THE PUBLIC ARCHIVES OF NOVA SCOTIA
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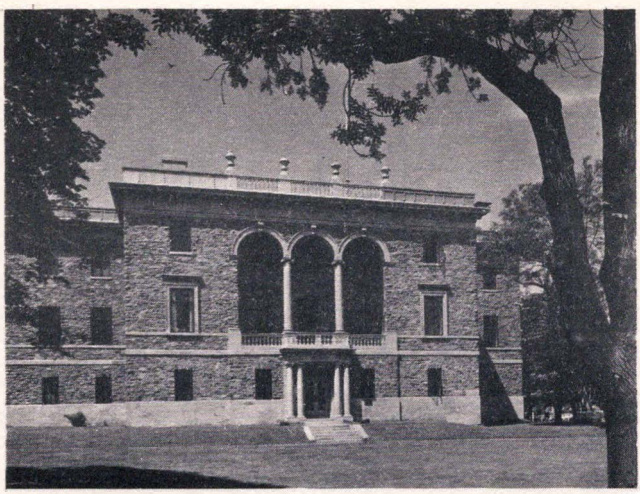

# THE LABOUR MOVEMENT IN NOVA SCOTIA BEFORE CONFEDERATION

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CHARLES BRUCE FERGUSSON

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So little has so far been written about the labour movement in early Nova Scotia that it might seem that the subject beggars description. That, however, is far from being the case, as will appear from this account, for the history of trade unions in Nova Scotia not only goes back a surprisingly long way but it has had a vivid and interesting evolution.

Trade unions did not spring into being, fully fledged, at one particular instant, reaching maturity by one instantaneously spontaneous act. There was a gradual growth, from the recognition of a common need and the desire for mutual self-help, to benevolent efforts, common solidarity and collective bargaining power. The process is not always continuous, and circumstances are bound to have their effect.

*Early Halifax*

The Nova Scotian setting in which the movement began has its own special significance. Halifax had one peculiar characteristic in that it was the only English colony in America founded by direct governmental action. It was to be an imperial outpost, a centre for trade, a base for fishing, a shield for New England and a palladium by means of which Nova Scotia could be secured from danger. Free passage, grants of land, subsistence for a year, arms and ammunition, material and equipment for clearing and tilling land, erecting habitations and carrying on the fishery were offered to prospective settlers. It was hoped that needed surgeons and tradesmen would accept these terms and that many disbanded soldiers, sailors and privateersmen would do the same, thereby lessening the number of unemployed at home in a time of returning peace. A variety of trades and occupations were represented by the settlers of 1749, but many of those who crossed the Atlantic to Halifax that year were unsuited for the task of building a town in a new land. This meant that skilled labourers and tradesmen were at a premium for the indispensable needs of the place. No wonder many of the newcomers built poor houses and some being incapable of doing so built none at all and were obliged to shelter themselves all winter in their tents. Throughout the first summer and autumn a swarm of vessels from New England came and went, bringing supplies and additional

settlers, and, in the following year an inflow of "foreign Protestants" from the continent of Europe began.

In the circumstances wages were high. Much had to be done in constructing habitations, public buildings and fortifications, while the number of labourers was limited. When 300 Germans arrived in the late summer of 1750 the Governor summoned the Council to consider what arrangements should be made for these new settlers for the winter. Its opinion was that "the exorbitant price of Labour" might now be reduced. At that time 250 labourers were employed on public works at two shillings per day, besides rum and beer. The Council advised that such of the Germans as were artificers or fit for labour be taken into the King's works at two shillings per day for artificers and one shilling and two pence for labourers till their passages were paid to the Government.[1] But the rate of pay for labourers employed on public works could not be kept at this level. The wages in neighbouring colonies were higher. Thus the current rate at Halifax might be inadequate to induce many industrious persons to remain or to attract others. Consequently, within a month, the Council decreed that the wages of labourers would be eighteen pence per day plus provisions.[2] Some persons attributed the slowness in clearing land outside the town to the highness of the wages, whereas the German and Swiss settlers complained that when they engaged to work for New Englanders they had to wait three times as long for their pay as it took them to do the work and then they were obliged to take their payment in goods, "such as they have & we often not want, at an Exorbitant Price & on Refusal of this are turned out, . . .[3]

*A Friendly Society*

In this situation, and many of them having to earn money at Halifax to pay for their passages, it was only natural for the German settlers in Nova Scotia to combine for mutual self-help. This they did in the Funeral Fees or Friendly Society,[4] a type of association that sprang up all over England during the eighteenth century and that perhaps bridged the gap between the mediaeval fraternities and the modern Trade Union in Europe. The purpose of this Funeral Fees or Friendly Society at Halifax was to aid by a grant of money, proportioned to the monthly payments made previously, those whose families had been stricken by death, and who by their own unassisted efforts would have been unable to defray the necessary burial expenses. This society continued in being until 1761 when, the circumstances of its members having apparently changed for the better, it was dissolved. Its funds, at that time amounting to eleven pounds, ten shillings and ten pence, were thereupon turned over to the German Evangelical Lutheran Church for the purchase of a pall. The members of the society at the

time of its dissolution, nine in number, and their families, were to be entitled to the use of the pall free of charge.

*An Employment Agency; A Workhouse; and A Lord's Day Act*

Meantime the condition of workers in Halifax had been affected by at least three other developments. One was the establishment in the spring of 1754 of "an Intelligence and Outward POST-OFFICE" at the first house outside the south gate. This provided not only a penny postal service for outgoing letters but also a sort of labour exchange, or employment agency.[5] Any person wishing to hire or to make available for hire a white servant or negro could do so by applying to this office. After the proprietor of this office left the town a little later it was continued by two other men in new quarters on Granville Street.[6] The second development had a more lasting effect. This was a statute of 1759, passed by the provincial legislature, which had been established the previous year. It was "An Act for regulating and maintaining an House of Correction or Work House within the Town of Halifax, and for binding out Poor Children." By its provisions, Justices of the Peace were empowered to commit to this institution all disorderly and idle persons, those who were found begging, practising any unlawful games or pretending to fortune telling, common drunkards, persons of lewd behaviour, vagabonds, runaways, stubborn servants, and persons who notoriously mis-spent their time to the neglect and prejudice of their own or their family's support. Poor children could be bound apprentices by the Overseers of the Poor, with the consent of two Justices.[7] The third factor was a statute of 1761—An Act for the better observation and keeping of the Lord's Day. Eleven years earlier, at a time when nearly forty unlicensed persons, in addition to those who were licensed, were selling liquor in Halifax, the Council of Nova Scotia decreed that the unlicensed retailers of liquor should be fined and punished and that no tavern keeper should entertain company or sell liquor on Sundays.[8] Those who violated this ordinance were not only to be fined but also to sit in the pillory or stocks for one hour, for the first offence, and to receive twenty lashes for the second infraction. Now, according to the provisions of the statute of 1761, no tradesman, warehouse keeper, shopkeeper, or other person whatsoever, should, for the future, open his, her, or their shop or warehouse on the Lord's Day. Nor should anyone for the future do any labour, work or business, or allow it to be done by his servant or servants, child or children, works of necessity and charity only excepted, or use or allow to be used any sport, game, play or pastime on the Lord's Day.[9]

*Relief for the Poor*

If there was need for regulating the observance of the Lord's Day, it was imperative that something be done for the relief of the poor. In the

early years at Halifax and at Lunenburg, provisions were supplied to the settlers at the expense of the imperial government. The fact that the Council of Nova Scotia as early as 1750 decreed that settlers were not to be liable for debts contracted previous to their arrival, except for goods imported into the colony, undoubtedly attracted the unscrupulous and useless—as well as the honest and industrious.[10] Subsequently this resolution was made law by the first legislature of 1758 and it continued in force until 1762, and from then in a modified form until 1769. During these years there was an inundation of useless persons, as it was called, and these, in their necessity, were very burdensome to the community. Some came to escape debt; others were undesirable passengers or indigent immigrants left behind by ships proceeding to other destinations; still others were camp-followers of the troops. Consequently the industrious inhabitants were subjected to grievous taxation to maintain idle persons and were thereby prevented from affording willing relief to the "honest poor".

