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CONTENTS

CHARLESTON'S LONGSHOREMEN: ORGANIZED LABOR IN THE ANTI-UNION PALMETTO STATE

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I

SOUTH CAROLINA VIES WITH NORTH CAROLINA AS THE LEAST-unionized state in the nation. Recent surveys put union membership no higher than 4.1 percent of the workforce, considerably below the South's average of 6.9 percent.[1] Union-sponsored work stoppages in South Carolina are practically nonexistent, consuming .0002 percent of working time.[2] State political and business leaders have consistently worked to prevent the development of a strong labor presence in the Palmetto State. Yet since 1869 organized Charleston longshoremen have overcome South Carolina's racial dynamic and anti-union sentiment to maintain economic, political and social influence unsurpassed in the state's labor community. From its earliest days this predominately African American union has enjoyed significant links with local political and business elites, many of whom looked upon the union favorably. Through Reconstruction, Jim Crow and after, Charleston longshoremen used solidarity forged by racial prejudice to disarm anti-union pressures. Their successful interaction with a southern mix of race, class, politics and anti-union sentiment has produced a unique South Carolina institution noted for its longevity and influence.

Charleston dockworkers first organized during the economic and political upheavals following the Civil War. In 1867 local longshoremen walked off the docks to protest low wages, demanding a 50 cents daily increase. Four days later, shipping companies conceded to "pay the difference demanded by the wharf laborers." In January 1868, 200 to 300 longshoremen stopped working and demanded an additional 50 cents a day; after failed

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[1]Barry T. Hirsch, "Estimates of Union Density by State," *Monthly Labor Review* 124 (2001): 51. A 1995 survey measured the southern average at 8.3 percent. Richard Greer, "Insurgent AFL-CIO candidates propose big organizing drive, Especially in South," *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, 29 June 1995, sec. F, 3.

[2]Team South Carolina, "Work Force: Right to Work State," http://www.teamsc.com, accessed 17 October 2001. According to the South Carolina Department of Commerce, the state currently has the lowest unionization rate in the country, at 1.8%.

efforts to break the strike, shipping companies again increased wages.[3] Emboldened by these successful actions and by a sympathetic Reconstruction state government, Charleston dockworkers organized the Longshoremen's Protective Union Association (LPUA) in mid-1868, and obtained their legislative charter from the South Carolina General Assembly on March 19, 1869.[4] The LPUA soon initiated "an unprecedented outcropping" of successful strikes and work stoppages.[5] With each successive protest, the LPUA became bolder, and its profile in the community grew through newspaper articles and word of mouth. When shippers did not adhere to the LPUA's September 1869 wage and hour demands, the longshoremen again walked off the docks. Within a week the shipping lines conceded, increased wages and overtime pay, and designated specific working hours. LPUA leaders scored a major victory when shippers agreed to a closed shop, as a result of which all dockworkers would have to be union members.[6] The LPUA had a monopoly on waterfront labor after only six months of official existence.

The LPUA became increasingly aggressive in confronting the waterfront business community. In 1873 the LPUA blocked all entrances to a wharf whose shipping line paid a below-union wage scale. Charleston's Democratic mayor finally convinced the shipping line to accede to the union wages.[7] At its height in the late 1860s and early 1870s, the LPUA's 800 to 1000 members dominated dock labor, intimidated waterfront businesses, and kept a high profile through media coverage and its leadership of local labor.[8] In 1875, the Charleston *News and Courier* described it as the "most powerful organization of the colored laboring class in South Carolina."[9]

The union's high profile and influence led to political involvement.[10] Its organizational meetings in the summer of 1868 were held at a local state senator's church. Local Republicans offered to counsel the LPUA during the 1869 strike. Union leaders defended dockworkers from Democratic coercion while aligning themselves with Republicans. In November 1869, the LPUA went on strike after a white union longshoreman was fired for Republican Party involvement. After a 300-member union meeting and four days on the

[3]Donald Nieman, ed., *African Americans and Non-agricultural Labor in the South, 1865-1900* (New York: Garland, 1994), 141-143.

[4]Isabel Liggins, interview by author, Charleston, SC, 2 January 2000.

[5]Bernard E. Powers, Jr., *Black Charlestonians; A Social History 1822-1885* (Fayetteville: The University of Arkansas Press, 1994), 129.

[6]Ibid., 129-130; Nieman, *African Americans*, 143-145.

[7]Powers, *Black Charlestonians*, 132.

[8]Ibid., 128.

[9]Walter J. Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 296.

