the black and white longshore locals off one another and divided the strike along racial lines. Without this solidarity, Galveston's longshoremen had no hope of success against their powerful opponents. Local 385 realized this at the end of January 1921 and grudgingly accepted the Morgan line's conditions for reemployment. On the morning of February 1, a small number of white coastwise longshoremen returned to their jobs alongside the non-union black workers who replaced them for ten months.⁴²

There was no up side in Local 385's final settlement to match the agreement reached between Local 807 and the Mallory line. Besides operating under the open-shop and losing their wage demands, the white Southern Pacific workers now faced the very real prospect of racial competition for employment. Neither their whiteness nor their union membership could guarantee them a paycheck on the coastwise docks. It appeared to many that Galveston's African-American workers had gained the upper hand, but ultimately, both races lost. As pragmatic and passive as it may have been, the cooperation that existed between the black and white longshoremen proved to be one of their greatest assets during the strike. Besides preserving peace on the waterfront for many years, this racial solidarity also guided Local 385 and Local 807 against strikebreakers, military occupation, and the open-shop for a full nine months. Once the companies managed to undermine these commitments, the unions' loyalties to one another quickly broke. When ILA leaders declared the strike off on February 1, 1921,

all that remained of this impressive biracial union system was the faint hope of rebuilding it someday. What had once been Texas's most strongly unionized waterfront became the site of racial conflict, discrimination, and a hostile open-shop. For Galveston's shipping companies and business interests, the remainder of the 1920s would be a time of prosperity and change. For the longshoremen and their unions, the decade promised only an endless struggle for survival.

Notes

¹ Eric Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers of New Orleans: Race, Class, and Politics, 1863-1923* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 255. For an examination of Arnesen's work and the new southern labor history's arguments on race, see the Introduction above.

² Ernest Obadele-Starks, *Black Unionism in the Industrial South* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000), 37-38; Sterling Spero and Abram Harris, *The Black Worker: The Negro and the Labor Movement* (1930; reprint, New York: Atheneum, 1969), 182; Daniel Letwin, *The Challenge of Interracial Unionism: Alabama Coal Miners, 1878-1921* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 77; Eric Arnesen, "Biracial Waterfront Unionism in the Age of Segregation," in *Waterfront Workers: New Perspectives on Race and Class*, ed. Calvin Winslow (Urbana: Illinois University Press, 1998), 26-27; Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers*, 63, 74; and Daniel Rosenberg, *New Orleans Dockworkers: Race, Labor, and Unionism, 1892-1923*. (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1988), 32-36. Letwin also argues that gender affected the acceptance of biracialism—the absence of women in the mining industry and its unions made association between black and white men more socially acceptable. Although there is no direct evidence, the male-dominated longshore industry may have aided biracial unionism in as well.

³ F. Ray Marshall, *Labor in the South* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 65 (quote); Starks, *Black Unionism in the Industrial South*, 37-38; Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers*, 22-22; and Arnesen, "Biracial Waterfront Unionism," 24-37.

⁴ Starks, *Black Unionism in the Industrial South*, 38-41; and James V. Reese, "The Evolution of an Early Texas Union: The Screwmen's Benevolent Association of Galveston, 1866-1891," *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* 75 (October 1971): 179-84; and Marshall, *Labor in the South*, 66-67.

⁵ Arnesen, "Biracial Waterfront Unionism," 32-37; and Lester Rubin, *The Negro in the Longshore Industry* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1974), 123-25. For examples of the old southern labor history, see Marshall, *Labor in the South*; Ruth Allen, *Chapters in the History of Organized Labor in Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1941); and George B. Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 318-353, 505-539.

⁶ Of the 51,841 total longshoremen in the United States in 1910, approximately 15,000, or 28.9 percent, were African-American. The ports of Texas had the lowest number of black longshoremen in the southern states, with only 35.2 percent. Georgia's longshore labor force had the highest percentage of blacks with an amazing 95.5 percent.

Starks, *Black Unionism in the Industrial South*, 45; and James C. Maroney, "The International Longshoremen's Association in the Gulf States during the Progressive Era," *Southern Studies* 16 (Summer 1977): 228-30.

⁷ "Minutes of the Convention of the Southern Locals," Labor Movement in Texas Collection, Center for American History, University of Texas at Austin; and Maud Russell, *Men Along the Shore* (New York: Brussel & Brussel, 1966), 84-88.