Relief for the poor was provided for a time by local assessment supplemented by provincial grants. A workhouse was established by 1759 and three rooms in it were set aside for a poor-house in 1763.[11] In the latter year responsibility for the relief of the poor was transferred from the provincial government to the townships.[12] Each township having at least 50 families was to assess and levy its poor rates. Four years later townships having fewer than 50 freeholders were empowered to do likewise.[13] But these changes did not entirely relieve Halifax of its disproportionate share of the burden. It was the chief seaport and to it gravitated poor persons from the country districts. An attempt was made to stop this migration from the rural areas by a statute of 1770.[14] This was an Act for the settlement of the Poor in the several Townships within this Province. It provided that no township was obliged to support a pauper unless he was a native of it, or had served an apprenticeship there, or had lived there as a hired servant for the whole year before applying for relief, or had paid the poor-rate for a year. Nor was any pauper having relatives to be eligible for public bounty, and if those relatives were negligent in their duty towards him they were to be fined five shillings per week. Four years later a new law contained more stringent regulations.[15] This was an act for punishing rogues, vagabonds and idle disorderly persons. Any person, having no visible means of support, who lived idly and refused to work for wages was on conviction to be imprisoned at hard labour not exceeding a month. Subsequently, by statutes of 1801 and 1803, the Commissioners of the Poor were empowered to bind out poor children, and to receive into the poor-house beggars and vagabonds who were to be put to work.[16]

*Masters and Servants*

There were also regulations pertaining to the relationship between masters and servants. According to the terms of a statute of 1765[17]—an Act for regulating Servants—apprentices and servants whose contracts extended to a term of at least six months were to obtain a certificate of discharge when leaving their masters, and persons harbouring or knowingly taking into their service any such servant or apprentice who had no such certification were to be subject to a penalty of £10. Although the word apprentice appears in this Act of 1765, the statute, it seems, referred chiefly to menial servants bound by indenture and to servants hired for six months or longer, such as those employed in agriculture and fishing by written contract, rather than to apprentices to trades and professions. By a statute of 1787 no engagement of a servant was to be valid for a period longer than a month unless made in writing and signed by both parties, in the presence of a witness, who read and explained the agreement. Only one Justice of the Peace was needed to hear complaints of the master or mistress against any hired servant for wilful misbehaviour and to order partial stoppage of wages, to a maximum of five shillings for one offence, if the complaint proved to be well founded.

*Effects of War*

The condition of the workers in early Halifax was also influenced by a variety of other internal and external factors, and wages were controlled by the authorities on several occasions. The Seven Years' War—or the nine years' war as it was in North America—not only brought its problems but it gave Halifax an opportunity to prove its worth. Military and naval forces assembled at Halifax in 1757 and 1758 for the security of the place and for offensive measures against Louisbourg. Many working men took to privateering. Labour was scarce; prices and wages rose. On November 14, 1758 a proclamation was issued that soldiers should work for the inhabitants at eighteen pence a day for artificers and six pence a day for labourers, by General Amherst's order, in consequence of the excessive rate of wages;[19] and the officers were directed to encourage all the men who could be spared to work for the settlers at these rates. Louisbourg was captured in 1758; the first House of Assembly for the Province was elected and convened the same year; and the forces to be used for the siege of Quebec assembled at Halifax in 1759. Now more effective steps could be taken for the spread of settlement within the Province and arrangements were made for New England planters, fishermen and lumbermen to establish townships along the South Shore, in the Annapolis Valley and across the Isthmus of Chignecto. Irish settlers came from Ireland as well as by way of New England. Acadians came out of hiding or returned from exile.

Yorkshiremen settled chiefly at the Isthmus of Chignecto. Scots in the *Hector* to the number of about 200 arrived in 1773, heralding an influx that was to come later. By the eve of the American Revolutionary War, Nova Scotia had a population of about 20,000, of whom about one-half were of New England origin.

Meantime the impact of war upon Halifax was memorable but fortunately not catastrophic in 1762. The French invasion of Newfoundland caused alarm, drove a number of refugees to Nova Scotia and precipitated counteraction. Moreover, after the capture of Havana about half of Albemarle's large fleet of men-of-war and transports sailed to Halifax to re-fit before proceeding to Great Britain. Many of the men-of-war were moored in Halifax all winter, and more than £400,000 of prize money was dissipated there.

As Governor Campbell put it, the troops were the very life, soul and support of the colony. When steps were taken in 1767 to repair and improve the road from Halifax to Windsor, the work depended on the troops, who were hired for this purpose at one shilling per day, as the scant population had to concentrate upon cultivation of the land.[20] When two regiments and four ships of war were transferred from Halifax to Boston in 1768, their departure was deplored by the Governor, who urged that they be sent back to Nova Scotia as soon as possible, on account of the poverty of the people, "whose chief dependence was the circulating cash spent by the troops" and on account of the menace from the Indians.[21]

Late in 1774, when the imperial authorities decided to build barracks in Boston, no resident tradesmen could be secured for the purpose. Consequently 51 carpenters were sent to Boston from Halifax for this work.[22]

The next year was one of anxiety at Halifax. Rumours of invasion, raids on other Nova Scotian settlements and the deplorable state of the fortifications provided a groundwork for this concern. Shortage of provisions, resulting from efforts to supply British troops at Boston, discontinuance of imports from colonies to the south, and impressment of men into the navy, deepened the alarm. Fuel also became scarce.

During the years of the American Revolutionary War, the importance of Halifax as an outpost of empire is plainly evident. For a few weeks in the spring of 1776, from the evacuation of Boston in March to General Howe's departure from Halifax in June, Halifax was the headquarters of the British army in North America. The British forces from Boston, about 200 officers and 3,000 men, were accompanied to Halifax by more than 2,000 camp-followers and by about 1,500 refugees, with their families.

*Refugees and Others*

This vast and instant increase in the number of people in Halifax had an enormous effect on living conditions in the town. Prices and rents rose sharply. On April 2nd the Governor and Council fixed the prices of provisions.[23] Beef, veal, lamb, mutton and fresh pork were to be one shilling per pound, milk was to be six pence per quart and fresh butter was to be one shilling and six pence, Halifax currency. They also decided that no one should charge more than double the ordinary rent for rooms or houses. But, in spite of all the regulations, the price of beef quickly rose to 2/6 per pound, and that of butter to 5s. per pound,[24] while many had to cook in cabooses brought from the ships. Every house and store was crowded to excess, and Halifax took on the appearance of a military camp, the Common west of Citadel Hill and Camp Hill being covered with tents. When Howe and his men left Halifax in June, they left behind them over two thousand women and children. To arrange for their accommodation the Council appointed a committee to seek out out-houses and unoccupied old buildings.[25]

*Wage Control*

Shortly afterwards the arrival of additional troops increased the pressure on accommodations in Halifax. In 1777, on account of the dearness of provisions, the export of sheep, cattle and swine was prohibited by proclamation.[26] Wages had also risen—to such an extent that the legislators of the Province regarded them as grossly excessive. A statute —an Act for restraining the exorbitant Price of Labour—was passed.[27] This authorized the Justices of the Peace in the various counties and in the townships empowered by law to hold Special Sessions, after taking into consideration the circumstances of the times and the prices of provisions, to set, according to their best judgment, the wages of all artificers and labourers. Employers who offered or paid higher wages and employees who received higher wages were to be fined or imprisoned. This statute remained in effect for one year and until the end of the session of the General Assembly then next following. In the spring of 1778 troops were encamped on the Common, and the scarcity of provisions was a cause of anxiety. Early in 1779 it was reported that the stock of cattle had been reduced in supplying the troops.[28] Provisions were dear; the wages of seamen were high; and the enlisting of men for the army and the navy had resulted in higher rates of pay for workmen. In 1780 General McLean demanded more workmen to complete the fortifications deemed necessary for the safety of Halifax, and the Lieutenant-Governor and Council resolved that 200 men from the militia of ten townships outside Halifax should be employed for three weeks on the works in the capital.[29] In 1781 the

Lieutenant-Governor declared that every necessary article had doubled in price since 1775.[30]

The war brought a measure of prosperity to Halifax. Scarcity of labour tended to cause a rise in wages. An increase in the supply of money led to higher prices and inflationary tendencies. There were undoubtedly certain inconveniences, but luxuries could generally be obtained, as well as necessities, and there was considerable gaiety in the town.