[10]Nieman, *African Americans*, 143.

picket line, the man was re-hired as the union urged the shippers to "withdraw all discrimination."[11] Years later, Charleston's labor community briefly supported its own political entity, the United Labor Party, founded in 1887.[12]

The LPUA also influenced Charleston Democratic politics through C.H. Simonton, a white Democratic legislator from Charleston. The legal advisor to the union, Simonton led the legislative effort to ratify the original 1869 charter.[13] Simonton was no backbencher; he lost by only six votes the Presidency of the 1876 South Carolina Democratic Convention, which nominated the candidate who would end the state's Reconstruction government.[14] Despite his conservative Democratic credentials, Simonton led legislative efforts in 1880 to re-charter the LPUA for 20 years.[15] His leadership of the second ratification of the charter indicates his assessment of the political power of the LPUA, even after Reconstruction. In 1898 union members objected to a shipping agent's use of non-union laborers working for lower wages; a subsequent riot intimidated the non-union workers into leaving Charleston. At the time, Charleston longshore wages were double that of Savannah and Brunswick, Georgia, and Wilmington, North Carolina, likely due to the LPUA's presence.[16]

Deterioration of Charleston port facilities, coupled with the reimposition of white Democratic political rule, weakened the LPUA. Following major hurricanes in 1885 and 1893, and the 1886 earthquake, the Port of Charleston fell into serious disrepair. Port owners neglected Charleston, redirecting sea traffic to Savannah to benefit their Georgia railroad interests. Piers rotted, warehouses crumbled, and the waterfront was seen as a "reproach and disgrace."[17] The falling price of cotton and rice further reduced commercial traffic. High freight rates and poor rail connections in the South Carolina lowcountry made the Charleston port an unattractive shipping destination.[18] With little work, Charleston longshoremen declined in significance.

In the early years of the twentieth century, Charleston longshoremen re-organized under International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) Local 1020, but financial mismanagement combined with anti-union efforts by

[11]Powers, *Black Charlestonians*, 130.

[12]Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!*, 319.

[13]George Brown Tindall, *South Carolina Negroes 1877-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), 137.

[14]Francis B. Simkins and Robert Hillard Woody, *South Carolina During Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1932), 490.

[15]Tindall, *South Carolina Negroes*, 137.

[16]Ibid., 138.

[17]South Carolina State Ports Authority, *History of South Carolina State Ports Authority* (Columbia: R.L. Byran Company, 1991), 12-13.

[18]Ibid., 15; Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!*, 327.

employers led to its dissolution in 1921.[19] Marion Turner, a member of ILA Local 1422 (Charleston's contemporary ILA Local) for over 42 years, recalls stories of how employers would "bust up" Local 1020 by going to the strongest men and "buying" their allegiance through money and loans. "[Once] they got the leaders out of the way, the rest wouldn't have enough sense to organize."[20] Veteran longshoreman Rufus Wilson recalls stories of financial mismanagement; "the President [of the union] at that time was letting the stevedores hold the union fund...they messed up the union fund" and the union was kicked out.[21]

In 1919 dockworker George German returned to Charleston from military service in World War I to find the longshoremen local in disarray. German's father had worked the docks of Charleston as a boatman and waterfront worker. German's grandfather, William German, a former McClellanville slave who worked as a rice boat navigator after the Civil War, was involved in the 1869 effort to incorporate the LPUA.[22] For 15 years George German labored without a union. By the 1930s, increased labor union activity in South Carolina and the revival of the Port of Charleston led to renewed union interest along the docks. During the 1930s the CIO's International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU) and the AFL's ILA engaged in fierce competition across the southeast to sign up waterfront laborers.[23] ILA leaders feared shippers would forgo unionized ports in the north for the lower cost, non-unionized ports of the South. In 1935 the ILA set out to organize southern dockworkers, beginning with Tampa (Local 1402), and moving to Jacksonville (1408), Miami (1412), Savannah (1414), and finally to Charleston (1422) in 1936.[24] Charleston longshoremen leaned towards the AFL's ILA because the federal government had designated that union as the official longshoremen representative during World War I; that endorsement resonated in Charleston's growing naval shipyard.[25] Meanwhile, the port underwent major improvements. In 1922 ownership was transferred to the City of Charleston, and in 1942 the

[19]"ILA Headquarters Affects Jobs Of 750 Negroes Here," Charleston *News and Courier*, 28 January 1957, 10A; Rufus Wilson, interview by author, Charleston, SC, 12 December 2001.

[20]Marion Turner, interview by author, Charleston, SC, 12 December 2001.

[21]Wilson, interview.

[22]Liggins, interview; "ILA Headquarters Affects Jobs Of 750 Negroes Here," 10A.

[23]F. Ray Marshall, *Labor in the South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 206.

[24]Turner, interview.

[25]Lester Rubin, William S. Swift, and Herbert R. Northup, eds., *Negro Employment in the Maritime Industries* (The Wharton School: University of Pennsylvania, 1974), 19; South Carolina State Ports Authority, *History of State Ports Authority*, 11-17.

South Carolina General Assembly created a state agency, the South Carolina State Ports Authority, to operate the Port of Charleston.[26] In June 1936 third generation Charleston longshoreman George German became the first president of ILA Local 1422.

Under German's tenure as president, the latter part of which coincided with the post-war civil rights movement, the ILA exercised a quiet influence admist an incendiary racial atmosphere. In 1944 the United States Supreme Court ruled in *Smith v. Allwright* that states could not exclude African Americans from voting in primary elections. South Carolina led the southern states' reaction by amending the state constitution to make the Democratic Party a private club that could "legally" exclude black voters.[27] Three years later Federal District Court Judge J. Waites Waring, a Charlestonian, ruled the private primary unconstitutional.[28] White Charleston was "seething" that one of their own would rule against white political supremacy.[29] Reaction and posturing after the rulings fueled tensions and radicalized conservative opposition to black political rights.