⁸ Arnesen, "Biracial Waterfront Unionism," 36-37; International Longshoremen's Association, *Proceedings of the Twenty First Convention* (1913); and International Longshoremen's Association, *Proceedings of the Twenty Second Convention, Including Executive Council Minutes* (1914).

⁹ James C. Maroney, "Organized Labor in Texas, 1900-1929" (Ph.D. diss., University of Houston, 1975), 181-82, 184-85; and Steven A. Reich, "Soldiers of Democracy: Black Texans and the Fight for Citizenship, 1917-1921," *Journal of American History* 82 (March 1996): 1479.

¹⁰ Reich, "Soldiers of Democracy," 1480-84, 1490; and W. A. Wiseman, "Race Riots, Negro Screwmen's Union, Texas, 1920," in *Federal Surveillance of Afro-Americans, 1917-1925: The First World War, the Red Scare, and the Garvey Movement*, ed. Theodore Kornweibel (microfilm, University Publications of America, 1986), Case File OG379203, reel 13. By 1921, the year the coastwise strike ended, the Galveston NAACP branch had dwindled to a mere fifteen members. If Reich is correct in his argument that workers were the core of the Texas NAACP, the defeat of Local 807 at the hands of the Mallory line may have contributed to this decline.

¹¹ Lewis L. Gould, *Progressives and Prohibitionists: Texas Democrats in the Wilson Era* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1973), 253 (quote); and Reich, "Soldiers of Democracy," 1498-1501.

¹² *Galveston Daily News*, March 20, 1920; and *Union Review*, March 26, 1920.

¹³ *Union Review*, April 23, 1920.

¹⁴ Besides ILA Locals 385 and 807, the meeting also included Locals 1113 and 1024. These two unions were composed of white checkers and warehousemen employed by the coastwise lines. In terms of race, these jobs were considered the exclusive domain of whites. Most whites believed that racially inferior blacks were incapable of performing either of these administrative occupations. Because of their relatively small membership, neither Local 1113 nor 1024 had much of an impact on the course of the strike.

¹⁵ *Galveston Daily News*, May 7, 8, 1920.

¹⁶ Throughout the South and its industries, economic necessity drove white unions into alliance with black unions, but the racial hierarchy of white supremacy remained in place. Occasionally blacks overturned this system and gained a semi-equal voice, but these instances were rare. See Arnesen, "Biracial Waterfront Unionism," 23; and Arnesen, *Waterfront Workers*, 181, 255.

¹⁷ Letwin, *Challenge of Interracial Unionism*, 7.

¹⁸ *Union Review*, June 4, 1920.

¹⁹ *Galveston Daily News*, June 7, 10, 1920. The Philadelphia incident occurred when a mob of strikers began harassing a group of black strikebreakers. After a short chase, three of the strikebreakers turned and began firing at their pursuers, killing white bystander Stanley Darylak and wounding two others.

²⁰ *Galveston Daily News*, June 5, 1920.

²¹ Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 62-63. Foley goes on to argue that whites "accepted" African-Americans, and vice versa, because neither was an alien race. Blacks and whites lived together in Texas long before the influx of Mexican agricultural workers in the early twentieth century.

²² Foley, *The White Scourge*, 44-47; Maroney, "Organized Labor in Texas," 181-82; and *Union Review*, April 23, 1920.

²³ *Galveston Daily News*, June 12, 1920; *Houston Post*, June 15, 1920; and *Union Review*, June 11 (quotes), 1920. The *Review* urged the Department of Justice, the Immigration Department, and the Mexican consulate to investigate these conditions.

²⁴ *Galveston Daily News*, June 15, 1920.

²⁵ *Galveston Daily News*, June 17, 1920; *Union Review*, June 16, 1920; and *Houston Labor Journal*, June 19, 1920. Barb concluded his argument by stating that the western end of Galveston had become "a regular Mexican colony."

²⁶ *Houston Press*, June 15, 1920.

²⁷ *Galveston Daily News*, June 14, 16, 18, 1920. Further investigations of Mallory's Mexican laborers supported Soape's conclusion. With the cooperation of

Brigadier General Jacob Wolters, the Department of Labor's local immigration service interviewed many of the strikebreakers, as well as bystanders in the Mexican sections of the city. The Department's agent concluded that none of the workers was imported and the longshoremen's charges against the shipping company were unfounded.

