

REPORTS AND INQUIRIES

Vocational Training of Dockworkers in the Port of Rotterdam

Although considerable scepticism still exists as to the possibility and value of vocational training for dockworkers, there is an increasing awareness in many countries that, under modern conditions, training is both essential and a practical possibility, and its importance is recognised in several dock labour schemes, including those of the United Kingdom, India and Burma.

In December 1951, at Nervi, the Fourth Session of the Inland Transport Committee of the International Labour Organisation adopted a resolution concerning the training of dockworkers, in which the Governing Body of the International Labour Office was invited to draw the attention of governments and of the employers' and workers' organisations concerned to the importance of adequate training for dockworkers in the handling of mixed cargo in modern ports. It also requested that the Office should collect and publish information on such training.

The original text of this resolution had been put forward by the delegation from the Netherlands, where the keen interest taken in this question for many years has resulted in the development of a pioneer vocational training scheme for dockworkers in the port of Rotterdam. The initiative was taken by the Shipping Federation South, of Rotterdam, with the financial help and encouragement of the Government and municipality. The Netherlands Government granted a subsidy of 10,000 guilders in 1952, and the city of Rotterdam voted 13,000 guilders towards the cost of training. The idea of organising vocational training courses for dockworkers had already been considered before the war, although at that time only the training of winch drivers, hatchmen, tallymen and foremen was envisaged. When the question was raised again after the war it was decided to include dockers in the scheme.

The following account of the Rotterdam scheme is based on a mimeographed report¹ produced by the Shipping Federation South, and on the Annual Report of the Shipping Federation South for 1952.²

¹ SHIPPING FEDERATION SOUTH, Rotterdam: *Vocational Training in the Port of Rotterdam*.

² *Verslag van de Werkzaamheden der Scheepvaart Vereeniging Zuid over het jaar 1952 (Rotterdam)*.

OBJECTIVES OF THE TRAINING SCHEME

Before the introduction of the vocational training scheme in the port of Rotterdam dock labour had always been officially classed in the Netherlands as unskilled labour, and this idea was shared by public opinion and by some of the dockworkers themselves, who refused to send their sons to the docks "because they must learn a trade". In a modern port, however, the old system, under which new recruits had to learn the work on the job as well as they could, is no longer satisfactory.

The main objectives of those responsible for the institution of the scheme were to improve efficiency and productivity, to reduce the number of accidents, to raise the status of the dockworker and give him more pride and satisfaction in his work, and to increase the stability of labour.

The work of the port includes the loading and discharging of ocean-going steamers, of Rhine and inland vessels carrying a wide variety of products, such as cases of glassware, barrels of pickles, crates of earthenware, bales of rubber or cotton, tobacco, motorcars, railway engines, cattle, or bulk cargo such as iron ore, coal and grain. In recent years, too, the rapid development of mechanisation, while having the advantages of relieving manual labour and increasing the handling capacity of the harbour, has called for greater specialisation and consequently for training. It may also cause the workers to fear that they will become redundant, though a modernised port can attract more work.

The worker must understand what he is doing. An unskilled and inexperienced dockworker cannot carry out his work rapidly without damaging the goods and, above all, without risk to himself and others, and safety was a paramount consideration in evolving the scheme. The accident statistics of the Shipping Federation's medical service show that systematic training and education, particularly of young and inexperienced workers, are essential for the prevention of accidents.

It was hoped also to develop co-operation and a good team spirit among the gangs, to increase the worker's sense of responsibility, and above all to increase his interest and pride in his work as special training and growing skill took him out of the general mass of unskilled labour. The system would provide an opportunity for selection and promotion, and better status and prospects would in turn lead to greater stability of labour, since one of the main reasons for dockers often changing their trade is lack of training.

ORGANISATION

In 1947 a committee was formed for the study of the vocational training of Rotterdam port workers, which resolved that vocational training was most desirable on account of the shortage of skilled labour in the harbour, and that dockers, public warehouse workers, winch drivers and hatchmen, tallymen and supervisors should be included in the scheme. The greatest difficulties were the lack of any previous experience in this field and the absence of any careful analysis of the jobs for which training was to be given. The committee therefore proposed that Dr. F. J. Th. Rutten, Professor of Applied Psychology in the University of Nijmegen, should be asked to work out in detail a provisional

report that he had made on training, and to co-operate with the committee in carrying out the scheme.