German thought a vocal African American role would provide an easy target for race-baiting politicians. German's ILA took a non-confrontational posture that emphasized economic goals over political equality, stressing its role as a labor union and not as an advocate for political or social change. "Worst thing he could have done was get in the media," recalls his daughter Isabel Liggins, as such attention could only distract from wage and hour issues. German "advised all his men to participate in the civil rights movement ... but he didn't put the union in front," recalls veteran longshoreman Marion Turner, who worked under German for nine years. "He didn't want to create problems with the people we worked for...or create a bad relationship between the people we work for and himself."[30] "He wasn't against it [the civil rights movement] a bit," notes veteran longshoreman Rufus Wilson, "but he just didn't get involved...he would tell you to use your best judgement about that."[31] As Turner notes, German "didn't want to go but so far."[32]

German's low profile and economic emphasis carried over to the policies of the union. German disliked work stoppages, especially when called by the New York headquarters and not involving Charleston events.[33]

[26]South Carolina State Ports Authority, *History of State Ports Authority*, 26.

[27]V.O. Key, *Southern Politics in State and Nation* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1949), 627.

[28]Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!*, 394

[29]Ibid., 402.

[30]Turner, interview.

[31]Wilson, interview.

[32]Turner, interview.

[33]Liggins, interview.

This often set German and Local 1422 against the International. In October 1959 the ILA's national leadership called a strike along the Atlantic and Gulf Coast ports. Local 1422, however, broke the strike early by unloading banana boats waiting in the port.[34] Similar action by German three years later drew scrutiny from the union's national headquarters. In 1962 the International called a strike along the East Coast over disagreements with shippers on the size of work "gangs." Three days into the strike, the front page of the Charleston News and Courier announced in large type, "Local Longshoremen Defy Union Mandate." German had agreed to unload potatoes and bananas from a Belgian freightliner. William Bradley, President of the ILA, stated from New York his displeasure with the Charleston local and threatened to revoke 1422's charter.[35] Soon after, the leadership of a rival dockworkers' union expressed interest in the Charleston longshoremen, hoping to exploit the "rebellion by local members of the ILA" against national headquarters.[36] But the ILA Vice President sent to investigate the Charleston local found them "unanimous in wishing to remain in the ILA," and 1422 retained its charter. Recalling the incident, a newspaper profile of German suggested "it has been said that [he] has a knack of getting lost when a strike call was expected, so that there would be nobody around with authority to issue orders, and the men could continue working."[37] As a result, German had "few, if any, disagreements with stevedoring contractors."[38]

Local 1422's continued affiliation with the ILA and rejection of rival longshoremen union ILWU was consistent with German's non-confrontational ideology. Like their respective parent institutions, the ILA and ILWU differed over racial questions; the CIO's ILWU advocated integration and believed racial divisions hindered labor's power, while the AFL's ILA tolerated segregation and advocated local autonomy.[39] Yet

[34]"Dockworkers Go Back To Piers As Taft-Hartley Law Functions; Charleston First To Resume Work," Charleston *News and Courier*, 10 October 1959, 1B.

[35]"Local Longshoremen Defy Union Mandate," Charleston *News and Courier*, 27 December 1962, 1A.

[36]"Rival Union Wooing Charleston Dockers," *South Carolina Labor News*, Spring 1963, 17.

[37]"George German: Undisputed Boss," Charleston *News and Courier*, 18 January 1965.

[38]Ibid.

[39]Robert Zeiger, ed., *Organized Labor in the Twentieth-Century South* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1991), 138.

despite the CIO's "Operation Dixie," which aimed to organize laborers across the South, South Carolina's CIO paid scant attention to the ILWU.[40]

While Local 1422 maintained a relatively low profile before the 1960s, it did not stay out of politics. The local influenced a large and cohesive group of registered voters, whose votes became crucial after Judge Waring opened the primary to African Americans in 1947.[41] Beginning in the early 1960s, German required his members to register to vote before they could get their union card. "If you didn't have your [voter] registration card, he wouldn't let you change your [union] card," thus precluding work, recalls veteran longshoreman Turner.[42] German would usually replace all cards after about eighty percent of the local had registered.[43] Local 1422's membership fluctuated in its early years, dropping from over 2,500 workers in 1936 to an active membership of about 450 in 1957, then stabilizing around 750. (Present-day membership stands near 800 workers).[44] Local politicians understood that the ILA leader influenced port business, and usually responded to his demands. Liggins recalls how local police would occasionally pick up union members for alleged public drunkenness and detain them at the station. German would call the police chief to ask why the police were stalling port business by preventing the longshoremen from working.[45]

The ILA had the ear of longtime Charleston Mayor William Morrison, who held office from 1947 to 1959, and was the first mayor to appoint African Americans to the police force and other city jobs. Morrison championed the Port of Charleston, encouraging an expansion in the mid-1950s that added waterfront property, piers, docks and railway lands.[46] Mayor Morrison also had personal and professional connections with the Charleston ILA; Morrison's grandfather had owned German's grandfather and freed him in 1861. German's daughter believes this connection affected Morrison's conscience and encouraged a sympathetic attitude towards

[40]The Collected Papers of the CIO Organizing Committee for Operation Dixie, ed. Katherine F. Martin, Lamont Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA (Sanford, NC: Microfilming Corporation of America, 1980), microfilm, reel 16. The ILWU is not mentioned in the correspondence, financial records, or membership lists of the South Carolina CIO office.