²⁸ The full text of Machem's report is published in the *Galveston Daily News*, June 29, 1920. Besides physical violence, some of which was against innocent white bystanders, the black and white longshoremen also stood accused of intimidating the strikebreakers. According to the court of inquiry, interracial mobs of between ten and one hundred strikers picketed the docks since the beginning of the strike and hurled verbal abuse at their replacements on a daily basis. The underscores quoted above appeared in the original. Also see *Houston Post*, June 17, 1920; and *Houston Press*, June 16, 1920.

²⁹ The Galveston strike provides an outstanding example of the ambiguous racial position of Mexicans in Texas. While the black and white coastwise longshoremen saw them as an inferior race of cheap, foreign labor, the shipping companies and their supporters gave the Mexican strikebreakers much more respect. For example, Machem's report places a great deal of emphasis on violence against Mexicans and whites, but mentions almost nothing about attacks on the African-American workers who comprised the non-union workforce on the Morgan-Southern Pacific docks. The court of inquiry tried to equate the two races with one another by making them superior to blacks, an acceptable strategy because of the Mexicans' "in-between" status. See Foley, *The White Scourge*, 40-42.

³⁰ *Houston Post*, July 5, 1920 (quote); and *Houston Press*, July 5, 1920. In light of Wolter's statement about the city commission's alleged black supporters, the suspension of civil authority by Hobby less than two weeks later makes more sense. The governor could ill-afford to ignore these charges, especially in a city like Galveston whose "cosmopolitanism" was already well-known throughout the state.

³¹ *Houston Press*, June 30, July 2, 1920; and *Houston Post*, July 3, 1920. Evidence seems to indicate that Wolters exaggerated the situation. The reports of federal investigators in Houston indicated that many blacks there had attempted to buy ammunition, but made no mention of similar purchases in Galveston. These agents reported their discoveries to Wolters by phone, which may have prompted him to make his own announcement. See E.F. Tinsley, "Race Riots, Texas 1920," *Federal Surveillance of Afro-Americans*, Case File OG387830, reel 13; and J.V. Bell, "Purchase of Firearms by Negroes, 1920," *Federal Surveillance of Afro-Americans*, Case File BS203677, reel 7.

³² *Galveston Daily News*, August 16, 19, 1920; *Union Review*, August 20, 1920;

Houston Press, August 16, 1920; and *Houston Post*, August 16, 1920. Two days later, the coastwise locals in New York returned to their jobs under these same conditions.

³³ *Galveston Daily News*, August 22, 1920; *Houston Post*, August 21, 22, 25, 1920; *Union Review*, August 20, 27, 1920; and *Houston Labor Journal*, August 28, 1920. The companies' proposal is especially radical in light of other studies that argue for southern business' total acceptance of racism and Jim Crow up to the 1960s. Stanley Greenberg argues that "Where commercial farmers and dominant workers insist on the traditional race lines businessmen will take the course of least resistance...dependent on the goodwill of dominant consumers and the state, [they] will learn to tolerate prevailing ideas on political practice and the utilization of labor." The behavior of the Morgan and Mallory lines stands in direct contrast to this conclusion. See Greenberg, *Race and State in Capitalist Development: Comparative Perspectives* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1980), 146.

³⁴ *Galveston Daily News*, August 21, 1920 (quote). For the companies' response to union proposals, see *Galveston Daily News*, August 22, 1920; *Houston Post*, August 21, 22, 25, 1920; *Union Review*, August 20, 27, 1920; and *Houston Labor Journal*, August 28, 1920.

³⁵ *Houston Press*, August 21, 1920 (quote); and *Union Review*, August 27, 1920.

³⁶ *Galveston Daily News*, December 14-16 1920; *Houston Post*, December 15, 1920; *Houston Press*, December 14, 1920; and "Results of a Meeting Held in the Office of Mr. J.H.W. Steele, Galveston, Texas, December 13, 1920, Between Citizens' Sub-Committee and Representatives of Mallory Line Local #807," Adjutant General's Correspondence, Texas State Library and Archives Division, Austin, TX. The settlement agreement between the Mallory line and its former employees also stipulated that the company would henceforth provide ice water at no charge. This was the only clear cut "victory" the men attained in the strike.