Professor Rutten and his assistant, Dr. Vijftigchild, then made a thorough study of the port, and worked as port workers and tallymen to gain practical experience. The report showed how port work could be made a trade and the workers' skill improved, using as a foundation the existing practices in the port. It was recommended that there should be three training courses for (i) basic training; (ii) the training of specialists (tallymen, fork truck drivers, winch drivers and hatchmen); and (iii) the training of foremen.

In April 1949 a chief of the Department of Vocational Training was appointed. He produced a memorandum dealing with the organisation of the scheme evolved by the committee and Professor Rutten, including the central place of training, training methods and the training of instructors.

An Advisory Committee for Vocational Training was set up, composed of representatives of the governing body of the Shipping Federation South, the Director of the Dock Labour Reserve, and employers' and workers' representatives.

In September 1949 the first group of men began their basic training, and the first certificates of competence were issued at the end of that year.

Part of the training is carried out in one of the less used parts of the harbour on the *Veteraan*, a disused vessel placed at the disposal of the Shipping Federation South by the Government. Cabins are fitted out as classrooms for lectures, and there are on board various kinds of gear and tackle and samples of the main kinds of cargo handled in the port.

Basic Training

In this course men are trained in groups of not more than 12, which are formed after the men have voluntarily applied at the office of the Vocational Training Department. The candidates are first examined by the medical service and their records checked by inspectors of the Dock Labour Reserve. Wages and working conditions are those established by collective agreement, the members of the course being paid their normal wages. There are no fees for the courses, which last for 13 weeks. Five groups of 12 are trained simultaneously during each period.

The main object of the basic training is to increase the worker's skill. In so doing, and in teaching him how to understand and handle the material, efforts are made to improve the worker's attitude towards his job. Special safety instruction is given at the beginning and at intervals during the course, and the importance of safety, order and neatness is emphasised throughout. The men also learn how to work in a team.

The course is divided, if possible, into nine weeks' training in the general cargo branch, three weeks in the bulk cargo branch and one week in the grain branch. The first training period includes one week of night work.

The trainees spend one day each week on the training ship *Veteraan*, when, in addition to theoretical and practical instruction, there is discussion and summing-up of the work and difficulties during the past week. The rest of the week is spent on actual productive work under

the supervision of an instructor, who is the same for each group during the whole period of 13 weeks.

Theoretical Training.

The theoretical training is always based on demonstrations and practical work, and includes discussion of dock labour and its meaning, and the history and significance of the port of Rotterdam. The trainees learn about the organisation of the port ; the procedure on arrival and departure of an ocean-going vessel (pilotage, harbour and towage services) ; the relation between shipper and consignee ; the Shipping Federation South and the Dock Labour Reserve ; wages, working conditions and rules ; the social position of the worker ; port work at home and abroad ; the nature and location of the various port undertakings in Rotterdam, and a plan of the harbour ; bulk cargo and general cargo, including stevedoring equipment and lifting machinery ; the principal regulations concerning the loading and discharging of ocean-going vessels, and safety regulations ; ships and their layout, and the principal company and national flags ; elementary history of the main commodities and materials ; first aid and hygiene ; and harbour terminology.

There are also excursions to businesses and ships, including harbour trips by steamer and, if possible, a visit to the Shipping Museum.

Practical Training.

Practical training takes place while the men are engaged on productive work. An instructor, who is always in attendance, shows the men how to move and work efficiently and how to use stevedoring tools. The trainees become acquainted with shed and warehouse work ; the discharging of general and bulk cargoes from sea-going vessels, and of coal, coke and ores ; and the loading, stowing and dunnaging of goods in ocean-going vessels. They learn how to drive mechanical flat wagons (Yale wagon type). Throughout the training the importance is stressed of working safely and with neatness and order, of taking due care of tools, and of teamwork.

