

# Harry Lundeborg

## Centennial Tribute 1901-2001

Andrew Furuseth made sailors men, but Harry Lundeborg gave them lives worth living. No one, not even Furuseth, did more to improve the basic facts of life for those who go to sea for a living. Labor historians have consistently overlooked Lundeborg's achievements and often for the same reason: they never went to sea. For those that go down to the sea in ships, the Lundeborg legacy is not some theoretical political argument. It's as simple and as real as the work—the turning to and knocking off. It the shapes thoughts of home and it appears on the bottom line of the payoff at the end of every voyage. Harry Lundeborg conceived of the possibility of retirement for seamen and made it a reality. He built a Welfare Plan to take care of their problems and illnesses. He correctly identified the lasting threats both to the industry and to the labor movement as a whole, and usually opened fire before anyone else had detected an enemy. But Lundeborg most presciently tied wages and conditions to professionalism, and in so doing he elevated the status of seamen in both material and moral terms. Furuseth theorized that “skill puts the mechanic nearest the gods.” It took Harry Lundeborg to make it pay.

Born on March 25, 1901 in Norway, Lundeborg shipped out at the age of fourteen. Many years later, testifying before a Congressional committee in 1955 he described his past with simple precision.

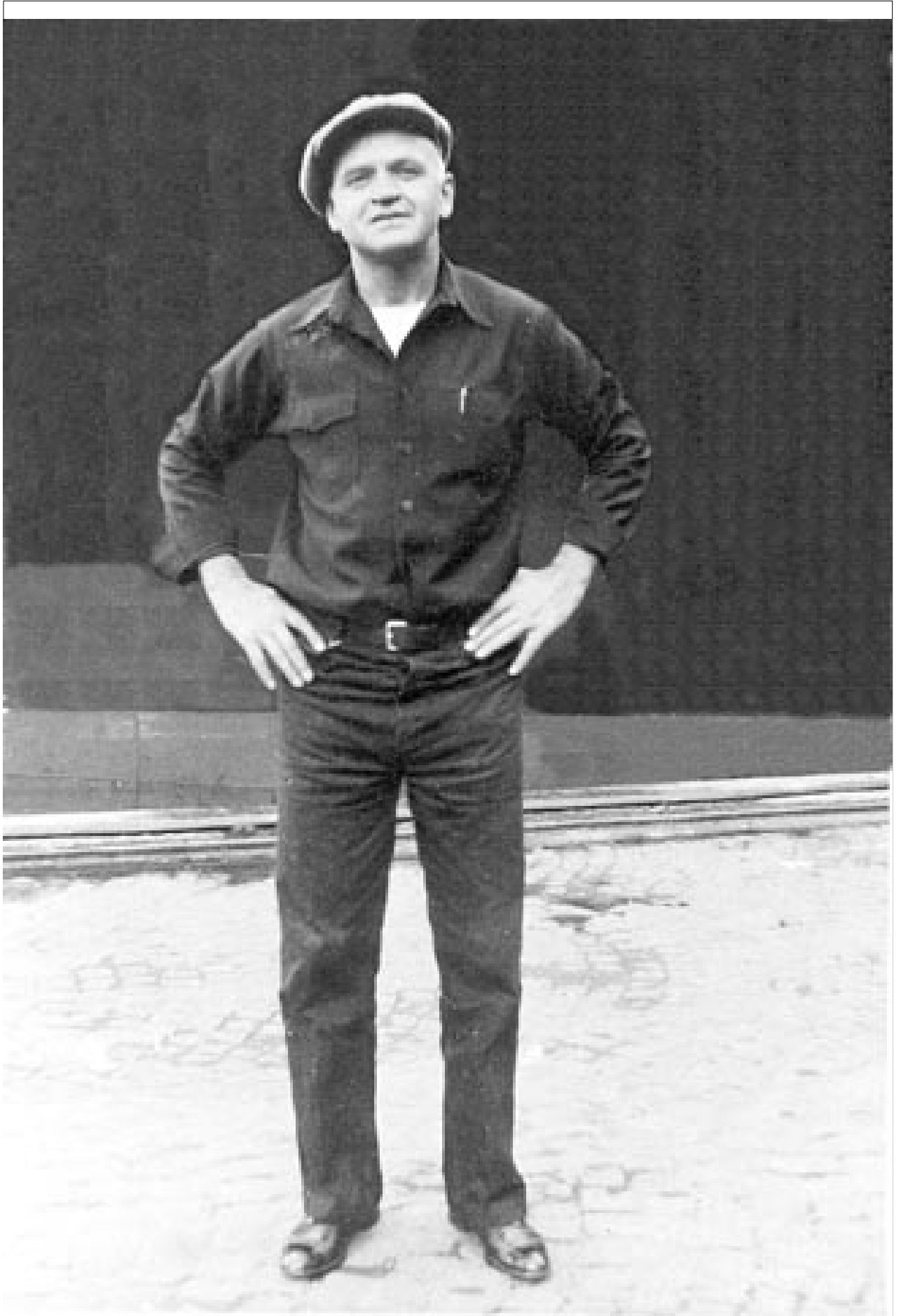
**“As for my background, I am a sailor. I went to sea for 21 years. I sailed in many different rigs. I have sailed in steamers, passenger ships, sailing ships and any type of rig you can mention. I have sailed under several different nationality flags. I am an American citizen. I am married. I have a family. I have been a member of organized labor for 40 years.”**

**“I am a sailor,”** and like all sailors, his trade was at the center of his identity. Even at an early age, he was renowned as a first-class sailorman who knew and respected the ancient lineage of the craft. The language of seamen dominated his speech throughout his life. Moreover, all of his later convictions were rooted in the sincere realities of practical seamanship. **“A good sailor is always a good union man,”** he told the senators.