*Increased Population*

One result of the war was the doubling of the peninsular population, besides a substantial inflow of people into the new colonies of New Brunswick and Cape Breton. At a time when Nova Scotia had about 20,000 people, a similar number of loyalists, disbanded soldiers and refugees arrived. This sudden inflow drove up the prices of fresh provisions. With a view to affording relief to the new settlers, the Governor and Council allowed the importation of such articles from New England, notwithstanding the opposition of some Halifax merchants who wished to keep the price of flour high, and the farmers who sought high prices for their cattle. The following year, the importation of provisions from the United States was forbidden except in British vessels.

Between 1785 and 1800 the population was affected by immigration and by emigration. Nearly all Nantucket whalemen who arrived in the 1780's left the Province in 1792. About 650 Scots arrived in 1791. A considerable number of Loyalists departed. There was an exodus of nearly 1200 negroes to Sierra Leone in 1792, and most of the French people who were brought from St. Pierre and Miquelon in 1793-94 were taken to the Channel Islands or France. Maroons, to the number of about 500, arrived in 1796 and departed in 1800 for Sierra Leone.

*The Poor House*

Although the Orphan House, which was advertised to be let in 1785,[31] seems to have been abandoned, the relief of the poor was rather costly. In 1789 expenditures on the Poor House swallowed up about one-fourth of the revenue of the Province, notwithstanding earlier efforts at economy which had been so successful as to reduce the Keeper to such straits that succeeding Overseers of the Poor were obliged to receive him as a pauper into the Poor House.

*Private Charity*

Besides the public outlay for the relief of the poor, there was private

charity. Mutual self-help was provided by national, patriotic, and humane associations, which assisted many on the way to fame or fortune. The North British Society, or Scots Club of Halifax, which was formed in 1768, and which is still a thriving organization, was one of those. The St. George's Society and the Charitable Irish Society, both organized at Halifax in 1786, were the others. The former ceased to exist in 1804; the St. George's Benevolent Society was established in 1806 and remained in operation till 1829; and the St. George's Society was revived in 1838. The Charitable Irish Society has had a continuous existence to the present. The Yorkshire Club, which was in being at Halifax in 1776, was apparently short-lived. There had been at least one Friendly Society at Halifax in the 1750's and early 1760's and one was formed at Liverpool in 1795.[33] A German Society was also organized at Halifax in 1786.

*The Carpenters' Society of Halifax*

At the time when the British working class was in the throes of the difficult era of the Napoleonic War and ensuing economic crises, with the suppression of Corresponding Societies in 1799 and of all forms of unionism in 1799-1800, a significant step was taken in Nova Scotia. This was the setting up of a craft organization—the Brother Carpenters' Society of Halifax—in 1798. By 1821 the Carpenters' Society owned the Carpenters' Hall on Salter Street.[35] Its rules and regulations were revised and reprinted in 1833. It had a visiting committee as well as officers. The entrance fee was 35 shillings and each member paid three shillings quarterly. No money was to be paid out of the funds until they amounted to fifty pounds. No member was entitled to relief until he had been a member for one year. If a member's dues were in arrear four quarters he was ineligible for relief. A member entitled to relief received ten shillings weekly if he was confined to his bed or seven shillings and six pence per week if not confined to his house, though unable to work. In case of the death of any member the sum of forty shillings was to be paid out of the funds towards defraying the burial expenses. If the deceased member left a wife, three pounds was to be paid to her annually as long a she remained a widow.[36] In December 1841 the members of the Carpenters' Society residing in the County of Halifax presented a congratulatory address to Lieutenant-Governor Falkland on the occasion of the celebration of the birth of a Prince.[37] Subsequently, in 1850, the Carpenters' Society of Halifax was incorporated by Provincial Statute.[38] At the time when this society was established in 1798, there were probably more than 60 carpenters and perhaps 100 or more carpenters and others in related occupations, including shipwrights, cabinetmakers, joiners and boat-builders, in Halifax.

*The Society for the Relief of the Poor*

Nova Scotians, like all other people, have always had their poor, in varying numbers, at different times, and provision has had to be made for them by means of public assessment, voluntary subscription, or otherwise. A new organization was created about a decade after the Carpenters' Society of Halifax came into existence. This was the Society for the Relief of the Poor.[39] It was formed at a meeting of "several Gentlemen of the Town" of Halifax on Thursday, February 10, 1809, called "to consider of the most effectual means for relieving the wants of the Poor at this inclement season." "It was resolved, that those present should immediately form themselves into a Society, by the name of the 'Society For the Relief of the Poor,' and that each person should subscribe half a dollar per week during the six winter months, and ¼ dollar per week during the remainder of the year." Its list of subscribers contained the names of many prominent Haligonians, including the Anglican Bishop, S. B. Robie, Andrew Belcher, E. B. Brenton, R. J. Uniacke, and others. Its treasurer was John Lawson. It had a visiting committee, comprising Rev. Dr. Stanser, Rev. Dr. Gray, Hon. E. B. Brenton, H. N. Binney, Dr. W. J. Almon, and John Lawson, whose duty it was to investigate the cases of all persons applying for relief, and to afford them such assistance as their necessities might appear to require. This society was greeted by a tribute in verse from a subscriber to *The Weekly Chronicle*.[40]

The Society for the Relief of the Poor was still in existence two years later, when a report of its activities was published in *The Royal Gazette*.[41] It had provided aid to needy families in Halifax, Dartmouth, Preston, Chizencook [Chezzetcook], St. Mary's, Sissiboo, Shelburne, Digby, Lawrencetown, Windsor Road, and other places, and had also afforded relief to destitute Indians. This was a social experiment worthy of note, for the Society for the Relief of the Poor, formed in 1809, was a voluntary benevolent organization that dispensed relief throughout the Province, after investigation of the circumstances of those down on their luck. It preceded the Association for the Relief of the Labouring Poor by eight years and the Halifax Poor Man's Friend Society by eleven years.

*A Philanthropic Society*

Before these last two associations were created, there was a Philanthropic Society at Halifax. It was instituted at Halifax on April 29, 1811.[42] During the next three years it met at Mason Hall or the Exchange Coffee House. Its object was "to contribute to the support of the poor friendless Debtor, and lessen the misery of his imprisonment." Each member paid a fee of five shillings and a further sum of three shillings at each quarterly

meeting. In August 1816 its funds had become so depleted from the very steady and pressing calls upon them that a committee of three was appointed to collect arrearages as early as possible.[43] It continued its operations at least until 1824.