³⁷ *Galveston Daily News*, December 14, 15, 1920.

³⁸ *Galveston Daily News*, January 6, 1921; and *Houston Post*, January 6, 1921. Although there is no direct evidence of cooperation or communication, it seems likely that Morgan officials collaborated with Mallory officials in making this decision.

³⁹ *Galveston Daily News*, January 6, 12 (quotes), 1921; *Houston Post*, January 6, 1921; and *Houston Press*, January 12, 1921. The Morgan line's intransigence provides further evidence contradicting the conclusions reached by Greenberg. He argues that businessmen were quick to reproduce socially acceptable segregation on the shop floor, formally recognizing "colored" and white jobs and imposing Jim Crow and all his

attendant separate facilities on the work place. See Greenberg, *Race and State*, 227-30.

⁴⁰ *Galveston Daily News*, January 6, 7, 23, 1921. Surprisingly, the local labor press refused to comment on Wilkins' policies. Although there is no direct evidence to support this conclusion, the *Union Review* may have been attempting salvage a relationship between the black and white locals. Also see Greenberg, *Race and State*, 282-86.

⁴¹ *Galveston Daily News*, January 9 (quote), 12 (quote), 20, 1921; *Houston Post*, January 20, 1921, and *Houston Press*, January 19, 1921.

⁴² *Houston Post*, January 21, 1921; *Houston Press*, January 21, 1921; and International Longshoremen's Association, *Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth Convention*, (1921), 52.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

On September 15, 1920, Governor William P. Hobby issued a call for a special session of the Texas Legislature. The stated purpose was to “protect the ballot boxes” and eliminate any discrimination that might occur against newly-enfranchised female voters in the November elections. Most Texans realized, however, that the real issue at hand was the Galveston longshoremen’s strike. Alongside Hobby’s announcement, the *Galveston Daily News* speculated “Lawmakers Will Also be Asked to Consider Cheaper Way ‘To Keep Commerce Open’ at Galveston.” Some commentators put great faith in the upcoming session, declaring the legislature to be a voice of reason that would restore free government in Texas. Lawmakers rudely shattered these hopes when they convened in Austin on September 21.¹

The day prior to the session, state legislators received copies of a new bill that sought to prevent a future recurrence of the labor troubles in Galveston. Hobby’s “Open Port Bill,” as the press dubbed it, declared that because the ports of Texas operated at public expense, state law should prevent any obstruction or hindrance to their operation. In order to keep commerce moving, the bill made it a felony “for any person or group of persons by physical violence, or by threatening to use physical violence, or by intimidation to, or by harassing or molesting or in any way to interfere with men engaged in loading or unloading ships at any port in Texas.” Defining harassment very broadly, something as simple as a conversation between a striker and strikebreaker could technically be considered illegal. In addition to this, the governor gained the right to

assume and exercise full control over the police force in any area where these conditions existed without making an expensive declaration of martial law. Offenders arrested by state officials would be subject to a change of venue to a location no more than one hundred miles away from the site of their offense. Written ostensibly to guarantee defendants a fair trial, in reality this provision insured prosecution. Hoping to speed its own passage, the bill's final section read, "The importance of the legislation proposed, and the short term of this special session, creates an emergency and imperative public necessity that the constitutional rule requiring bills to be read on three separate days be suspended, and this act shall take effect and be in force from and after its passage, and so it is enacted." Following the formal presentation of the bill to committee on September 21, Hobby sent several messages to both houses of the legislature outlining the history of the Galveston strike and urging members to vote favorably.²

Organized labor's legislative supporters offered stiff resistance to the proposed law, which they labeled Hobby's "Anti-Strike Bill." Galveston representative Lee Brady argued that the bill represented an attempt to legitimize Hobby's recent actions. He also declared sarcastically, "If we are going to forbid strikes, let's do it directly and not pass such a makeshift measure as this." House Speaker R.E. Thomason of El Paso joined Brady in denouncing the bill, saying "I am for law and order everywhere in Texas but not for any legislation that singles out a certain class and imposes a certain law on that class."³ As expected, representatives of labor strongly disapproved of the proposed law. In a lengthy speech before the Senate, Texas State Federation of Labor (TSFL) president George Slater fumed that the bill came close to making him "a red flagger." "Organized

labor will not admit the striker, battling economically for more bread and butter for his wife and babies, is a more despicable type of criminal than the murderer or thief,” he cried. “We are going to claim for the striker all the rights common criminals claim.” The *Houston Labor Journal* remained confident that the bill would not become law, saying that “no sane body of lawmakers could afford to place such a measure in the statutes of their State, and it denounces the very platform that Governor Hobby is pledged as a democrat to support.”⁴