Another key aspect of his formative years is his internationalist and syndicalist experiences. Being shipmates with sailors of various nationalities, he was conscious of diversity long before it became fashionable. While sailing nitroglycerin boats under the British flag, he was twice torpedoed by German U-boats in World War I. Lundeborg was also a member of a number of different unions prior to joining the SUP, and included in such experience was an awareness of commonality within the trade. Commonality with respect for differences: therein lies the essence of Lundeborg's philosophy about organizations and coalitions. It's a major reason for opposing communism, which acknowledged neither the individual nor the allied autonomous organization. It's the model on which the Maritime Federation of the Pacific was based, and later, for the Seafarers' International Union of North America.

Other demonstrations of the idea came in the *Pho Pho* beef, the *Makiki* beef, the *Chicot* beef, and the *Riviera* beef, to name a few. In such cases, Lundeborg and the SUP repeatedly helped the sailors of other nations in their struggles with the shipowners. Lundeborg and the SUP also sponsored thousands of alien seaman and aided in their applications for U.S. citizenship. Similarly, during World War II, Lundeborg was outraged that SUP members of Japanese ancestry were being interned as a risk to the war effort. He worked tirelessly to free them from the camps so that they could go to sea. Lundeborg put teeth into the internationalist ideas of Furuseth and the old ISU, and in so doing made the concept of the Brotherhood of the Sea vibrant, diverse, comprehensive and compassionate.

Finally, Lundeborg told Congress he was a family man.



*Harry Lundeborg in Oslo, Norway 1948. The hull of the s/s Marine Jumper is in the background.*

It was at the time a bold statement to claim family ties while at the same time working as a seaman. Before Harry Lundeborg, most seamen were unmarried, itinerant and childless; they were without property or savings or respect, and they had been that way for ages. But as sailors began to prosper from Lundeborg's tough bargaining with the shipowners, as they gained overtime, vacation time, and as they became recipients of new benefits, it was no longer a necessary contradiction to be a seaman with a family. But he also implied a second, subtler understanding of family. **“I have a family,”** he said, his personal background concluding his summary of the history of the Sailors' Union of the Pacific. Lundeborg, as a seaman, instinctively knew that his family was not limited to blood ties. How can a man who was away from home for 30

years (see Lundeborg's homecoming photo on page 14) confidently declare himself before Congress to be a family man? To the always absent seamen, the answer is obvious: his shipmates were his brothers, and the Union became his extended family. Sailors, like other exiles, have always discovered home at sea. Lundeborg knew that the bonds of family are similar to the attachments that bind an organization together; and he deliberately and strategically merged the two.

Lundeborg joined the Sailors' Union of the Pacific in Seattle in 1923, a time when the remnants of the Union still smoked from the disastrous 1921 strike. Many years later, he reflected on those days at the dedication of the Marine, Cooks and Steward's

*Continued on next page*



## Harry Lundeberg .... continued

Headquarters building in 1956.

**"It is true that in the 1921 strike or lockout as you may call it, when the shipping industry together with Admiral Benson of the Shipping Board chose to join hands to break the unions, we know we lost that strike. We know also that and the Unions' went back—many many years. And those of us who sailed those days, we know the conditions we enjoyed under non-union conditions. We had no strength, because they broke us, at least temporarily. As a result of that, a man who went to sea for a living was paid the big sum of \$40.00 a month. On some of the intercoastal ships you made \$32.50 a month and they made you work 56 hours a week and if you squawked, they fired you. If you carried a union button, you couldn't get a job on a ship. They had their fink halls up and down the Coast, east and west and south and you had to go in like a crumb to look for a job with your cap in your hand just like a dog to get the lousy job for \$32.00 a month. Those were the conditions the shipowner gave us when we were not strong."**

The point is that Harry Lundeberg started sailing in the SUP during some of the toughest times ever. Wages then had been cut as much as 20% in some trades, the "hiring halls" (fink halls) were controlled by the government and shipowners, and union membership had fallen to levels that had not been seen since the shipowners tried to break the SUP in 1893. However, the SUP remained alive, dispatching sailors to vessels engaged in the coastwise and Australian trades. The remainder of U.S.-flag ships were filled in Lundeberg's words with **"hopheads, bindlestiffs and college boys—all the refuse."** Most histories begin Lundeberg's story with his leadership in the 1934 strike. But his understanding of the trade and the Union was fired in the crucible of the 1920's, when some abandoned their unions and packed fink books to survive—but on their knees. They were shut out of a great national prosperity and then fell among the hardest hit in the Great Depression. The stage was set for change.

For the SUP the year 1934 set in motion revolutionary changes that are still in effect today. Harry Lundeberg was sailing as third-mate in the coastwise steamer *James W. Griffiths* when he seized the moment and led the gang off the ship in Oakland at the start of the coastwise maritime strike. They rode boxcars back to Seattle to be at the center of the action there. After the strike was over, he was elected SUP Seattle patrolman. But because of his central role in the strike he was also elected president of the newly formed coalition of maritime unions called the Maritime Federation of the Pacific in 1935. That position helped form Lundeberg's understanding of how coalitions are built and maintained, especially that mutual support depended on individual autonomy. Later that year, in a run-off for the top job of the SUP, he was elected and relieved Andrew Furuseth as Secretary-Treasurer. Despite the importance of 1934, the improvements for sailors came after the strike was settled. Before Congress Lundeberg stated:

**"The sailors did not get anything out of the strike. As a matter of fact, the sailors wanted to stay out longer, but through the pleading of the other unions we were forced to go back after the 1934 strike without any gains whatsoever, and without any recognition...So the sailors had taken it upon themselves through their own activity to kick the shipowners into line by tying up ships. We had a period of job action. We tied up ships in every port we got hold of them. By the time the so-called Board made up their minds to settle the wages for the seamen, firemen, and cooks, we already had superseded those conditions by our own activities. It was a hit-and-run deal, but it did its purpose... The only thing we did get after the 1934 strike was that we re-estab-**

**lished the union hiring hall and we did it without an agreement at all. In other words, among the seamen, the policy was no one hires any other place except through the union hall and it was not very healthy for anyone to hire any other place, so we took the hiring hall without an agreement and we wrote it into the agreement in 1937."**

Although he didn't press the point, Lundeberg knew that regaining control of the hiring process was a great victory. He would defend it again in 1947, this time for workers in all industries. During the Congressional effort to pass the Taft-Hartley bill, Senator Taft traveled



Harry — June 10, 1943

to Santa Cruz, California, to attend a conference. In a strong anti-union era of Congress, Taft had supported new limitations on a variety of union rights granted under the Wagner Act. In particular, the bill as originally proposed would have weakened the union hiring hall through new open shop requirements. Knowing of Senator Taft's trip, Lundeberg wrote and then presented in person the so-called "preferential hiring" clause to the senator in Santa Cruz. Taft accepted this "Lundeberg Formula" without revision and after it became law it was clear that preferential hiring essentially restated the status quo. Again the hiring halls were saved. At the dedication of the Marine Cooks and Steward's hall, Lundeberg developed the idea of a hiring hall as an integral aspect of integrity and professionalism.

**"In this beautiful building, you as members of the Marine Cooks and Stewards organization, you go to sea for a living. You don't have to run all over the waterfront with a cap in your hand to get a job. The job comes out of here. You sit here in comfort. Nobody's policing you or pushing you around. You're in clean quarters, your own quarters. A job comes up, when your turn comes and you can qualify for the job—you get the job. You don't have to be at the beck of any crimp or any shark that wants to get a fin out of you... Now you're your own masters! You've got your own jobs! The fact remains that the American seamen are tradesmen. You follow a trade the same as any man ashore. You are not a roustabout, you're a legitimate tradesman. You have now**

**come to the point that you have the conditions that can support a family—which you never had before. You don't need any handouts from any charity organization, or any corporate joint, or any mission on the waterfront—you got your own halls, you got your strength, you got your own conditions. We don't ask for charity, we ask for recognition and respect and we got it. We may have taken the hard way but we got it."**

The legislation that Congress was debating in 1955 would have set up a Federal Maritime Board that had the power to call "cooling off" periods if negotiations were unsuccessful. In much the same way the Railway Labor Act can be invoked to prevent strikes in the railroad and airline industries, the bill in question would have greatly reduced the bargaining leverage of all maritime unions. Lundeberg's defense was that such a Board is unnecessary. He time and again described the collective bargaining agreement as sacrosanct and the negotiating process as the best method of dispute resolution.

**"I have negotiated agreements with these shipowners, various types of shipowners, for the past 20 years. At no time did I take a gun in with me. I took a committee with me. We met with them across the table. They didn't have take what we asked for and many times they didn't...I can remember at no time having a six-shooter in my pocket and telling Mr. St. Sure, 'You give me that, lest I knock you off.'"**

Responding to a question about his contact with the shipowners outside of the collective bargaining process Lundeberg said:

**"No, I have no contact with the shipowners. In all of my experience with them, I deal with them on the up and up. I like to look a man in the eye when I sign an agreement and tell him I can live up to it, and I like him to look me in the eye, and many of them cannot."**

The argument that responsible collective bargaining can be the basis for harmonious labor relations found a receptive audience among the senators, and the legislation was ultimately defeated.

A telling measurement of the impact of a man's life is the reaction caused by his death. On January 28, 1957, Lundeberg unexpectedly died of a heart attack. It was described in the newspapers of the day as a great shock. The shock emanated from the expectations that Lundeberg had created. He was a man in mid-stride, organizing new workers, stringing together powerful and lasting coalitions, creating new benefits, improving wages and conditions. His death stopped hundreds of projects short, and in his absence the Union, like his family, grieved in stunned anguish. Up and down the coast, work stopped in SUP ships to honor the man who made seamen professionals. Politicians, shipowners, union leaders, and thousands of rank-and-file seamen attended his funeral. As befitted his persona, he was buried in a dark suit with a wool shirt, open at the throat, with his gray tweed cap at his hands.

The biography of Harry Lundeberg has not yet been written. The task awaits the student that can grasp the effect that the practical realities of seafaring had on Lundeberg's psyche. **"Free men don't like institutions,"** he acknowledged, and yet he built a movement of lasting power and principle. The greatest challenge, though, to one who wants to get it right, will be the explanation of the ineffable Lundeberg spirit of confidence and the idealistic struggle that still inspires those who want to make a difference. All that go to sea for a living have something of this spirit. Everyone who steps out on deck, in fact or in memory, embodies the fighting sailor and his accomplishments.



# HARRY LUNDEBERG STETSON:

by Archie Green

Sailors and their waterfront fellow workers have through the years distinguished themselves from landlubbers by gait, speech, or dress. At times, these separate characteristics came together to reinforce the representation of the mariner so well described by Melville, Conrad, and fellow writers.