Physical training is arranged, including sports and games.

Specialist Training

At the end of the basic training course a successful candidate is awarded a certificate, and until September 1952 he could then apply for admission to the specialist training courses for tallymen or winch drivers and hatchmen. Before a man was accepted for this, however, (or for the foremen's training course) his fitness was considered in the light of a medical examination and the judgment of his instructors during the training period, tests and discussions. By September 1952 a sufficient number of new tallymen, winch drivers and hatchmen had been trained, and the basic training of these categories was stopped temporarily and replaced by retraining courses.

Tallymen.

The 13 weeks' course for tallymen was designed to train skilled checkers and gaugers and to increase the professional capacity of this category of port worker. Candidates who passed the examination at the end of the course were granted a certificate. After a year's practical

work the worker may apply to be admitted as a certified weigher and measurer by the Corn Dealers' Committee, after having been sworn in by a judge.

Winch Drivers and Hatchmen.

The course for winch drivers and hatchmen also lasted for 13 weeks and aimed at training skilled men capable of working efficiently and safely. At least 15 men were trained in each 13-week period, in groups of three. Each group was attached to one of the five basic training groups for the weekly instruction day on the training ship. At the end of the course a practical and theoretical examination was held.

Training of Foremen

Special attention is paid to the training of supervisors, and three courses were held during 1952. The object of these courses is to train new foremen and to improve the efficiency of existing foremen. The three months' training is divided into theoretical and practical courses and begins with three days' residence at one of the "people's universities".

The course includes further study in many of the subjects taught in the basic training course, and instruction is given in the laws, agreements and rules in force in the port; the loading and discharging of both ocean-going vessels and inland craft; geography, Dutch and English in relation to the harbour and shipping; first aid, hygiene and safety; labour and time study and labour analysis. Special attention is paid to the supervisor's function of giving efficient instruction on the job, and to human relations.

This course is now called "basic training of supervisory personnel", since the inauguration of a fourth part of the training programme in 1952 on the basis of job analysis carried out by a working party set up in February of that year. The working party investigated the duties of foremen in the cargo, mechanical, warehouse, check-taking and grain elevator branches, and specialised training is now given for supervisors in these branches.

During each training period the student's progress is assessed regularly both in regard to personal qualities, sense of responsibility, efficiency of action in case of accident, safety sense, promptness, co-operation with the foreman, comradeship and leadership and, in regard to proficiency in learning new operations, understanding instructions and acquiring the right working method; thoroughness, accuracy and speed; and staying power—the ability to maintain quality and speed for a long period. The trainees are informed regularly of the marks awarded to them.

Additional Courses

It was found in practice that the general level of education was inadequate, which was a handicap in following the courses, particularly in the case of foremen. In the early part of 1952, therefore, general education courses in Dutch, arithmetic and knowledge of the Netherlands were started. They last nine months, and lessons are given by qualified teachers for three hours on one evening each week. The certificate is officially recognised by the Government.

Experience has shown that personnel who are in constant touch with officers and crews of foreign ships should have at least some basic knowledge of another language, preferably English. In the winter months the Vocational Training Department organises courses for beginners and advanced students in the Dutch and English languages. At the end of each course an oral and written examination is held and certificates are granted. A special English manual for dockworkers¹ has been used with success in the courses. It contains a simplified grammar, basic conversational phrases and current essential terminology used in dock work, and a chart of a ship's cargo-lifting tackle.

There are also first-aid courses leading up to an official certificate, and a fire protection course was being planned to train men to fight fires in the harbour areas.

Technical Manual

Although this type of vocational training is new, the need for suitable technical manuals was evident and the chief instructor of one of Rotterdam's most important stevedoring undertakings has published an "Introduction to Stevedoring"², which is used in the courses. The author analyses the process of stowage from beginning to end. There are many illustrations showing how and how not to do the job. After a general description of the purpose of stowage, the author describes the functions and responsibilities of foremen, assistants, hatchmen, winchmen and many other workers, and gives details of ocean-going vessels, lighters and river craft. He describes the equipment used by stevedores, such as lifting machinery (loading bridges and floating cranes), and devotes considerable space to technical instruction on, for example, how to strip the hatches, how to "top" the derricks, hoisting, and the stowage of the different goods.