*A Marine Humane Society; Oddfellows; and a Friendly Society*

While a number of these charitable societies, as well as the national and patriotic associations, continued to provide relief for the needy in their plight, three or four additional benevolent bodies appeared—the Marine Humane Society, Lodges of Oddfellows and a Friendly Society. Perhaps the Marine Humane Society was a continuation of the Halifax Marine Society of 1786.[44] The Order of Odd Fellowship in England, during a long history, has collected and expended vast sums in the sacred cause of charity; at times its Lodges have taken on some of the attributes of Trade Unions. This Order was apparently introduced into Halifax in 1814 in the form of the Royal Wellington Lodge, one of whose meetings was announced in *The Acadian Recorder* of January 7, 1815;[45] it held its anniversary dinner on September 21, 1815.[46] Another Lodge of Oddfellows—The Loyal Benevolent Bon Accord Lodge—was organized at Halifax in 1815.[47] Both of these Lodges continued to hold meetings in 1816, but they were rather short-lived. The Order was revived about 1830, in a Lodge instituted chiefly in connection with the garrison. It, too, soon ceased to exist—like its predecessors it lacked permanence, owing to the fact that it operated under authority vested in the old country, with headquarters at such a distance and its originators transient persons. By 1851 another attempt had been made to secure to Halifax the benefits of this charitable Order, this time under the auspices of the Grand Lodge of the United States. There was also a Friendly Society in Halifax in 1815 and 1816; it held its meetings in Mason Hall.[48]

*Trade Unions; Master Shoemakers; Master Tailors; Journeymen Tailors; and a Statute*

Before the end of the War of 1812, tradesmen in Nova Scotia, recognizing their common interests, united their efforts to achieve a common solidarity in trade unions of their own. Trade unions might be illegal in the mother country, but combinations were formed in Nova Scotia at this time. Late in 1814 there were complaints that journeymen shoemakers had been prohibited from earning a living by faction and combination in Halifax. One individual, "having taken into consideration the evils which must arise to families, by men being turned out of employment at this inclement season of the year, particularly; and conscious that by Factions and Combinations gaining ground, total misery to families, must be the

final result," publicly announced that he would employ "any or all of them, and [would] give the highest wages to Shoe-makers, in Halifax, during the Winter, or any length of time."[49] It is clear from this notice that the Master Shoemakers had combined to cut the wages of their employees and to dismiss some of them. The fact that these developments occurred near the end of a long and arduous war that had brought "many blessings" to "this favored province" was perhaps more than a coincidence.

Combination was not restricted to Master Shoemakers. "The Association of Master Taylors" and "The Benevolent Society of Journeymen Taylors" were two trade associations that met regularly at Halifax in 1815 and 1816.[50] Nor were combinations to be found only in Halifax. A statute of 1816—an Act to prevent unlawful Combinations of Master Tradesmen, and also of their Workmen and Journeymen—has the following preamble.

> Whereas, great numbers of Master Tradesmen, Journeymen and Workmen, in the Town of Halifax, and other parts of the Province, have, by unlawful Meetings and Combinations, endeavoured to regulate the rate of wages, and to effectuate illegal purposes, . . .[51]

This statute was designed to prevent such practices. It annulled all contracts, covenants and agreements entered into by journeymen, manufacturers, or other workmen, or other persons for obtaining an advance of wages, for lessening or altering their usual hours of working, for decreasing the quantity of work, for preventing or hindering any person from employing whomsoever he chose to employ in his manufacture, trade or business, or for controlling or affecting anyone in carrying on his manufacture, trade or business. Those convicted of the charge of entering into a contract of this sort could be imprisoned for a period not exceeding three months or put in a house of correction for a period not exceeding two months. Journeymen or others combining for such objects, or enticing other men not to hire, or to leave their employment, or hindering employers from hiring men, or endeavouring to do so, or refusing to work with other men, when hired, were subjected to the same punishment. It also annulled all contracts entered into by master tradesmen or manufacturers or others for regulating wages, adding to or altering the usual hours of work, increasing the quantity of work, or for regulating or fixing the price to be paid for any work done, or article made or manufactured by such master tradesmen or manufacturers, or other persons, whereby their customers or others who might deal with them might be affected. Furthermore, the Act was not to be construed to prevent any persons combining to raise prices, prices of labour, goods or provisions from being indicted, prosecuted or punished as for a conspiracy or combination.

*From War to Peace*

By this time the transition from war to peace had brought a striking transformation in the circumstances. During the war commerce had flourished and revenue had expanded while men had been required for military purposes or drawn into privateering. There had been such difficulty in obtaining workmen that the building of Province House proceeded at a snail's pace. Farmers deluded by the phantom prosperity and beguiled by the military contracts for beef, pork and hay had concentrated on grazing to the neglect of tillage. They were ill prepared for the dark days that followed the war when failing markets and falling prices resulted in a general depression which was deepened in Nova Scotia by the loss or failure of crops caused by hungry field mice or unfavourable weather. Disbanded soldiers and others sometimes found employment by the month with farmers, during the summer. They might afterwards be discharged in the inclement season, when they either left for the United States or resorted to a seaport such as Halifax for a precarious support.

*Charitable Societies*

New charitable societies were formed. An Association for the Relief of the Labouring Poor[52] came into being in 1817; it provided soup, wood, and some employment. Arrangements were made the following year to move the Newfoundland immigrants from Halifax to suitable places elsewhere in the Province. A soup kitchen, opened the next winter, continued in operation till 1820. The Halifax Poor Man's Friend Society,[53] a voluntary benevolent association, laudably did its sacred duty to relieve distress from its foundation in 1820 to its finale in 1827.

*Agricultural Societies*

A glimmer of light pierced the darkness that had descended on Nova Scotian farmers in the depths of the post-war depression. This was provided by John Young, a Scottish immigrant merchant and practical farmer of Halifax, whose "Letters of Agricola", from 1818 to 1821, advocating the adoption of scientific methods in agriculture and stressing the importance of making Nova Scotians self-supporting, raised the farmers of the Province to action through agricultural societies. The achievements, even if they did not come up to the first enthusiastic expectation, were rather impressive.

*Trade*

Difficulties confronting other Nova Scotians could not be surmounted overnight. Concessions restored to American fishermen by the Convention

of 1818 aroused the righteous wrath of Nova Scotians. The reduction of the preference on colonial timber in 1821 was disquieting to Nova Scotian lumbermen. The enforcement of the old colonial system under the Commercial Convention of 1815 and the closure of the ports of the United States to British colonial trade in 1818, as the climax of American efforts to penetrate this system and usurp its commerce, had baneful effects in Nova Scotia. These developments precipitated a demand for free ports and for free trade. It was only partly satisfied when Halifax and Saint John were designated as free ports in 1818. Although the Lieutenant-Governor, in his speech at the opening of the Legislature in 1823, congratulated the legislators on the improving state of the Province in almost every branch of its industry,[54] such a day of cheerfulness had not been witnessed in Halifax for ten years as that memorable St. George's Day holiday in 1825, when news of Huskisson's new commercial policy was received.[55] "The town," commented *The Acadian Recorder,* "was on the eve of destruction and daily losing its population;" the new policy had "just come in time to save it from ruin." "All parties, distinctions and animosities were for the time forgotten, and the young and the old; the grave and the gay, thronging the streets, clustered at noted corners or assembled in their families, joined in the exultation. . . Some of the most zelaous assisted in preparing the Province building, and Exchange coffee house, for illumination in the evening. When the day ended, the Province house glittered with light—the national banners of Great Britain floated in the area, and the band of the 74th regiment enlivened the scene with national airs. . . ."[56] New developments in mining resulted in free port privileges being accorded to Pictou and Sydney in 1828. But the admission of Americans to the British West Indies in 1830 lessened the satisfaction caused by the relaxation of a number of the old restraints on trade.

*An Awakening*

Throughout the two decades following the War of 1812 Nova Scotia experienced an intellectual and economic awakening that laid the basis for an evolving colonial culture and heralded the dawn of the golden age of sail. There was an intense local patriotism. Provincial authorities promoted the improvement and the spread of schools. Newspapers increased in number. Libraries were established. Mechanics' Institutes were introduced. There was a marked burgeoning of native literature. Training was offered in the fine arts; an exhibition of paintings was held; the tradition of the theatre continued; and music assumed a larger place. At the same time expanding trade, largely a result of Huskisson's Acts, provided a stimulus for shipbuilding. Communications were improved; stagecoaches were operated; a canal was begun, and a short railway was built. New industries were started; wider opportunities appeared in mining; steam

was introduced; iron works were established. Between 1815 and 1838 more than 40,000 immigrants arrived and by the end of that period the population numbered more than 200,000. Immigration provided more than 13,000 additional people in the ensuing thirteen years, and Nova Scotia had a population of about 364,000 by 1867.