One such figure of speech, the HARRY LUNDEBERG STETSON, holds elements of customary behavior, ritual, humor, dress code marking an unofficial uniform, and traditional talk. This vernacular expression is hardly known to dictionary makers. Accordingly, I shall sketch the time line during which a maritime unionist's name combined with a cowboy hat's best-known designation to symbolize Pacific Coast seafarers.

In some nations in former days, sea duty attracted nomads — rootless workers lacking close ties, outcasts, castaways. Within a Frederick Marryat novel centered on a Thames River pilot at the time of Admiral Nelson's death, "Jack Tar" became "Poor Jack." Perhaps such a poor lad, with a strong sense of poetic irony, first sensed the humor in appropriating an heroic cowboy's headgear, the ten-gallon hat pictured from dime novel to film thriller. Could not a humble cloth cap be equated with a magnificent Stetson?

To begin: Harald Olaf (Harry) Lundeborg (1901-1957), born in Oslo, Norway, went to sea at age fourteen. After sailing the proverbial seven seas under nine flags, and joining various national unions, he made Seattle his home port. He joined the Sailors' Union of the Pacific (SUP), then headed by a fellow Viking, Andrew Furuseth. As a militant worker devoted to his companions, Lundeborg emerged in the 1934 Big Strike as a leader. He served as SUP secretary-treasurer and, after 1938, he became the dominant voice in the reconstituted Seafarers' International Union (SIU).

This bare-bones summary of an active life does not convey the turbulence, and at times violence, of union politics during the 1930-1950's. Sometimes in open warfare, again in muted accommodation, Lundeborg opposed Harry Bridges of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU) and Joe Curran of the National Maritime Union (NMU). The conflict played itself out physically on picket lines, and ideologically in the daily press and history books.

Generally, labor partisans and journalists were partial to the flamboyant Bridges and hostile to the truculent Lundeborg. Intellectuals elevated the former to a "progressive" pantheon; the latter remained an enigma beyond labor circles. Bridges, while alive, attracted several biographers—a good press. To this day, the literature on Lundeborg is scant.

Here, I intrude a personal memory. Beginning as a shipwright in San Francisco in January, 1941, I recall a then-current saying: "The waterfront isn't big enough for the two Harrys." This maxim cloaked personal disagreements, as well as the ongoing war between Communist Party members and friends in the ILWU, and an unlikely scattering of Wobblies, Trotskyists, anarchosyndicalists, and ordinary rank-and-file trade unionists in the SUP.

Some time in Lundeborg's early career, he acquired the nickname "Harry Lunchbox." To my knowledge, no one knows when this moniker first circulated in speech, or appeared in print. Sailors used it playfully—even affectionately—within the SUP. By contrast, rival unionists voiced it negatively. Like many similar terms,

the meaning of "Lunchbox" depended on the perspective of its users.

At least, three explanations have been advanced for this nickname: Scandinavian immigrants were commonly called "squareheads" or "boxheads," supposedly after their appearance. Detractors branded them slow witted, backwards, stupid. Lundeborg defied these stereotypes, but he retained a thick Norwegian accent, peppering his speech with choice profanities in his native and his adopted language. "Squarehead/boxhead" may have led to "lunchbox," but the route (if it actually occurred) is uncharted.

A second sequence involves pragmatic or bread-and-butter union bargaining, often called "business unionism" in textbooks or "lunchbox unionism" in common speech. Lundeborg saw wages grow from \$67.00 a month in 1935 to \$400.00 in 1953, and concomitant advances in the benefit package. Other factors influenced wage rates but, ultimately, rank and file members judged a leader by his ability to fill their lunchbox with porkchops.

Jack Howard, writing an obituary in the *San Francisco Chronicle* (January 29, 1957), suggested that the nickname dated back to the SUP's lean days, when Lun-

the stage of history." (Pages 125-127)

Gladstone adds details to the uniform story: seamen substituted a white shirt for a Hickory on Labor Day parades. He did not gloss "hickory shirt" and "Frisco jeans," perhaps assuming these names to be clear.

A durable shirt of tightly-woven twilled-cotton with a narrow blue stripes, it has been favored by Pacific Coast loggers, cannery hands, and maritime workers for a century. "Hickory," a word borrowed in our Colonial era from native Indian speakers, connotes many strengths: among them, a tree of, tough hard wood, winning baseball bats, the familiar name for President Andrew Jackson, "Old Hickory."

"Frisco jeans," a straight-leg pants of heavy black cotton twill, have been made since 1935 in San Francisco by the Ben Davis Company (trademark, a monkey). I do not know how early black dungarees became common among maritime and building tradesmen.

Gladstone also asserts that the term "Lunchbox Stetson" reflected ethnic identity directed at immigrants rather than people of color. The slur implied ever-present racism in America. (I'll return to this matter, but first a view from the East Coast).

Mark Walker—seaman, building tradesman, steeple-



*The SUP contingent, led by Lundeborg, struts up Market Street in the 1948 Labor Day Parade. Rig for the day: white shirts, frisco jeans and "Lundeborg stetsons."*

deberg packed his own lunch to the union hall. I do not know if ethnic stereotyping, economic bargaining, or lean times fit the circumstances that surround Harry Lundeborg's sobriquet.

Since the mid-1930s, if not earlier, SUP members and some fellow maritime unionists have adopted an unofficial uniform at Labor Day parades and similar "occasions of state." Joe Gladstone, who sailed from 1940 to 1952, offered a fine description of the required clothing in an unpublished account of his adventures, *TO MAKE THE RUN* (1990, revised 1993, 1996). He wrote:

"It consisted of a grey hickory shirt, black Frisco jeans, black shoes, white sox, and a white cap known as a "Lunchbox Stetson." Unofficial to be sure, this uniform became a "trade mark" of West Coast seafaring men. Its origin is probably shrouded in antiquity and, I [J G] must say that I questioned many old-timers and, as far as I could ascertain, [the uniform] was here when I got here.