Apparently disregarding the *Journal's* assessment of its mental health, the Senate reported favorably on the Open Port Bill after making a few minor amendments to its provisions on punishment.⁵ Business leaders and chambers of commerce from around the state inundated the legislature with telegrams urging final passage, saying that the public interests of all Texans depended on it. Pro-business newspapers also voiced their approval. “A longshoremen’s strike must rely for its success largely not so much on violence as on the institution of a reign of terror,” the *Daily News* affirmed. “It is because this bill would provide a more effective and prompt method of ending a reign of terror...that it is thought ‘dangerous’ to many of those who join in the outcry against it.”⁶

Legislative proponents of the bill responded to these entreaties, arguing on the floor of the House that the presence of so many foreigners, African-Americans, Bolsheviks, and anarchists in Galveston made passage of the bill and the current military occupation more necessary than ever. Several representatives attempted to add amendments to the bill, but the suggestions of Waco representative Newton Williams

proved to be the most important and far reaching. Rather than limit the bill to the commerce of ships and railroads, Williams proposed that all common carriers engaged in the transportation of freight or passengers be protected as well. This included interurban railways, streetcars and express lines, and pipeline companies. After a fierce debate, the amendment carried. On September 30, the same day that martial law ended in Galveston, the House voted 77 to 25 in favor of the strengthened bill. Following a brief conference session between the two legislative branches, Hobby signed the Open Port Bill on October 4, making into law “the most drastic anti-strike bill that ever passed a legislature.”⁷

* * * *

Although the Galveston strike continued for another four months, the passage of Hobby’s Open Port Law in October 1920 provided its unofficial conclusion. The striking dockworkers no longer entertained hopes of successfully resolving the conflict. When the law became effective on January 1, 1921, it completely circumscribed the actions of an already divided waterfront labor movement. Organized labor showed its disapproval of this assault by withdrawing support from the traitorous Democratic Party, but the state’s most firmly entrenched political force paid no attention to their feeble protests.⁸ Supported by an anti-labor state government, the shipping companies and their business allies held all the cards. Galveston’s longshoremen had no choice but to accept the companies’ open-shop terms and dream of better days. Unfortunately, the realization of these hopes remained years away.

Simply put, the strike was disastrous for Galveston’s coastwise longshoremen

and their unions. In the aftermath of the conflict, Texas's most strongly organized city and its waterfront became a hotbed of open-shop employers and anti-labor sentiment. Forced to accept non-discrimination in hiring, Locals 385 and 807 lost all leverage on the waterfront. Once employment became a contract between an employer and an individual worker, the "right-to-work" cut out all union intermediaries. Without union stewards and foremen to police the waterfront, working conditions rested entirely in the companies' hands.

The strike also destroyed the Galveston longshoremen's fragile biracial solidarity. When the Morgan line replaced its white members with non-union black labor, Local 385 could do little more than voice their disapproval. By 1930, African-Americans accounted for nearly 70 percent of the workers in Texas's longshore industry, up from 54 percent in 1920. Racially divided and subject to the open-shop, Galveston's coastwise locals eventually yielded their charters in 1922. Through employee loans and planned social functions, both of which became mandatory conditions of one's continued employment, the companies successfully used welfare capitalism to prevent their workers from organizing again. In 1924, company unions formed, providing the only form of organization for Galveston's coastwise longshoremen well into the 1930s. As late as 1936, ILA member Nick Macela claimed that neither the Mallory nor the Morgan line workers had organized independently since the end of the strike.⁹