[41]Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!*, 394; Liggins, interview.

[42]Tuner, interview; Wilson, interview.

[43]Turner, interview.

[44]"ILA Headquarters Affects Jobs Of 750 Negroes Here," 10A; "George German: Undisputed Boss;" Tony Bartelme, "Indicted Longshoremen Adopted as Union Crusade," Charleston *Post and Courier*, 3 September 2001, A1.

[45]Liggins, interview.

[46]South Carolina State Ports Authority, *History of State Ports Authority*, 84-87; Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!* 408.

German and the ILA.[47] When German needed a lawyer for the organization, he turned to Morrison, who would serve as the union's counsel for thirty-three years. German's wife was care-giver for Morrison's children, and Morrison helped German's daughter gain employment in Washington, DC.[48] State Senator O.T. Wallace, who represented Charleston County from 1943 to 1953, also served as counsel to Local 1422. In the legislature, Wallace was "one of Labor's staunchest supporters in South Carolina...vot[ing] against the original right to work legislation and address[ing] several conventions of the South Carolina Federation of Labor."[49] German himself was a staunch Democrat, declaring that "all the best bread comes when the Democrats are in office." He kept a poster of United States Senator John Sparkman (D-AL) in the Local's union hall.[50] Under German's leadership, the ILA strove to prevent political scapegoating from overwhelming economic concerns, maintaining a non-confrontational ideology that masked a quietly influential black labor organization.

Local 1422's stability and cohesiveness resulted at least in part from the leadership style of German. Re-elected every year from 1936 until his retirement in 1969, German often went to elaborate lengths to stifle challenges to his power. "He ruled with an iron fist" recalls Marion Turner, "[and] nobody challenged him."[51] A cadre of four veteran longshoremen acted as German's intelligence officers, reporting any rumors of competition to his leadership. One veteran longshoreman recalls this group as German's "bullies." Such efforts paid off when the President of 1422A, a subsidiary union that unloaded fruit boats, challenged German for leadership of the entire local. German promptly had the 1422A leader installed as a pension administrator, revoked 1422A's charter, and consolidated the fruit boat local within his "deep sea" local.[52] As the union "quarterback," German would put out word that a certain member should not be given work for a specific amount of time to discourage unruly behavior and suppress challenges to his power.[53] Outside of his small cadre of advisors, German

[47]Liggins, interview.

[48]Ibid.

[49]Jack Leland, "Injunction is Issued Against Striking Waterfront Workers," Charleston *News and Courier*, 12 May 1953, A1; "A Constructive Convention," *South Carolina Labor News*, July 1952, 4; Louise N. Bailey, Mary Mongan and Carolyn R. Taylor, *Biographical Directory of the South Carolina Senate 1776-1985* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1986), 1663.

[50]"ILA Headquarters Affects Jobs Of 750 Here," 10A.

[51]Turner, interview.

[52]Turner, interview; Wilson, interview; Robert Porcher, Jr., interview by author, Charleston, SC, 12 December 2001.

[53]Turner, interview.

was reluctant to share information with the union at large; "you wouldn't know more than what German [would] want you to know," recalls Wilson.[54]

Other waterfront leaders recognized German's control over dockside labor. Throughout the 1960s, Charleston stevedore executive Thaddeus Street served as one of the five employer representatives for negotiations with ILA locals in South Atlantic ports.[55] German and Street would often travel together, keeping knowledge of negotiations to themselves. A 1957 News and Courier profile of Local 1422 quoted Street's praise of German's leadership: "German is an outstanding man in his district. We have always found him to be honest, trustworthy and reasonable. Anything he tells you he will do he does."[56] However, the erratic nature of dock work sometimes strained the local's relationship with non-maritime Charleston merchants. Members' work schedules were not always predictable, resulting in inconsistent wages. "It was hard to get credit," recalls Turner; "when a lot of the fellows didn't make their money, they didn't pay their bills."[57]

II

Charleston longshoremen's longevity and ability to maintain a strong union is a rare success story for organized labor in the Palmetto State. Early opponents to organized labor typically couched their rhetorical opposition labor in two related themes: union organizers were "outsiders" who were unfamiliar with local customs and preferences, and unions advocated desegregation. Labor's troubled history in South Carolina makes the ILA's stature stand out. Within today's local Democratic party, the union is a powerful and courted organization. As one observer puts it, "any Democratic candidate with any sense must go by there, especially during the Democratic primary."[58] Having overcome serious historical and institutional obstacles, Local 1422's current President claims "other unions in the state look to us as a beacon."[59]

South Carolina's majority anti-union sentiment is tied to the failure of class-based politics in the state, exemplified by "Pitchfork" Ben Tillman's isolation of the state's Populist movement in the 1890s. Following Reconstruction, the Farmer's Alliance developed to address economic and

[54]Wilson, interview.