"I'll always cherish the day I was able to walk into Joe Harris's famous clothing emporium on the San Francisco Embarcadero the first time I came ashore there, having drawn some money against my account, and purchased my very own first "uniform" complete from Lunchbox Stetson down to black shoes and white sox. After he allowed me to use one of his dressing stalls to try everything on, I walked out of there on Cloud 9, a transformed person, a member of an exclusive fraternity, identified outwardly as a West Coast man, and inwardly as one who is playing a certain unique role on

jack—in his published autobiography, *WORKING FOR UTOPIA* (2000), described the New York scene in the summer of 1938 when he first shipped out on the Shepard Line's *SS Harpoon*. On a side street near the Battery, between a bar room and a defunct cafe, he found the SUP's upstairs dispatcher's office. The inside window opening onto the hall was open. Walker wrote:

"Framed in the opening with his elbows on the sill was a big ugly fellow with red face and cauliflower ears, wearing a white cloth cap.... A couple of men [in the office] also wore white caps, as did most of the men in the hall. I was to learn that this was the unofficial uniform of the west coast sailor and these SUP men were very proud of their west coast heritage." (Page 97)

Walker and Gladstone both retain valuable memories of SUP dress. The latter described a full uniform from head to toe; the former, only a white cloth cap. Can we determine how this inexpensive cap came to stand for the entire uniform?

I have previously indicated that standard dictionaries overlooked "Lundeborg Stetson." However, Marshall Uran, a former member of the Marine Firemen, Oilers, Watertenders & Wipers Union (MFO&W) contributed an invaluable book, *SEA-SAY: SALTY STORIES AND SEAMEN'S SLANG* (1995). His massive compilation covers technical nomenclature used aboard ship, union terms, and bawdy speech. It glosses "Lunchbox Stetson," as well as "Lundeborg Cap" and "Lundeborg Stetson," "Lunchbox," "Boxhead," "Squarehead," "Uniform," and both "West Coast Cap" and "West



# THE USUAL RIG

Coast Stetson.”

Beyond formal definitions, Uran adds choice contributions by other mariners. For example—Frank Barberia, a MFO&W member who served as a ship’s electrician, recalled a matter of rank. He wrote:

“Mates and chief engineers got a little pushed out of shape because I wouldn’t wear a high-pressure hat [cap with a bill and special insignia or braid worn by licensed officers]. They said my Lundeberg Stetson made me look like a deckhand. I told them if wearing a high-pressure would result in me shooting trouble better [doing electrical work], I’d wear one.” (Page 108)

“Squarehead/boxhead/lunchbox” may have been used as an ethnic brand by many speakers, but not by Frank Barberia. In addition to his electrician’s skill, he had joined the Socialist Workers Party in the 1930’s. As a well-read committed radical, he knew “high pressure” as a century-old steam-engine term. He had picked up “high pressure hat” from fellow seafarers; he enjoyed the term for its latent class consciousness.

Barberia, of course, openly defied engine-room protocol, rejecting an accepted hat in favor of a deckhand’s headgear, the “Lunchbox Stetson.” In his cosmos, the white cloth cap symbolized independent politics, a belief in direct action by unionists, and significant distrust of Stalinist positions.

While gathering notes for this study, I asked Knud-Bent Andersen, dispatcher at SUP headquarters, for his take on the sailor’s moniker. He indicated that the custom of wearing white caps had begun before Harry Lundeberg’s rise to power within the SUP. “Andy” related that the practice dated to steam-schooner days in the lumber ports of Northern California, Oregon, and Washington, when sailors held jurisdiction over ship-loading operations.

Before electric lights became widely available, winch drivers urged sailors working in the holds to wear their white caps. A driver on deck could look into a dark hold and spot bobbing white caps, thereby insuring the relative safety of men below. This functional explanation makes sense; I hope to find the custom confirmed and dated in print.

Andersen, born in Denmark, is aware that the SUP held considerable strength among Pacific Coast lumber-schooner crews, chiefly Swedes, Norwegians, Danes, and Finns. For decades, friends and foes, alike, labeled the SUP the “Scandinavian Navy.” Whether the white cap originated among “coasters,” as well as its tie to the ethnic composition of the lumber work force remains unknown.

In examining books on the Redwood and Northwest lumber trade, I have found many fine photos of vessels but none of crews showing clearly their white hats. However, Dave Connolly, while preparing a SUP website, discovered an unusual photo. Reproduced here, it reveals five young seamen, “dressed up” while away from their ship. Four wear white caps; one wears a black watch cap.

This photo dates to Shanghai, 1927 (scrawled on the back). Apparently taken in a shoreside studio, it tells us that in the mid-1920s this cap had been transformed from an article of clothing in isolated “dog-hole ports” (shallow inlets offering little shelter against rough seas) to an emblem of status across the Pacific (if not around the globe).

Other photos add to our exploration; Labor Day parade scenes particularly mark the SUP’s uniform in all its glory. Workers, including sailors, have always dressed up or worn distinguishing clothing for parades. Contrary to some writers, all marchers in San Francisco’s “Bloody Thursday” funeral procession (July 9, 1934) did not wear black Frisco jeans, hickory shirts, and white caps.

I have yet to determine the precise date when any maritime union voted to make the uniform mandatory

for Labor Day. Nor do I have any documentation of the internal debate over such a policy. Many maritime workers committed to libertarian values resented an imposed dress code. Other union militants welcomed the holiday clothing in the name of distinctive pride. Very likely, the Labor Day uniform had evolved with the resurgence of unionism after the 1934 strike.