*Mining*

Developments in mining enabled the miners to become conscious of themselves as a class and to begin to act jointly in a common cause. Coal had been mined in Nova Scotia for many years, but a new era began when the General Mining Association obtained a monopoly in the Province in 1825-27 and brought out British miners and mechanics, as well as machinery and equipment, in the spring of 1827. On September 6, 1827 the first coal was raised to the surface at Albion Mines in Pictou County, and precisely three months later for the first time in Nova Scotia a steam engine went into operation there.[57] A foundry was erected and an iron industry was begun. The General Mining Association also commenced operations on Cape Breton Island. Short lines of railway were constructed at these mines and horse-drawn coal cars were used on them. Eventually, on September 19, 1839, that portion of the railway extending from the Albion Mines to the Company's wharves below New Glasgow was traversed by a locomotive for the first time.[58] The railway from the Albion Mines to South Pictou was completed in May 1840 and the locomotives made their first trip from the Mines to the Loading Ground, a distance of over six miles, in about twenty minutes, "carrying in their train a numerous retinue of wagons. . . ."[59]

The policy of the directors of the General Mining Association was evidently to provide for a great expansion of the coal trade, and to this end they built a village near the mines in Pictou County and imported a colony of miners to inhabit it. These colliers, to the patent displeasure of certain persons, were considered as tradesmen. They determined not only to have a say in setting their own wages but also to prohibit other persons from entering the works.[60] Even though common labourers could do two-thirds of their work, the miners insisted upon doing the whole of it themselves, at wages from two to three times as high. Besides their wages, the miners received privileges in rent and fuel—free fuel, in fact, being chargeable only for its delivery. In addition, the colliers had the opportunity of employing their own boys, "a privilege which is always given them." There, then, was a community of tradesmen, employed in the same industry, able to exert a concerted influence for a common interest.

When the demand for coal temporarily declined, the company decided

to cut wages. The miners determined to resist this demand and a strike ensued.

*Strikes*

At a time when there were signs of a trade union revival in Great Britain, with attendant strikes at the coal mines, the strike was used by the miners of Nova Scotia with a view of gaining their ends. The first strike perhaps occurred in the summer of 1840.[61] Much of the coal then mined was exported to the United States where it was chiefly used in iron works, railways, cotton factories and steamboats. For a variety of reasons, including a greater use of Pennsylvanian coal, there was a reduction in the American demand for Nova Scotian coal in 1840. In consequence of this circumstance the secretary and the agents of the General Mining Association decided to cut wages. When J. B. Foord, secretary of the company, visited the Albion Mines in the summer of 1840, it was thought to be for the purpose of ordering the discharge of a large number of men. "We regret to hear this;" declared the editor of *The Mechanic & Farmer,* "and would beg to suggest to the enterprising Proprietors, that if the price of coal was reduced to $3 per chaldron, as it was about five years ago, the demand would be trebled, especially from the United States—where they are for the last year beginning much more extensively to use the Pennsylvania coal—which, though an inferior article to ours, is preferred because the cost is much less. It is true that the Company have been at an immense expense in the construction of rail roads, and other improvements; but it is probable they will not require to expend further for years to come; and it is contrary to all the principles of commerce, for them to anticipate a high price for coal, while every other kind of merchandise has fallen this year below the usual price, in consequence of the general depression of trade.[62] On this occasion it seems that the miners were successful in resisting the proposed reduction in wages. "About two summers since," the editor of the same newspaper stated in 1842, "and at a time when the demand for coal was great, these fellows made a strike for higher wages; and having the proprietors then in a manner in their power, their demand was granted."[63] There was no reduction of wages in 1840.

There was another strike at the Albion Mines in 1841-42.[64] This time the strike attracted greater attention, for it was accompanied by riots. It resulted from a dispute over wages. The company desired to put into effect the decrease that had been proposed in 1840. This would have meant a reduction of four pence per cubic yard of coal. According to the agent of the General Mining Association, the colliers having received a written memorandum of the proposed rate on October 1, 1841, agreed to accept the lower rate on the ninth of the same month. But after working for three days at

the reduced rate the miners struck for an increase of two pence per cubic yard. In other words, the miners were willing to accept a reduction not of four pence but rather of two pence from the old rate. The strike began on November 19, 1841 and lasted till February 9, 1842.

The miners struck for the increase of two pence per cubic yard on November 19th. Five days later the agent of the company caused the horses to be taken out of the pits. In order to put pressure on the men, he stopped their allowance of free coal until they should return to work and he gave notice that the store should withhold the usual supplies until they did so. On the evening of the next day a disturbance occurred. More than one hundred of the women and children of the miners gathered at Mount Rundell, the house of the company's agent, while the miners concealed themselves in the woods surrounding the house. One of the men forced open the outside back-door and the women broke the kitchen shutters and windows. After directing abusive language at Mr. Poole and insisting on the usual allowance of coal, the women left after about an hour, threatening to return the next day. Mr. Poole told them that he would see them at his office the next morning. When he did so, the women insisted that they should continue to receive free coal as when the men were at work. Thereupon he gave them a written memorandum stating "that whoever got coals during the strike for a higher rate of wages would be charged twelve shillings per chaldron, and the coal hauled to their door as usual—the difference of eight shillings per chaldron from the old charges to be returned or not at the option of the Company and the extra charge not to be continued after they returned to work." Within a few days several of the men took advantage of this offer, though they still declined to return. A deputation of three miners called on Mr. Poole on November 29th to inform him that they were still determined not to go to work at the reduced rate and to request from him the address of the Secretary of the Association in London, to whom they intended to send a petition. There was no further threat to Mr. Poole, but a "riot" did also take place in a public house in the neighbourhood during the strike.

At least one editor professed to be horrified by the incident at Mount Rundell and most of the newspapers blamed the miners for the strike.[65] A strike, no matter what its justification, was a thing almost unheard of in Nova Scotia in those days. One Pictou editor heard that the military was on the way from Halifax to coerce and overawe the miners—"a circumstance which must redound to the disgrace of the Mines, and of the County at large."[66] To this printed rumour a Halifax editor replied by saying that the troops had "enough to attend to, without taking a trip to Pictou, to chastise a number of unruly miners."[67]

To one Halifax editor the strike was foolishness—"The Albion Miners holding out for higher wages than their employers can afford to pay."[68] For a time efforts to settle the strike failed. Hon. Samuel Cunard was one of those who tried without success.[69] When about 200 men and boys had been on strike for about ten weeks, it was reported that some of them were willing to resume their work on the Company's terms but that these men were overawed by their leaders. "On one occasion," it was stated, "two of them who expressed a willingness to return to their work, had their effigies burned, and were effectually deterred from entering the pits."[70] It was also reported that some of the striking miners had set off for the United States, leaving their wives and children behind them, "presuming, no doubt, that they will be provided for from the Poors' fund."[71]

Notwithstanding these comments, the miners remained steadfast and the strike lasted about twelve weeks. According to the agent of the company, a good miner would make over ten shillings per day at the old rates, besides the opportunity of employing his boys at 2/6 to 3s. per day, if from 14 to 16 years of age, or 1/6 per day if from 12 to 14. At the rates proposed by the company, according to the same authority, a good miner would make eight shillings per day and the rates for boys would be unchanged. On the other hand, the miners contended that they would be chargeable for oil, powder, etc. to the amount of one shilling per day and that they needed to have full work to make fair wages. Moreover, they added, they had not had more than twelve days of work per month the previous summer and in some cases as few as nine; the remainder of the time they were either idle or working above ground at four shillings per day. One investigator was critical of the monopoly enjoyed by the miners. "Sometimes," he declared, "the miners take an apprentice who by the payment of a fee obtains the standing of a miner, but the employer can not send a single man among them. There is no business with which I am acquainted that could sustain itself against the influence of such a monopoly as this."[72] As a consequence of this monopoly, he claimed, it was necessary for the purpose of having a proper supply of miners for an emergency to encourage more of them to remain at the mines than could be employed and to pay them a high rate of wages when they worked to make up for the time they were idle. For the same reason, he added, a greater number of labourers was required than could at all times be advantageously employed. Moreover, the irregularity in the arrival of vessels to take away coal caused a corresponding irregularity in their work. "It is this high price of labour," he declared, "in conjunction with the scheme forced upon the agents by circumstances beyond their control of keeping two distinct parties of men for different departments of work that is the cause of the present embarassments [sic]. The mistake by which this state of things was brought about, probably arose from applying the maxims and practice of England to

a country under different circumstances." At that time, at the Albion Mines there were 91 well finished houses, 21 smaller and inferior ones, and 110 old log houses, most of which were quite habitable.