[55]Stewart King, "Reluctant Strikers Watch Ships Arrive," Charleston *News and Courier*, 28 December 1962, 1B.

[56]"ILA Headquarters Affects Jobs of 750 Negroes Here," 10A; Turner, interview.

[57]Turner, interview.

[58]David Agnew, Administrative Assistant to Charleston Mayor, interview by author, Charleston, SC via telephone, 6 December 1999.

[59]Kenneth Riley, interview by author, Charleston, SC, 4 January 2000.

political concerns in the rural South. In 1892 the Alliance endorsed the "Populist" political agenda, which challenged conservative Democrats with a bi-racial appeal based on economic issues. In his 1892 gubernatorial re-election effort, Tillman endorsed the Populist platform to gain their support, then quickly subsumed the state Alliance movement into his own political machine. Once re-elected, Tillman did little to advance the Populist agenda. The South Carolina Alliance network was incorporated into Tillman's organization and efforts at a bi-racial, class-based political movement in South Carolina were thwarted. Ironically, later in his career Tillman indirectly aided the development of unionized Charleston longshoremen. As a member of the Senate Naval Affairs Committee, he orchestrated the transfer of the under-utilized Port Royal naval station to Charleston in 1901. Tillman regarded the Charleston naval shipyard as a significant legislative achievement, and under his prodding, the Navy invested significant resources there. This federal spending aided the entire port's growth, which in turn generated work for members of the fledgling dockworkers organization.[60]

Another obstacle to organized labor in South Carolina was the structure of state government. Until the mid 1970s the state senate was apportioned one seat per county, giving rural, thinly populated districts disproportionate representation relative to urban, industrialized counties. Representation was even more imbalanced considering that African Americans, who comprised over 60 percent of several lowcountry counties, were generally excluded from the political process before the 1960s. Less than 25 percent of the state's 1930 white population lived below the "fall line" (running across the center of the state, from Chesterfield to Aiken counties), but half the state senators hailed from those counties.[61] Unlike the upstate, the lowcountry was almost totally dependent on agriculture. Drawing on a smaller, more united white constituency, lowcountry senators were frequently reelected, and ascended the seniority-based leadership. Thus, for most of the twentieth century, rural, conservative lowcountry legislators controlled the South Carolina state senate.

As union activity traditionally concentrated in the upstate and in urban Charleston, most state senate leaders cared little for millworker politics or organized labor and were largely indifferent to labor concerns.[62] Without

[60]Francis Butler Simkins, *Pitchfork Ben Tillman, South Carolinian* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1944), 365-366.

[61]Bryant Simon, *A Fabric of Defeat: The Politics of South Carolina Millhands* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 69, 131, 139.

[62]Donna Dewitt, interview by author, Columbia, SC, 13 September 1999; Jack Bass and Walter DeVries, *The Transformation of Southern Politics: Social Change and Political Consequences since 1945* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 282.

a white labor presence in their constituencies, they were immune to pro-labor political pressure.[63] In the early 1930s, the state senate killed over thirty pro-labor bills, including an eight-hour workday proposal. Of twenty-nine pro-labor bills introduced in 1935, all but one died in the state senate.[64] Over time, organized labor's failure to achieve political and economic changes made it appear ineffective, perpetuating the "outsider" stereotype.

Of the obstacles to a strong statewide labor presence in South Carolina, race has been primary. Racial appeals to white workers have trumped financial concerns and diverted attention from economic issues. Early in the twentieth century, Cole Blease (Governor (1910-1915) and Senator (1925-1931) distracted upstate millworkers from economic concerns through appeals to white supremacy. After World War II, with the growing national focus on civil rights, racial issues frequently overwhelmed economic concerns. Gearing up for his 1944 senatorial bid, Governor Olin D. Johnston called a special legislative session to revoke all state laws pertaining to the Democratic primary, aiming to make the party a private club to exclude African Americans.[65] In the early part of his gubernatorial term J. Strom Thurmond was seen as a relatively progressive leader, appointing an African American physician to a state board and leading an intense investigation of an upstate lynching.[66] But by 1948 he was the southern symbol of segregation, running for president on the States' Rights ticket. At the same time, prominent national labor unions publicly aligned themselves with civil rights and desegregation efforts. AFL-CIO presidents in every southern state supported civil rights measures, despite local organizers' concerns about relations with their white constituencies.[67] In South Carolina, the state AFL-CIO had to publicly deny charges that the organization donated funds to the NAACP.[68]

[63]Key, *Southern Politics*, 153.

[64]Simon, *Fabric of Defeat*, 69, 139.