The SUP’s *Coast Seamen’s Journal* had ceased publication in 1927; its successor, the *West Coast Sailors*, dates to 1937. On September 3, it ran a box on San Francisco parade plans:

“Sailors! Try and wear a white cap, white shirt, no coat and blue pants, like we had last year if possible. If you haven’t got it, come the best way you can.”

On September 9, 1938, the *West Coast Sailors* ran a front-page photo of its 800-strong contingent “wearing white caps, white shirts and dark trousers.” By 1941,

days of the early 1930’s. I find it significant that Red, a member of the Shipwrights union, had begun to call his work cap “Lundeberg Stetson” in the late 1930s.

Andersen added to my findings: these caps were first called “West Coast Stetsons.” The switch in speech to “Lundeberg Stetsons” came when Harry’s informal dress, blunt talking, and personal habits became part of waterfront lore. He seldom donned a suit and tie, stubbornly clinging to sailor’s garb—black dungarees, open shirt, gray cap for everyday wear and white cap for special events. This simple attire spoke to proletarian values. Often a decorative belt softened the uniform’s starkness—this bit of “fancywork” or sailor’s art was hand-knotted at sea.

Lundeberg constantly ridiculed “tuxedo” or “uptown” unionism. He prided himself on his ability to handle the work of a seaman. In 1947, the SUP voted funds to send him to an overseas conference; instead he worked his way as a deckhand. Of course, he crafted this character, but it was one grounded in a culture that had been formed before the mast.

Those who remember Harry Lundeberg have no trouble in accepting that the tag “Lunchbox” attached itself to him, or that the “West Coast Stetson” metamorphosed into the “Lundeberg Stetson.” Our question remains: when did the two naming acts take place, if indeed they were separate in time?

Until this juncture, I have focused on the SUP. However, other unions may add to our findings. The ILWU’s paper, the *Dispatcher* (January, 1999), ran a back-page photo of Harry Bridges leading white-hatted longshoremen in San Francisco’s Labor Day parade in 1939. The accompanying text read in part:

“To show our colors the Coast Committee is asking the membership and their families to wear the Lundeberg Stetson, the old longshore white cap, every Thursday until we have the contract we deserve!”

The *Dispatcher* correctly named the “Lundeberg Stetson.” Whether or not it was an “old longshore white cap” depends upon the meaning of “old.” Until we know when white-cloth caps became common among steam-schooner crews, the question is open.

Our closing task requires many hands. Resolving mysteries in language depends on close reading of many sources: newspapers, diaries, logs, meeting minutes, fiction, drama, technical reports. In memory, Knud Andersen placed the term, “West Coast Stetson,” back to steam-schooner days, 1880-1920. Joe Gladstone, Mark Walker, Marshall Uran, and Frank Barberia—young seafarers in World War Two—recalled “Lunchbox Stetson” and its derivatives from the 1940’s.

When did “West Coast Stetson” originate? Did it appear in early print? How did it evolve into the “Harry Lundeberg Stetson?” Solitary words, words knotted together in tales, and words preserved in memoirs or manifestos are vital to our existence. We often overlook the questions about language which illuminate paths out of the jungle. To probe for intangibles that constitute workers’ culture is one such path.

Long after many of the concrete victories and defeats of the Sailors’ Union of the Pacific are relegated to history’s bin, the image of a seaman, not in a cowboy’s grand sombrero but in a simple white-cloth cap, shall linger in our hearts and minds. Indeed, the “Lundeberg Stetson” is more than “the usual rig.”



The stetson worn with pride by this anonymous group of youthful SUP sailors ashore in Shanghai in 1927.

SUP minutes referred to the dress as “the usual rig.”

When did this rig become usual, and among which unionists? A photo in the ILWU STORY (1997) of members of Weighers, Warehousemen & Cereal Workers Local 38-44, International Longshoremen’s Association (predecessor of ILWU Local 6), reveals five men in white caps, white shirts, and black pants at the head of its 1936 Labor Day parade contingent. These marchers carry an American flag and a Local 38-44 banner. A sixth member behind the banner wears a fedora, which suggests that white caps were recommended but not yet mandatory.

Photos taken on Labor Day for 1934, ’35, and ’36 will reveal other clues in our search. I shall appreciate any leads in this matter. At this juncture, I must caution that white caps were worn at work before hard hats became required on many jobs, and were simultaneously worn on Labor Day as part of a “group costume.”

“Red” Alexander, veteran shipwright and folk artist, recalls that when he started boatbuilding on the Oakland-Alameda Estuary, he would buy his white caps at a shop near Swan’s Market (Clay and Ninth, Oakland). A seamstress made caps to order while the mechanic waited. A cap cost but \$0.25—a bargain even in the depressed

## Letter to the Editor

February 19, 2001

Regarding your publication of January 26, I’ve been away from the sea for more than 20 years, but the photo of Harry Lundeberg brought back some long forgotten memories.

There was something about the West Coast Sailors that set them apart from us East coasters and it was the “Lundeberg Stetson.”

The “Lundeberg Stetson” was a white golf cap type of hat that was worn at just the correct angle with the top pulled down over the right ear. It could

be hospital white or covered with paint, but it was worn with pride and made a statement.

Since that type of cap was Harry Lundeberg’s trademark, I imagine it was worn out of respect or affection or maybe both.

I hope that all of us who had it “good” remember those who didn’t and fought to change it.