Before the strike ended, the services of Hon. George Smith were used in the investigation and suppression of the disturbance at the Albion Mines.[73] This was more investigation than suppression, but Smith, who was accompanied by a magistrate, had several of the most troublesome men bound over to appear before the General Sessions for being in a riot in a public house in the neighbourhood during the strike.

The strike ended in February 1842 when the company accepted the terms proposed by the miners. "Operations at the Mines have been suspended the greater part of this winter," commented *The Yarmouth Herald,* "in consequence of the workmen having *struck* for higher wages. The Company held out for several weeks—but felt at last obligated to succumb, and accept the terms demanded by the Miners, who have thereupon returned to their employment. We are ignorant of the merits of the dispute, but observe that the newspapers blame the workmen."[74]

Several other disputes over wages occurred at the coal mines in Nova Scotia between 1842 and 1867. It appears that there was one at the mines in Pictou County in 1846 and that it culminated in a strike for higher wages. "Several of the masters of the vessels had protested against the Company, and at noon on the 10th [of September], word was received at the Landing place that most of the miners had returned to their work. Ultimately they all returned." Other demands for higher wages also resulted in a strike at Sydney Mines in 1864.

*Movement for Shorter Hours*

Meantime shorter hours of work became an urgent goal for some workmen. The young men in the dry goods stores of Halifax, which were open evenings as well as days, attempted to reduce their hours of work by appealing to the women to do their shopping during the day. This was a pathetic but futile gesture; it availed little and the shops remained open.[76] Soon the demand for shorter hours of work took a new form, and a half-holiday movement sprang up at Halifax and in other centres. The mechanics of Halifax began to press for the closing of establishments at one o'clock on Saturdays.[77] In June 1862 the mayor was urged to call a public meeting to consider the pressing need for a weekly half-holiday. Many citizens seemed to be incensed at what they regarded as an outrageous request, whereas others hoped that it would ameliorate the conditions of the workmen. The half-holiday programme was inaugurated at a number

of Halifax shops on June 28, 1862,[78] but few Haligonians sympathized enough with the movement to inconvenience themselves. Instead, they thronged the shops that remained open. At Pictou the next year the absence of reading room, debating club and other societies for the promotion of the welfare of the place was attributed to the fact that the young men were so taken up with business that they had no time to attend. It was suggested that the adoption of the early closing system would remedy this situation.[79]

*Need for Organization*

By the 1860's there was an evident need for effective labour unions in Nova Scotia. The times were in some, if not all, respects propitious for such organizations as would be militant in seeking reasonable goals in wages, hours of work and collective bargaining, and at the same time sensible of and responsive to the Provincial welfare. The miners must have used at least a rudimentary form of combination in their disputes over wages but something more adequate, with recognized general acceptance, was required. There was a similar need in a variety of trades, and it was felt by the carpenters, shipwrights and caulkers in Halifax and Dartmouth, and acknowledged even by some citizens at large. There was a demand for societies for mutual protection. Charitable activities were desired, but benevolence was not the only thing needed.

*New Trade Unions*

Late in 1863 steps were taken to organize two trade unions. One was of house joiners; the other was of shipwrights and caulkers.

*House Joiners Union Society of Halifax*

The journeymen carpenters, "a numerous and highly respectable class of citizens," held several meetings in Halifax for the purpose of promoting the interests of the body.[80] "It is indeed passing strange in a city such as Halifax, which has nearly four hundred carpenters," an editor declared, "there should have been no similar organization until the present period." "The omission," he added, "of course lies with the men themselves. Our 'chips', having now passed the rubicon, may now be expected to exhibit that manly independence, coupled with a judicious course of procedure, the practice of which cannot fail to give them their proper position in this community. Such associations are to be found in every city on both sides of the Atlantic, and the time has arrived when the citizens of Halifax should go and do likewise. Properly managed, this Society may be expected to result in much advantage to all concerned." For those who asked

why it was that so many of our young tradesmen left the land of their birth to seek a livelihood in the United States, one of the journeymen carpenters had a ready answer. It was this: the disadvantages under which they labour. Why did those who remained submit to these unfavourable conditions? "The reasons for remaining, and submitting to these disadvantages, are mainly owing to the conduct of the journeymen themselves. They alone are to blame. They have never tried to redeem themselves. They have never attempted to remove the difficulties and grievances under which they labour. They have never sought to elevate themselves to the position a mechanic ought to occupy; even now a great many of them, instead of coming forward and aiding the present movement, treat it with indifference. This is not as it should be. Those that have joined the Society have reason to be of good cheer. They have their own destiny and that of their fellow-craftsmen in their hands, and none but themselves will be to blame if they do not rise to that position to which as men and mechanics they are justly entitled." The objects of this society, as stated by the chairman of the meeting in the Committee Room, Temperance Hall, when it was formed in December 1863, were as follows: to defray expenses incurred by deaths among the members and support during sickness; to provide for widows and families of deceased members; to educate and apprentice orphan children of deceased members; and to establish a uniform and equable rate of wages in the city.[81]

At that meeting more than one hundred members enrolled and appropriate action was taken. A code of rules was adopted; a committee of five was appointed to prepare the necessary papers for soliciting an Act of Incorporation; and the Society was duly organized.

Shortly afterwards the committee applied to the House of Assembly for incorporation. Its petition was as follows: "That your petitioners duly appreciating the benefits accruing from similar institutions in Britian [sic] and elsewhere, and aspiring to that social position which can only be attained by such organizations have formed themselves into a Trade Union under the designation of the 'House-Joiners Union Society of Halifax' and respectfully submit for the consideration of your Honorable House, the annexed draft of an Act of Incorporation."[82] This petition was presented to the House on February 13, 1864, and the Act was passed on March 31, 1864. By this statute the House Joiners' Union Society of Halifax was made a body corporate "for the purpose of defraying expenses consequent on the death of their members, for the support of members during illness, for making provision for the maintenance of the widows and families of deceased members, and the education and apprenticeship of orphan children of deceased members."[83] There is no mention here of establishing a uniform and equable rate of wages. The reason for the omission is that the

bill was amended by the Legislative Council. It deleted from the first clause the words "for the establishment of an equable rate of wages for and among the several members of the Society." Thereby the Legislative Council, while approving charitable activities for trade unions, frowned upon any tendency towards collective bargaining by them.[84] Within a few weeks, moreover, another statute was to deal with the topic of wages in a manner designed to curb even more strictly the activities of combinations or trade unions.