[65]Key, *Southern Politics*, 626-627. In April 1944 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled the all-white primary unconstitutional. Two weeks later Johnston called the legislative session to make the South Carolina Democratic Party a private club. Throughout mid-1944 Johnston was locked in a close race for the United States Senate, challenging U.S. Senator "Cotton Ed" Smith, a virulent white supremacist and anti-labor incumbent. (At the 1936 Democratic National Convention, Smith left the hall when a black minister gave the invocation.) In the September 1944 Democratic primary Johnston prevailed.

[66]Bass and DeVries, *Transformation of Southern Politics*, 253.

[67]Ibid., 392; Simon, *Fabric of Defeat*, 229.

[68]"Britton Denies AFL-CIO Gave NAACP Funds," Charleston *News and Courier*, 21 April 1956, 1B.

III

Obstacles that hinder organized labor statewide have not affected Charleston's longshoremen to the same degree. Several characteristics peculiar to Charleston and Local 1422 partly account for this exception to the rule. First among these factors is Charleston's relative tolerance of organized labor. The textile industry, concentrated in upstate South Carolina, developed a fierce anti-union mentality; Charleston's economy, however, did not have the same kind of industrial base, so "there was never a mobilized, anti-union force...like there was in the rest of the state."[69] As Charleston's current mayor states, there "never was a struggle going on."[70] Other Charleston labor organizations welcomed the longshoremen; while Local 1422 participated in the Greater Charleston Maritime Committee (a groups of local maritime labor organizations) as early as 1955, Local 1422 did not join the state AFL-CIO until the 1970s.[71] Over 30 other Charleston-area unions contributed aid to Local 1422 during a national ILA strike in early 1963.[72]

Most of the Charleston maritime industry was subject to national, rather than regional, forces. If a shipping line used non-union labor in one port, an ILA local in another port might retaliate. The International's national contracts with non-local shippers allowed Local 1422 to bypass some local opposition to unions.[73] The naval shipyard that operated in Charleston until the early 1990s was a large union-friendly presence, as the federal government did not fight unionization. In the 1960s, over 25 percent of South Carolina's 40,000 AFL-CIO members worked at the Charleston Naval Shipyard.[74] Like other maritime workers, longshoremen also benefit from the site-specific requirements faced by their employers; unlike a textile factory, the Port of Charleston cannot readily close and move to another location.

Racial dynamics have hurt unions on a statewide basis, but the important African American presence in Charleston helps to explain Local 1422's success. Labor activists in the 1960s noted that African American workers

[69]Mayor Joseph Riley, interview by author.

[70]Ibid.

[71]"Ports' Unions To Meet Today on Unification," Charleston *News and Courier*, 15 November 1955, 12; Turner, interview.

[72]"Dockers Beginning To Feel Financial Pinch of Strike," Charleston *News and Courier*, 12 January 1963, 1B.

[73]Kenneth Riley, interview by author, Charleston, SC, 15 November 1999.

[74]Philip S. Foner, Ronald L. Lewis, and Robert Cvornyek, eds., *The Black Worker since the AFL-CIO Merger, 1955-1980* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), 510.

were more likely to be pro-union than their white counterparts, in part because the civil rights movement "legitimized aggressive social action" among southern blacks and introduced them to labor organizers. Because the federal government has had a positive effect on their lives, many African Americans do not harbor the suspicions of "big government" that stifle union support among many whites.[75] Many African American workers felt protected from employer threats by the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which removed obstacles to textile mill employment.[76] Longtime Charleston labor leader Isaiah Bennett linked demographics to in-state sectional differences in civil rights and union activism; "the Upstate is behind the time...[it is] more organized in Charleston."[77] Demographics also impact the politics of the lowcountry. Due to the 1965 Voting Rights Act, black voter registration in South Carolina increased dramatically, moderating the positions of white politicians on racial matters.[78] African American voters in the lowcountry have affected the debate on economic and social issues, including attitudes towards organized labor.

Charleston longshoremen's responses to historical racism likewise help explain their exceptional status. The shared experience with racial prejudice has helped to inoculate black union members against certain anti-union practices so effective elsewhere in the state. For example, "whites only" signs on textile mill gates were intended to create a bond with white workers that employers hoped would help overcome any support for the union.[79] It is not difficult to overcome "the most influential people in the state [telling] workers unions are bad and that they destroy prosperity" if those influential sources were discredited in the first place.[80] Accordingly, many African Americans found little credibility in anti-union rhetoric.

Regardless of educational background, profession or ideology, most African Americans in South Carolina share a common exposure to racial discrimination. Racial prejudice serves to perpetuate the idea of superior and inferior groups as a means to control minorities; both sides of this class

[75]Professor William Moore, interview by author, Charleston, SC, 4 January 2000.

[76]Zeiger, *Organized Labor in the Twentieth-Century South*, 50.

[77]Isaiah Bennett, interview by author, Charleston, SC, 4 January 2000.

[78]Laurence W. Moreland, Robert P. Steed, and Tod A. Baker, "Regionalism in South Carolina Politics," in *Government in the Palmetto State*, ed. David Mann and Luther Carter (Columbia: University of South Carolina Institute for Public Affairs, 1992), 11.