Yours truly,  
A. M. (Mike) Michelson  
Tamarac, Florida

# A Harry Lundeberg Retrospective

By Duane Hewitt

As a rank-and-file member Harry Lundeberg was prominent in the port of Seattle, but his exceptional abilities as a leader became apparent during the 1934 strike. Following the successful conclusion of the Big Strike, he was elected to the position of Seattle patrolman. He was aware that strength came through organizing, not only individual unions, but also federations of unions. During that period, there was much discussion of forming a federation of all maritime unions. Lundeberg understood that a united front could lend great strength to the sailors' cause but he also believed in autonomous unions; each had different problems and each should control their own destiny. The role of a federation or an international should be to lend strength and support through solidarity. Accordingly, Lundeberg emerged as the major advocate of a federation of autonomous unions working in concert for their mutual gain. This was the founding theory of the Maritime Federation and then shortly afterwards, the Seafarers' International Union of North America.

To start such a movement, the Sailors' along with the Seattle Longshoremen and other unions, organized the Puget Sound Federation in January 1935. This organization evolved into the Maritime Federation of the Pacific. The Federation held its first convention in April, at which time Lundeberg was elected its first president. He held this position until December, when he was elected secretary-treasurer of the Sailors' Union, succeeding Andrew Furuseth. William Fischer became president of the Federation, the man Lundeberg had appointed vice president. Through this succession, Lundeberg maintained considerable influence.

Unions then were mostly craft unions controlled by reactionaries. The Communists were infiltrating the labor movement and always on the lookout for new people who would help their cause. They hailed

the election of that "fighting progressive" as president of the Maritime Federation. They would eventually come to realize, much to their chagrin, that Lundeberg's militancy was directed to the improvement of seamen's conditions—not some political cause.

The ISU and the ILA were the principal unions in the maritime industry at that time. The ISU, under Andrew Furuseth's leadership, had made historical progress in maritime law—they had freed seamen of their bonds. However, by 1920, he believed his principal goals had been accomplished, and he and the other leaders became complacent. The Sailors' Union came close to extinction following the 1921 strike, however, it did survive. Conditions and wages were terrible, and they didn't improve in any way until after the 1934 strike. Lundeberg had joined the Sailors' Union in 1923. He saw what had to be done, and became involved. Improvement of the seamen's life became his life's work.

The ISU leaders believed that progress was only possible through legislation. It was a top down organization, not only in the International, but also in the individual unions. The leaders made the decisions. That is what happened in the ill-fated tanker strike in 1935, when Paul Scharrenberg called the strike without membership approval. His actions resulted in losing the strike and led to his expulsion from the Sailors' Union. Lundeberg led that initiative.

The ILA, on the other hand, was under the leadership of ineffective and corrupt reactionaries. Their do-nothing policies afforded the opportunity for the Communists to take control of most of the West Coast locals, which led to the founding of the ILWU. The Communists had been infiltrating the seamen's union, and those on the West Coast were successful in passing certain resolutions. One resolution passed in the Sailors' Union, was to accept MWIU members. As the MWIU was Communist dominated, the

ISU viewed it as a dual and hostile act. The leadership of the ISU also viewed the Maritime Federation as dual and hostile. Never understanding the principle of the Federation, they believed the militant organization was intent on replacing them.

Harry Lundeberg was elected secretary-treasurer of the Sailors' Union in December 1935, defeating the Communist-Bloc candidate, Herb Mills, in a lopsided win. It was ironic that he was viewed as a Communist by the leaders of the ISU, although they defeated the Communist candidate. To the ISU anyone militant and progressive, was a communist.

ISU leaders had been considering disciplining the Sailors' for several months and with the turn of recent events, the Sailors' Union was expelled. Lundeberg did not welcome the expulsion, he believed that remaining in the AFL was important. The ISU offered to give the charter back, but their differences were too great.

Lundeberg was a proponent of direct economic action, or what was referred to as "job action," without government intervention. The ISU believed just the opposite, they cooperated fully with government policies, including accepting the Copeland Books and government arbitration awards. In fact, ISU policies were more in line with those of the communist unions' who also would not oppose the government, as at that time the party was trying to build a friendly relationship with the Roosevelt administration.

The Sailors' held talks with the ISU in an effort to have the charter restored. The ISU agreed to reissue the charter, providing the Sailors' accept to certain conditions. These conditions included reinstating Paul Scharrenberg, accepting all arbitration awards related agreements, the constitutional amendments enacted by the Executive Board, and withdrawal from the Maritime Federation which the ISU deemed dual and hostile.

The Communists advised the Sailors' to accept these terms and campaigned very hard to convince them to do so. There was

a movement afoot within the East Coast rank-and-file, they were organizing on their own. This movement was under the control of the Communists, it would eventually evolve into the NMU. They knew if the Sailors' accepted the conditions that the Executive Board would amend the Sailors' Union Constitution to enable them to expel Lundeberg and several of his main associates. The West Coast would then be open for a Communist takeover. The Sailors' Union, aware of the consequences, and disregarding the Communists advice, voted to remain independent.

Dissent, within the Maritime Federation, was growing. Lundeberg sticking with the original intent: complete autonomy for the individual unions. The Communists continued to advocate the concept of One Big Union with distinction, rights, or voice for all the composite groups. The 1936 strike further exasperated the situation. The Communists insisted on one committee for all unions; the Sailors' insisting on doing their own negotiating. The main issue at stake in these negotiations was the hiring hall. Lundeberg thought this too important entrust to others. The Sailors' reached agreement on December 17, but they did not ratify it until the other unions settled on January 28. This demonstrated what Lundeberg had argued for all along, autonomy among the unions while supporting each other: no one to sign until they all signed.