*Shipwrights and Caulkers' Association of Halifax and Dartmouth*

The second trade union instituted late in 1863 was the Shipwrights and Caulkers' Association of Halifax and Dartmouth. Its petition for incorporation was presented to the House of Assembly on February 15, 1864 and the Act was passed on April 18, 1864. In this manner it was created a body corporate "for the purpose of assisting the several members of their association in case of sickness or death in their families, and in other cases beneficial to their members and their families; and also for the purpose of carrying out their several trades more advantageously for the mercantile communities of Halifax and Dartmouth."[85] It encountered difficulties at the outset when the storekeeper of the Dockyard refused to allow any of the governmental employees to become members. By participating in meetings and processions in support of the movement for Confederation it was subjected to criticism. As a result it decided to take no further part in political demonstrations.[86]

*The Albion Mines Union Association*

The Albion Mines Union Association, previously known as the Union Association at the Albion Mines, was also incorporated in 1864. It was empowered to hold and possess real estate, not exceeding ten thousand dollars in value.[87]

Labour organizations were being instituted in Nova Scotia but soon they encountered suspicion and hostility. Protection of the interests of their members was enough to arouse the distrust and the opposition of some employers, who made little effort to appreciate the point of view of their employees or to see anything between docility and defiance. It is always possible, of course, that workmen might be misguided. Contemporary reports in the newspapers of those days, whenever difficulties or disputes arose between workmen and management, almost invariably presented a stark contrast between enlightened employer and rude, lawless, misguided men. "It is true," *The Morning Chronicle* declared, "that humanity has rights, and the right of laboring at such occupations and at

such wages as the individual can obtain, is one of them; but past experience has proved that working men, in the long run, can gain but little by resorting to strikes."[88]

*A Strike at the Sydney Mines*

The strike at Sydney Mines in 1864 was one of the bitterest concerted cessations of work in Nova Scotia during the period. It was the climax of a dispute between miners and management over wages. This dispute was the basic element in the mixture, but there were other ingredients. It smouldered for a while and then flamed into an irreconcilable discord, for which exaggerated rumours provided menacing overtones. "A combination," *The Nova Scotian* announced, "has for some time been formed at Sydney Mines of that character which is usually known as a "strike for wages."[89] "The strike of the colliers at the Sydney Coal Mines," *The Morning Chronicle* declared, "threatens to result in serious and unfortunate consequences."[90] Report or rumour had it that the men had, in a body, taken possession of the works and stopped the pumps, with the result that the pits were rapidly filling with water. It was even said that many of the strikers, in arms, threatened death to any who commenced work for the agent before their demands for increased wages had been granted. "Various rumours regarding this lamentable affair have been afloat in Pictou for several days past," *The Eastern Chronicle* stated, "but we have been unable to rely upon any that were sufficiently authenticated to be safely depended upon, as giving the facts of the case." Notwithstanding this recognition of the necessity of discounting the miasma of unfounded rumour, even that newspaper commented: "Enough however is known to warrant the assertion that a violent outbreak of a most serious character has been committed by these misguided men."[91]

Brown, the superintendent of the mines, strove to break the strike. He tried to hire new men to replace the miners who had ceased work in support of their demand for higher wages. No new men could be hired unless they were provided with houses in which to live. The Company's houses were the homes of the striking miners, who were naturally reluctant to be without roofs over their heads. Brown took steps to have the houses legally repossessed. He also quickly appealed to the Government for help, and the authorities hastily complied with his request.

*Troops Sent*

Troops were soon on the way to Sydney Mines. On May 9th the Administrator of the Government made known to the Major General Commanding (the Administrator being the Major General Commanding) his

desire that troops should be dispatched. The next morning a detachment from the 2nd Battalion of the 17th Regiment was ready to embark[92] It consisted of one field officer, one captain, two subalterns, an assistant surgeon and 100 men. There being no steamer immediately available, Major C. Heigham and his men left Halifax in S.S. *Delta* on May 13th. Reaching Sydney on the 15th, they marched to the mines and encamped. The purpose for which they went to the Sydney Mines was, in Major Heigham's words, "to assist the Civil power in turning some ringleaders of the Strike out of their Houses, which they refused to give up. . . ."[93]

*Legislation*

In the meantime, before the detachment sailed from Halifax for Sydney, the Government turned to legislation. The bill—An Act relating to the Combination of Workmen—was rushed through all its stages on one day—May 10th.[94] The Attorney General presented it. It was read a first and *nem. con.,* a second time, committed to a committee of the whole house reported from the committee without amendment, and, engrossed, was read a third time and passed. This was expeditious work. Strikes were not to be condoned; strikers were to be coerced; and striking miners were not to be allowed to remain in their own homes, if their houses were owned by the company which was their employer.

This statute of 1864 was designed to meet the exigencies of the situation at the Sydney mines, but it was bound to have a signal effect upon the labour movement in the Province for some time to come. It did permit workmen, or employers, to meet, discuss and determine rates of pay or prices to be demanded or paid, hours of work, and agreements. But having discussed one of these goals as much as they liked, this statute provided no legal means of achieving it if the employer disagreed. If any person, "by violence . . . , or by threats or intimidation, or by molesting, or in any way obstructing another, force, or endeavour to force, any manufacturer or person carrying on any trade, mining operations, or business, . . ." to raise wages or reduce hours, he was liable to be imprisoned or imprisoned at hard labour for a period of up to twelve months. Few actions that workmen might take to improve their lot could not be construed as "obstructing another" or as "an endeavor to force." Earlier in the year, without having a strike in immediate contemplation, the legislators had so amended an act of incorporation of a trade union as to cut out any reference to the establishment of an equable rate of wages and to have it apply only to charitable activities. Now this new general act slammed the door against effective action on the part of workmen to achieve their goals or to settle disputes.

Having been sent to the Sydney Mines simply in aid of the civil power,

the troops could act only under the orders of a magistrate. They were accompanied by Samuel Macdonnell,[95] member of the Legislative Assembly for Inverness County, lawyer and Justice of the Peace. On Monday, May 16th, the day after their arrival, Macdonnell called on Brown and, having learned that legal notices to give up their houses had been served on the miners, he sent for a few of the more prominent ones promoting and sustaining the strike. The miners, meeting in a schoolhouse nearby, sent a deputation of six to see him, whereupon Macdonnell demanded that all the houses should be given up to Brown. Their answer was that they had retained a lawyer and would abide by the law. Macdonnell told them that he would give them till a certain hour the next day to deliver the houses to Brown; if they did not do so, he would immediately use force to compel them. They departed for consultation and returned shortly afterwards to request Macdonnell to "grant an audience to their counsel." Macdonnell peremptorily declined this request and reiterated his demand that the houses should be relinquished at the specified time. Before that hour nearly all had yielded up possession of their houses. Accompanied by three constables, Macdonnell then visited the houses of a few who were reluctant to leave or dilatory in doing so. He obtained the keys of the houses or, in cases in which keys were not surrendered, caused the doors to be bolted. A day later about thirty persons resumed work in the mines. The day after that "all that had not previously left, except such as would not be retained, were re-employed and at work." Brown anticipated that within a few days the mines would be in as active operation as before the strike.

"It was quite necessary," Macdonnell reported to the Provincial Secretary, "to have sent down the troops and I have no doubt the strike would be persisted in and acts of violence committeed, were not the means pursued adopted to quash the proceeding." "Altho' the Troops were not actually required to act," Major Heigham stated to his superior, "it was the opinion of the Superintendent and others connected with the Mines, that these Houses would not have been vacated, and no work would have been done this Summer had we not been sent, so that our presence there had the desired effect."[96] "There can be no doubt," Macdonnell concluded, "but the prompt measures taken by the Government to put down the Strike in question, the first attempt of the kind ever made in the Province, will have the salutary effect of preventing for the future any such movement among persons engaged in mining operations in any part of the Country & this is more important and desirable owing to the rapid increase and development of mining interests through the Province." This is perhaps the best case that can be made for the action taken by the authorities.