This weakened position became obvious very soon after the strike ended in February 1921. At the ILA's annual convention in July, recovery occupied an important position on the union's list of priorities. Early in the proceedings, the Executive Council

received a request from M.J. Gahagan of Local 385 recommending remittance of his union's taxes for the previous year. Because of the strike, the local's remaining members could not pay their dues. Following this, union members from across the South joined representatives from Galveston and asked the ILA to take action against the Southern Pacific line. Their resolution read:

Resolved, That the incoming Executive Council of the Longshoremen's Association be instructed to take this matter up with the General Officers of the Southern Pacific Steamship Company at New York and use their best efforts in remedying this practice to the end that *all discrimination against the members of our organization cease, and they be given an equal opportunity in the hiring of men employed on the docks and piers of said Company, both at Galveston, Texas and New Orleans, Louisiana.*¹⁰

Disregarding the terms it had dictated for reemployment, the shipping company refused to hire union members. No sooner had the men placed this problem before the convention than word of another setback arrived from Galveston. On July 14, Mallory officials announced that they would lower wages to the pre-strike levels of \$0.60 an hour regular and \$0.90 overtime. They also intended to increase the work day from eight to ten hours. Dissatisfied with this arrangement, the president of Local 807 asked what course of action he should take. He received a disheartening response. Although the ILA strictly opposed the increase in hours, the Mallory workers should accept the pay cut without debate. Having already lost one dispute over wages, the union could not afford to start a new campaign.¹¹

Galveston's longshoremen did not hold a monopoly on this kind of high-handed treatment by their employers. All across Texas, workers and their unions came under attack from business interests and the state government. The open-shop was so

successful, argued historian James Maroney, “that the organized business interests could boast that they had made greater progress in the anti-union campaign in Texas than in any other state in the country.” Oil workers, machinists, and building trade employees found themselves dismissed from jobs for their membership in unions. Retreating from its earlier strategy of legislative reform, the TSFL hardly functioned during the decade. From 50,000 members in 1920, the Federation declined to just over 25,000 by 1927. Biracial unionism and cooperation also fell victim to the 1920s. With the TSFL repeatedly denying their delegates seats at its annual convention, African-American unionists warned that industries like longshoring would soon belong exclusively to non-union labor.¹²

By institutionalizing the open-shop, Hobby’s Open-Port law greatly facilitated this assault on the working class. The most dramatic example of its use came in July 1922, when several thousand Texas members of the Federated Railroad Shopmen’s Union joined 400,000 of their fellows in a nationwide strike for higher pay. After violence broke out between strikers and strikebreakers in the town of Denison, Governor Pat Neff invoked the Open Port Law there and in sixteen other cities affected by the strike. When the Texas Rangers failed to keep order, Neff followed the path of his predecessor and declared martial law in the North Texas town. Following injunctions and similar military actions elsewhere in the nation, many of the shopmen returned to work. Ultimately, however, the strike cost their union more than 125,000 members. Although the Texas Criminal Court of Appeals later declared it unconstitutional in 1926, the invocation of the Open Port Law in breaking the shopmen’s strike indicated

organized labor's waning status in the state.¹³

Contrary to those who argue for Texas's exceptionalism, the decline of organized labor in the state was not a unique phenomenon. Workers in Texas suffered the consequences of a larger trend seen across the nation in the 1920s. Although pay envelopes increased in size by 11 percent between 1923 and 1929, this did not come close to matching the 60 percent increase in profits and dividends that corporations and their stockholders earned. By the end of the so-called "Prosperity Decade," it has been estimated that between 60 and 70 percent of Americans did not earn enough to provide their families with a decent standard of living. Unemployment became a chronic problem, averaging over 10 percent for most of the decade. Organized labor suffered huge losses in union membership, falling from a high of just over 5 million in 1920 to 3.4 million in 1929.¹⁴ As historian David Montgomery so aptly argued:

The hostile stance of the state toward labor's demands after 1918, its policies of deregulation and deflation, the ubiquitous repression by local, state, and federal police, and above all the mounting toll of unemployed—first at the end of 1918, more devastatingly during the 1920-2 depression, and then endemic to industrial life through the Coolidge Prosperity—all fostered an environment in which open-shop drives could hurl back the union tide in virtually every city of the land.¹⁵

Open-shop movements, welfare capitalism, and outright repression made the prospect of joining a union, in Texas and every other state, less than desirable to most American workers in the "Roaring Twenties." Boarded up and in disrepair, the house that labor built remained unoccupied by all but a few of the most hopeful until the late 1930s.