[79]Cliff Sloan and Bob Hall, "Its good to be home in Greenville...but It's better if you Hate Unions," *Southern Exposure*, Spring 1979, 83-93.

[80]Jim Davenport, "SC Labor's Voice only a Whisper," The Columbia (SC) *State*, 1 September 1997, sec. A, p. 1. University of South Carolina Law Professor and labor expert Dennis Nolan is quoted.

system "tend to develop a distinctive [respective] psychology."[81] The internal cohesion of the African American community resulting from that psychology has facilitated successful collective initiatives by black organizations.

By limiting other leadership opportunities for African Americans, racial prejudice had the effect of enhancing the stature of longshoremen. Segregated locals provided a rare opportunity for black leadership and control of an important industry, and stifled dockside racial conflict.[82] In today's black community, Local 1422 provides a way for those without a college degree to experience part of the "New South;" with seniority, union members can make $100,000.[83] As College of Charleston political science Professor William Moore observes, "what [Local 1422] has done for black workers in the community is unmatched in the state."[84]

The ILA's prominence within the black community also stems from the structure of the longshore industry. Because longshoremen work in small groups, early national union leaders organized locals around ethnic or racial groups to encourage camaraderie and teamwork.[85] By the turn of the century, the New York ILA was organized into Italian, Greek, African American, German and Irish locals.[86] Foremen (dockworkers with seniority within each group) chose the workers for each group and directed the loading and unloading. Since Charleston waterfront labor has long been almost exclusively African American, the union structure "allowed for the development of a strong cadre of black officials who exert[ed] more influence over the economic well being of those under their control than could be found in any other industry."[87]

The Charleston ILA's internal cohesion is another factor that has resisted anti-union pressures and strengthened the local's public voice. Mainly because of its relative homogeneity, Local 1422 has an internal solidarity unmatched by other unions in the regional Charleston Labor Council, permitting a unified political and social voice. A small number of dissatisfied whites left the LPUA in 1890, and soon thereafter white social and racial inclinations resulted in Charleston waterfront labor being

[81]John Dollard, *Caste and Class in a Southern Town* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1949), 62-63.

[82]Michael Honey, *Southern Labor and Black Civil Rights* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 95-99.

[83]Ken Riley, interview.

[84]Professor William Moore, interview by author.

[85]Rubin, Swift, Northup, eds., *Negro Employment*, 12.

[86]Ibid., 53-57.

[87]Ibid., 32.

comprised almost exclusively of African Americans.[88] Veteran Local 1422 member Marion Turner began work on the docks in 1959, "during [a] time [when] a white man in the South wasn't going to do this kind of work...it was too hard and dirty."[89] Racial prejudice ironically aided the black unions, as few whites were willing to take what they perceived as socially inferior jobs.[90] The LPUA's 1869 dock strikes were successful because waterfront business owners could not find workers to replace the association's members; other blacks were unwilling to cross the picket lines, while whites were unwilling to do the work.[91] One hundred years later during the Charleston hospital workers strike, striking black Charlestonians won concessions from the Medical College Hospital after administrators could not find replacement workers. Hospital workers spoke at black churches and civic groups to generate support; when the workers did go on strike, the black community refused to cross the picket line.[92] Urging solidarity, an NAACP official insisted the black community, "stand together and do what they can for themselves."[93]

As the organized Charleston longshoremen have always been overwhelmingly African American, they have largely avoided the racial divisions that troubled other Southern waterfront unions. Shipping lines shattered bi-racial longshore organizations in New Orleans in 1873, 1894 and again in the 1920s by appealing to racial prejudices. In each case, when the union agitated for a wage increase, the carriers hired non-union African American strikebreakers, angering white unionists who then retaliated against the black community rather than negotiating with the shipping company.[94] Intra-union racial animosity fostered by shipping lines destroyed ILA locals in Gulfport, Mississippi and Mobile, Alabama during a 1923 strike.[95] Charleston longshoremen have largely avoided intra-union racial conflict and have in some respects benefited from the societal racial discrimination that consolidated community support and suppressed internal division.

In contrast, white and integrated unions encountered a wider range of views among their memberships. No issue was more divisive for them than

[88]"ILA Headquarters Affects Jobs of 750 Negroes Here," 10A; Rubin, Swift, and Northup, eds., *Negro Employment*, 91.

[89]Turner, interview.

[90]Miller, 251; Nieman, *African Americans*, 153.

[91]Nieman, *African Americans*, 140, 152.

[92]Marshall, *Labor in the South*, 251.

[93]Stewart King, "Abernathy to Lead Rally Here," Charleston *News and Courier*, 21 April 1969.

[94]Marshall, *Labor in the South*, 63-69; Rubin, Swift, Northup, eds., *Negro Employment*, 98.