Part of the legacy of 1936 strike was the bitter and often violent dispute that would become known as "the Shepherd Line beef." The Sailors' had an agreement and had crewed Shepard Line vessels since early in 1935. Three of these ships were tied up on the East Coast as a result of the strike. When this occurred they were crewed by the "East Coast rank-and-filers," a rump group of disgruntled ISU members. When the sailors' went back to work, and the vessels resumed their intercoastal run, the "East Coast rank-and-filers" refused to quit,

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*Backed by a handful of SUP pickets, Harry Lundeberg tells a CIO mob, "You shall not pass!" A historic incident in the Shepard Line beef in 1938, when the CIO-NMU attempted a raid on the s/s **Sea Thrush** at Pier 41, San Francisco.*



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and turn the jobs back to the Sailors' Union. The ships were met in each port by picket lines set up by the Sailors'. This led to physical confrontations with the Longshoremen, who backed the East Coast crews. Eventually, the "East Coast rank-and-filers" became the nucleus of the National Maritime Union. While the Shepherd Line beef raged on, both the NMU and the West Coast Longshoremen became CIO unions. After many hearings in court and at the NLRB, the Sailors' eventually won the beef, but it led to the disintegration of the Maritime Federation and further separation from the Longshoremen.

In light of these fast-moving changes, William Green, president of the AFL, became concerned of Communist domination of the maritime industry, as both the ILWU and the NMU were Communist controlled. Green took the sensible course and started talks with Harry Lundeberg. In October 1938, the AFL issued a charter to the Sailors' Union to organize all seamen. Lundeberg with this charter in hand began the largest organizing campaign in the history of the industry. This new organization became the Seafarers' International Union of North America and within a few short years the organizing effort was extremely successful. On the West Coast the Marine Firemen and the Marine Cooks and Stewards were allied into the SIU of North America's Pacific District. Elsewhere Lundeberg established the SIU-NA Atlantic Coast District, the SIU-NA Gulf District, the SIU-NA Great Lakes District and the SIU of Canada with more than 100,000 merchant seamen united in a single federation with common goals. Through it all Lundeberg insisted on the autonomy of each affiliate.

During the war Lundeberg settled jurisdictional disputes on the steamships while defending the Union against attempts to flood the industry with unskilled Naval Reserve trainees. When the war ended, the labor battles resumed. In 1946 there was a general strike in Oakland, with Lundeberg at the center of it, supporting other unions. The strike soon ended; much of the success was credited to him.

In 1947 the Taft-Hartley Act was enacted; the first post war anti-labor law. The open shop sections of the bill would have outlawed the hiring hall. Since that was at the core of Union strength, this would be a catastrophe for all unions. When Taft came to Santa Cruz to attend a convention. Lundeberg made arrangements to meet with him along with a representative of the shipowners. Lundeberg wrote and presented to the Senator a "preferential hiring" clause. Senator Taft, after hearing the argument for the clause, approved it as written. The hiring hall was saved, was copied by other unions, and is the mainstay of the Union today.

After saving the hiring hall in 1947, Lundeberg saved the scope of work of sailors in 1952 in the last major strike of his life. Some unions were attempting to claim the Sailors' work. Although there was a scope of work section in the agreement, the employers continuously violated it. Lundeberg would not concede any part of the scope of work and eventually the strike was won. The scope of work remained and enforcement was assured.

Another major endeavor of Lundeberg's leadership was his plan for retirement homes, pensions, and a wel-

fare plan. Lundeberg went to sea as a boy, which was common in his day. The people he grew up with were sailors. He thought as they did and lived like they did. As his generation aged, he thought about what would happen to them when they became too old to go to sea. He feared poverty and isolation in a dingy hotel room. To address these concerns, Lundeberg proposed in the 1949 negotiations, that the shipowners fund a project to build retirement homes for retired sailors. At first they refused, then offered a small amount. Lundeberg and the Sailors' stood fast. The shipowners argued that they couldn't do both, fund the project and grant a wage increase. Being so intent in their project, the Sailors' proposed freezing wages for a year and diverting the entire increase into the fund. The shipowners had no choice but to agree. That was the genesis of the SUP Welfare Plan and soon the Plan purchased property adjacent to the Headquarters building in San Francisco to construct a home. Apartments were built in Seattle and Portland and Wilmington. In 1953, the SIU-PD Pension Plan was started from the same fund. The property in San Francisco was cleared, plans were drawn, construction contracts were negotiated and the steel purchased. Just as construction was set to begin, fate intervened. Harry Lundeberg died on January 28, 1957, and the dream of the Sailors' Home of the Pacific went with him. Those who were then in charge must have had their reasons, but they were never fully disclosed. I often wonder what it would have sold for had it been developed.

Harry Lundeberg was a lot of things to different people, but one thing everyone would agree on, is that he was consistent in his fight to improve the lives of sailors. He taught his generation how to fight for what they deserved and what they were entitled to. He taught my generation how to be a Union man and how to maintain what we had fought for. While some preached class warfare and theorized on the struggle of the masses, Harry Lundeberg led his class out of poverty.

*About the author: Duane Hewitt is the former Vice President of the SUP.*



*Harry on San Francisco's Market Street, August 12, 1938.*



*monument reads: "From every latitude and longitude, the sea shall give up her dead." From left: Harry, California Governor Earl Warren, and C.J. "Neil" Haggerty, Secretary-Treasurer of the California State Federation of Labor.*



*Breaking ground for SUP Headquarters building on September 29, 1947. Blessing the event is Father Mathew Connolly. Holding the shovel is Nick Jortall, a founding member of the Coast Seamen's Union. The site of the building was later changed as the area was needed for a Bay Bridge off-ramp.*