Notes

¹ *Galveston Daily News*, September 16, 1920; *Houston Press*, September 18, 1920; and James A. Clark, *The Tactful Texan: A Biography of Governor Will Hobby* (New York: Random House, 1958), 136.

² *Galveston Daily News*, September 21, 1920; *Houston Post*, September 21, 1920; and *Houston Press*, September 21, 22, 1920. The *Daily News* carried the full text of Hobby's proposed law in its pages.

³ *Houston Press*, September 22, 23, 1920. The *Press* echoed Representative Brady's comments, editorializing, "The governor, so far as the equity of his act is concerned, might just as well have gone farther and suggested a criminal law making it a felony for longshoremen to strike at all."

⁴ *Houston Press*, September 23, 1920 (quote); and *Houston Labor Journal*, September 25, 1920.

⁵ The Senate changed the penalties stated in the bill from a felony offense, punishable by one to five years in the state penitentiary, to a misdemeanor, punishable by 30 days to one year in county jail. See *Houston Press*, September 23, 1920; and *Houston Post*, September 24, 1920.

⁶ *Houston Press*, September 27, 1920; and *Galveston Daily News*, September 25, 1920. The *Houston Post* also voiced its approval of the Open Port Bill, arguing "the question involved in the hobby bill touches one of law and order and inviolable human rights, to say nothing of the broader question of public rights, and it is the province of the legislature to impose such lawful restrictions as may be necessary to preserve order and protect such rights." See *Houston Post*, September 26, 1920.

⁷ *Galveston Daily News*, September 24, 26, 28, 30, October 2, 3, 1920; *Houston Post*, September 29, October 3, 1920; Clark, *The Tactful Texan*, 137; and *Houston Press*, September 28, 29, 30 (quote), October 3, 1920.

⁸ *Union Review*, October 22, 1920. In issuing its protest against the Texas Democracy, the TSFL urged organized labor to overlook its political loyalties and affiliations in the upcoming election and vote for a third party, the American Party. Despite this impassioned call, Democrats soundly carried the November election just as they had done since the end of Reconstruction.

⁹ Ernest Obadele-Starks, *Black Unionism in the Industrial South* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2000), 45, 48; Albert Anderson, "Interview by

Anonymous,” July 13, 1936, Labor Movement in Texas Collection, Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin (hereafter cited as CAH); Doc Hamilton, “Interview by Anonymous,” July 8, 1936, CAH; and Nick Macela, “Interview by Anonymous,” July 8, 1936, CAH. Lizabeth Cohen deals with the corporate strategy of welfare capitalism at great length in *Making a New Deal: Industrial Workers in Chicago, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

¹⁰ International Longshoremen’s Association, *Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth Convention* (1921), 183. Emphasis added.

¹¹ ILA, *Proceedings of the Twenty-Sixth Convention*, 139, 215-16. By the time Nick Macela was interviewed in 1936, the Galveston longshoremen’s wage had declined even further. Although the regular pay rate remained at \$0.60 an hour, overtime pay had declined to only \$0.70 an hour. See Nick Macela, “Interview,” CAH.

¹² James Maroney, “Organized Labor in Texas, 1900-1929” (Ph.D. diss., University of Houston, 1975), 222-23, 229-31.

¹³ Norman D. Brown, *Hood, Bonnet, and Little Brown Jug: Texas Politics, 1921-1928* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1984), 82-86; Robert Justin Goldstein, *Political Repression in Modern America: From 1870 to 1976* (Urbana: Illinois University Press, 2001), 188-89; and Maroney, “Organized Labor in Texas,” 224-27.

¹⁴ Goldstein, *Political Repression*, 170-71, 184-85.

¹⁵ David Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor: The Workplace, the State, and American Labor Activism, 1865-1925* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 453.

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VITA

Joseph Anthony Abel was born on December 18, 1979, in Pasadena, Texas. He graduated Summa Cum Laude from the University of Houston in December 2001 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in history. After receiving his Master of Arts degree from the Texas A&M history department in December 2004, he will pursue a Master of Architecture degree with a certificate in historical preservation at the same institution. Mr. Abel can be reached at: 2205 Whatley Drive, Deer Park, Texas 77536.