[95]Marshall, *Labor in the South*, 69.

civil rights. Some southern white craft unionists engaged in dogged opposition to political equality, fighting to protect the economic and workplace advantages segregation accorded to white workers.[96] Opposing the Montgomery bus boycott, a local carpenters' union hung NAACP leaders in effigy under the sign "Built by Organized Labor," while a Tennessee union organized the Southern States Conference of Union People to oppose the national AFL-CIO's integrationist policies.[97] Alabama Governor George Wallace drew strong support from white unionists by tapping into white fears that the Civil Rights Act would eliminate workplace privileges for whites.[98] In 1956, white workers charted a South Carolina branch of the United Southern Employees Association, a union dedicated to segregation.[99] Statewide and Charleston area labor leaders encouraged bi-racial unionization, but individual locals were sometimes reluctant to link labor rights with civil rights. In 1964 members of the predominately white International Association of Machinists (IAM) local in Orangeburg walked off their jobs to protest the promotion of a black worker. National IAM officials did not authorize the strike.[100] Charleston's National Maritime Union (NMU) local refused to endorse the hospital workers' strike, declaring "there are racial overtones here which we can't accept." When the Secretary of the South Carolina Labor Council announced that the state AFL-CIO supported the strike, NMU officials objected, questioned his authority, and protested "he doesn't represent the organization."[101] While racial prejudice contributed to the coolness of white rank and file towards civil rights, misunderstanding over the meaning of the hospital workers' strike also influenced white attitudes. As the current President of the Charleston Central Labor Council recalls, "I don't think a lot of the white unionists really knew what it was about. They didn't know it was a union thing. Most of what you got from the media was 'several hundred black people [are] down here striking.' It was never brought out as a union thing."[102] Employers would often tolerate vocal segregationist union leaders because management knew such sentiments would "tear up the union" in the long run.[103]

[96]Zeiger, *Organized Labor*, 258.

[97]Ibid., 257.

[98]Ibid., 265.

[99]"New Labor Union Seeking Charter In S.C. Dedicated to Segregation," Charleston *News and Courier*, 4 October 1956, 1B.

[100]"Orangeburg Workers Protest Promotion of Negro," *South Carolina Labor News*, Summer 1964, p. 16.

[101]"NMU Refuses to Back Hospital Workers' Union," Charleston *News and Courier*, 2 April 1969, 6A.

[102]Thomas Crenshaw, interview by author, Charleston, SC, 6 January 2000.

[103]Ibid., 259.

Opposition to civil rights was not uniform within southern white organized labor, but white rank and file members were less likely to understand the adverse consequences of racial divisions within labor and were more inclined to participate in white resistance. In contrast, union leaders and national federations were more likely to encourage class-based, rather than race-based, labor policies. Even in the early 1950s, South Carolina labor leaders publicly supported African American involvement in the labor movement and endorsed civil rights initiatives. In 1953 the South Carolina Federation of Labor asserted that "the Negro membership of the South Carolina Federation of Labor is growing steadily and the interest they take in [the] trades labor movement means that the workers will be better united for economic gains for the workers of all races [all] over South Carolina."[104] In an editorial outlining the Federation's 1958 legislative initiatives, the South Carolina Labor News called for "further improvements in Civil Rights legislation to ensure equal treatment for all our citizens and equal protection [under] the laws."[105] Two predominately white labor union federations, the Charleston Building Trades Council and Charleston Central Labor Council, supported striking African American workers during the 1969 hospital workers strike.[106]

IV

Political, social and generational changes since George German's retirement in 1969 have led to an increased visibility and assertiveness by Local 1422. Politicians began to drop by the union hall on a regular basis in the early 1970s.[107] In 1978, both the then-president and secretary-treasurer of the local were indicted on fraud charges, damaging morale and the union's public image.[108] As a candidate for President of Local 1422 in 1997, current President Ken Riley's central campaign pledge was to improve the union's image in the community. Fundamental to that pledge was educating the community on the ILA and publicizing the union's community involvement. As Riley recalls,

[104]*South Carolina Labor News*, July 1953, 4.
[105]*South Carolina Labor News*, November 1958.
[106]Charleston *News and Courier*, 25 March 1969, 2A.
[107]Turner, interview; Wilson, interview.
[108]"Bateman Indicted in Embezzlement," Charleston *News and Courier*, 10 May 1978, 1A.

> When I came into the union in '77 no one dared to wear any union paraphernalia. You didn't want to be associated with the ILA. [As a union trustee] I began to travel to other ports and saw ILA jackets, tags on the cars, and came back here and made some paraphernalia. [Soon after], the pride within the union began to change. Everybody talked about it.[109]

With a higher profile for Local 1422 came a more assertive, activist posture in labor-management issues and public affairs. Its presence now, characterized by aggressive, direct action, resembles more the Reconstruction-era LPUA than the post World War II Local 1422. The union has transformed its public image to reflect an altered political and social environment. The Local's former practice during George German's leadership of maintaining quiet, strategic relationships with local business, community and political elites has gradually changed to more open and assertive advocacy of its interests.

Racial solidarity, together with relatively supportive factors peculiar to Charleston, have enabled Charleston longshoremen and Local 1422 to become an exception to the rule—a long-lived, successful union in the anti-union Palmetto State.

[109]Ken Riley, interview.