The final part of this very instructive book deals with safety regulations, and there is information on signals, tonnage and capacity of vessels and a short summary of current weights and measures.

RESULTS OF THE SCHEME

Up to the end of 1952, 725 dockworkers had received certificates in the basic training courses; 150 winch drivers and hatchmen, 71 tallymen and 66 foremen had also been granted certificates at the end of their training. The table on page 66 shows the numbers of men trained or in training up to the end of 1952.

DOCKERS' TRAINING SCHOOL

Though there is every reason to be satisfied with the results so far, there remains a feeling that the scheme is not completely satisfactory. Constantly increasing mechanisation demands more and more trained workers, with the necessary background and outlook to be able to cope with technical difficulties. Until now the choice of men for dock

¹ S. van der WIND: *Engels voor het Havenbedrijf* (second edition, Rotterdam, 1951).

² S. van der WIND: *Inleiding tot de Stuwadoorsarbeid* (Alphen a/d Rijn, 1950). See also D. P. JANSSEN: *Wat de Havenarbeider moet weten* (Amsterdam, Scheepvaart Vereeniging Noord, 1948).

VOCATIONAL TRAINING IN THE PORT OF ROTTERDAM
UP TO 31 DECEMBER 1952

	Basic training	Winch drivers' and hatch- men's training	Tallymen's training	Foremen's training	English courses	General education courses
Admitted to course .	901	198	100	99	282	59
Dropped out during course	103	20	1	3	157	23
Granted certificate .	725	150	71	66	58	13
Found to be un- suited	38	17	18	17	6	—
Still in training . .	35	11	10	13	61	23

labour has been rather limited. The average age of dockworkers tends to be high, and young candidates are the exception. This is due to the fact that many boys go to the technical school after leaving primary school and afterwards find work in industries where there is a possibility of further training.

A Dockers' Training School is therefore being established in Rotterdam, under the auspices of the Advisory Committee on Vocational Training and in consultation with Dr. Rutten, with the aims of attracting boys to work in the docks as soon as they reach school-leaving age, when they are most adaptable, and of providing a sound educational foundation for future port workers. The first two-year course at the school, which is unique in Europe, began in September 1953. The age for admittance is from 14½ to 16 years, but sons of men already working in the port have priority and can be admitted up to the age of 17. In a programme of this type the desirability of keeping the youth in training until he is of age to start work as a docker must be borne in mind. In the Netherlands, for instance, persons under the age of 18 are not allowed to perform stevedores' work ¹, nor may they be employed in minding winches or cranes. ²

Modern teaching methods are to be used and one-third of the school time will be used for general education, one-third for workshop training and the remainder for physical training. The school is to be subsidised by the Government and the municipality of Rotterdam, and tuition is free. The pupils will receive pocket money for any work they do during their second year.

At the end of the course, a "mate's" certificate will be issued to the pupils, who will then begin an apprenticeship of one-and-a-half years to acquire the necessary practical knowledge in the various branches of the trade for which they appear most suitable. During their apprenticeship the mates will receive wages and at the end they will receive a journeyman's certificate.

¹ The Stevedores Act, 1931, section 4. For a translation of the Act see I.L.O.: *Legislative Series*, 1931 (Neth. 3).

² Decree issuing public administrative regulations under section 10, subsection (1) of the Labour Act, 1919, dated 10 August 1920; see I.L.O.: *Legislative Series*, 1920 (Neth. 8).

It is intended that the Dockers' Training School and the apprenticeship system will eventually replace the basic training that has been given up to now, while the training now in existence for specialists and foremen will be replaced by a "final class". Under the latter scheme suitable mates and journeymen will be trained to operate mechanical and technical apparatus, and for administrative and checking work and responsible positions as foremen.

Although the long-term results must still be awaited, therefore, the Rotterdam experiment has proved that vocational training for dockworkers is a practical possibility, and by its institution dock labour is acknowledged to be a trade.
