



Working the Waterfront: The Ups and Downs of a Rebel Longshoreman

Gilbert Mers

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"Somebody said, 'History is written by the winners. The losers have nothing to say.' This book is by one of the losers, a bit player, not the star of the drama." So begins Gilbert Mers in these personal recollections of forty-two years on the Texas waterfront as longshoreman and radical union activist. But far from having "nothing to say," Mers reveals himself as a thoughtful philosopher of democratic ideals and eloquent agitator for union reform. He challenges the conventional wisdom that the leader is more valuable than the led. He contends that long tenure in positions of power dulls the union officer's working-class instincts. Always one to row against the current, Mers believes the union exists for the benefit of its members!

This is primary material of the best kind, vivid and evocative, and Mers, in his eighties at the time of writing the book, is an unusually vigorous and articulate spokesman for a democratic and humane unionism.

Whether he is describing the sweaty, dangerous and back-breaking work of loading cotton bales into the hold of an outbound ship or the gut-gripping tension of a face-to-face encounter with Texas Rangers bent on "law and order," Mers writes with the voice and conscience of the rank-and-file worker. He paints the waterfront world as it was, and perhaps still is—full of danger, humor, dignity in demoralizing circumstances, frustration, struggle, and sometimes hope—and tells his story with such wry humanity that even those who disagree with his destination will enjoy the ride.



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