There can be no doubt, however, that there is another side to the story! The miners had been put in a bad light by exaggerated statements in Hali-

fax newspapers and by distorting rumours. There was little attempt to see their situation, to appreciate their point of view, or to investigate the causes of their actions. "It was at one time apprehended," the Cape Breton *News* declared, "that the men attending the horses in the pit, and the Engines there and at the Pits mouth, would be similarly deterred, when the most disastrous consequences would speedily ensue. But, with the exception it is reported, of one day's absence from the pit of the stableman, and others, a sufficient force has been at work to keep the water in the pit under control, and to attend to the horses' wants."[97] A finger of light is focused on another aspect of the matter by *The Eastern Chronicle* of Pictou at a time when rumour was magnifying the enormity of the miners' actions. ". . . These poor men, ignorant, rude and lawless as they have now shewn themselves to be, have election after election at the various works of the association been led up to the polls like sheep to the shambles, not to exercise in freedom the great boon of a public franchise, but to record their votes to suit the political views of their employers." "Even a poor worm will turn under the heel that treads upon it," it added, "and it is not wonderful that the system of tyranny that we have mentioned should, among uneducated men, produce a spirit of defiance and lawlessness."[98]

An interesting sequel is disclosed in the financial responsibility for the conveyance of the troops. The imperial authorities refused to accept it, for the reason that the purpose was exclusively of a local character. It was then agreed that the cost would be borne jointly by the Government and the General Mining Association. The total amount, £538/11/8, including $200 for Samuel Macdonnell, was, however, eventually paid by the Provincial Government.[99]

*A Strike of Carpenters at Halifax*

A fortnight after the Sydney Mines strike ended, another one occurred at Halifax. The journeymen house joiners went out on strike when the master carpenters refused to comply with their demand for higher wages. On June 3rd it was reported that about one hundred and fifty carpenters were on strike and that business in the building trade was at a standstill in the city.[100] The house joiners had been receiving from 5s.6d. to 6s. per day; now they demanded 8s. *The Acadian Recorder* showed scant sympathy for the strikers:

> It may be that the rate of wages has been a little too low, and we have not a doubt that without this movement on the part of the mechanics, wages would have gradually gone up . . . We very seldom see strikes resulting in any good to the mechanic . . . if the mechanics begin to show

an unfair spirit the employers will naturally resort to means by which fresh sources of supply may be opened up.[101]

But these strikers in Halifax had at least one advantage over those in the Sydney Mines. They were near enough for the reasonableness of their claims to be evident to any fair minded editor or reporter in the capital. "We are very glad," *The British Colonist* declared on June 4th, "that most of the employers have complied with the request of the men; and work has been pretty generally resumed."[102] "It is satisfactory to learn," commented *The Halifax Reporter,* "that several of the master carpenters have complied with the terms asked for by the journeymen house joiners, and many of the latter resumed work yesterday. The rate of wages is henceforth to be 8s. per diem; this will not apply, if we are correctly informed, to contracts entered upon prior to the organization of the 'Union'. So far as we can learn, there was no demur on the part of master builders to augment the wages of the masons to $2 per day. We have not heard how the shipwrights and caulkers have arranged matters; but it may be fairly assumed there will be no difficulty experienced in coming to an amicable adjustment."[103]

The merits of the carpenters' case overcame the aversion to strikes in the mind of this newspaperman. "The question of strikes," he stated, "is indeed a delicate one with which to deal. But when such matters are broadly before the community, false delicacy must be waived, and the public journalist is expected to express some opinion on the subject. This can be given, on the question before us, in very few words. It has so happened in Halifax that, ever since the peace of 1815, up to a comparatively recent period, the wages paid to mechanics, as a general rule, averaged about 5s. per day. During the greater portion of the period the cost of living in this city was remarkably moderate. We know right well there were times and seasons when the necessaries of life, advanced in price. And on one of these occasions, some years since, the pay of persons in all the public departments was augmented to meet the emergency. With, here and there an exception, this kind consideration has not been extended to the mechanic class. And it has left until this late period for the workmen to ask for what is, after all, a corresponding amount of remuneration for their skill and labour which the altered circumstances of the times imperatively demand. There can be no doubt whatever that a dollar would go farther in a family twenty years ago, than double that sum can be made to supply at the present day. Under the circumstances, therefore, the workmen are justified in looking out for themselves and the dear ones dependent on them for their daily bread. . . ."

*The Stone Cutters and Masons' Association of Halifax and Nova Scotia*

Another labour union—The Stone Cutters and Masons' Association of Halifax and Nova Scotia—was incorporated in 1865.[104] It was thus created a body corporate "for the purpose of assisting members during sickness, contributing towards their funeral expenses in case of death, providing for widows and families of deceased members, and also for other benevolent purposes." It is clear that as yet labour unions had not obtained the undisputed sanction of legislation for much more than charitable objects. It is also evident, however, that they were attempting and in some measure achieving other results as well.

*Rumours*

The most alarming report from the Albion Mines in 1865 seems to have been an exaggeration. This was that a strike for higher wages had erupted in June and that, their demands having been rejected, the miners had resorted to high-handed measures. An attempt, it was alleged, had been made to burn down Mount Rundell, the residence occupied by the family of the late James Scott, agent of the General Mining Association.[105] This report, however, was discounted and, in part, denied. "We are glad to learn that the *'Recorder'* has been misinformed concerning the state of affairs at the Albion Mines." So stated *The British Colonist,* which declared that there had been no strike there and that the supposed attempt to destroy the Agent's house "seems rather to have been some drunken follow lighting his pipe by striking his match on the bark of a birch tree, which set fire to it, but the fire went out of itself, doing no damage. . . ."[106] Before these accounts had circulated, however, there was another well-founded one that many miners were leaving Pictou for the new mines in Cape Breton. A schooner left Pictou on May 24th for the Block House Mines at Cow Bay [Port Morien], with more than twenty miners, some of them accompanied by their families.[107]

*The Attitude Towards Unions*

When steps were taken to incorporate the Halifax Co-operative Society in 1866, the distaste of some Nova Scotian legislators for combinations of workmen was disclosed in debate.[108] One Member of the Legislative Assembly stated that he understood that good reason existed for narrowly watching the introduction of such measures. Another cited a case which in his opinion showed their injurious effects. A number of ship carpenters came to the city to procure work, he said, and applied for employment where a government vessel was under repair, but they were unable to obtain work, "owing to the combination of resident laborers, and they were told that if

they wished to be employed they must join the society which had been formed." A third member of the House had also heard of similar instances and "could well understand how injurious to the public interests such occurrences were." Still another member said that "a good deal of dissatisfaction existed among the shipowners of the community on the subject under discussion. Several instances had occurred in which carpenters who sought employment had not joined the association, and when they attempted to go to work on a ship on which the members of such association were engaged, the latter struck work. These were the representations made; whether they were entirely correct or not he was not prepared to say; but he had heard a good deal of complaint on the subject. The regulations of these associations, he understood, were such as not to admit of their members working in the same shop or yard with uninitiated workmen; the employers were at perfect liberty to engage such persons, but a strike was the consequence. . . ." He hoped that the discussion which had occurred would induce the merchants and ship carpenters to present their case to the House and ask an investigation, "for if the operation of such societies was to create monopoly and prevent men coming to the city and engaging in work, some remedy should be applied. . . ." Other members pointed out, however, that the House had no power to apply any remedy, for the carpenters could associate together and refuse to work, as had been described, even if no act of incorporation had been passed.

*Conclusion*

The labour movement in Nova Scotia was making progress and learning lessons. In the main, workmen had to look out for themselves, as much as they could, if they were to achieve anything like their rightful place in society and a standard of living in line with their contributions to society. In seeking these goals they were confronted by the hostility of owners and management, important segments of legislature and press, and other parts of the population. Yet they were associating, organizing and acting with these ends in view, taking a number of steps forward, ascertaining the obstacles to be surmounted, and learning important lessons in how to marshal their strength for collective bargaining.

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Appendix 71, page 156. Also George Smith to John Whidden, Deputy Provincial Secretary, dated at Pictou, December 8, 1841, with Henry Poole's statement of November 30, 1841. Public Archives of Nova Scotia, Assembly Papers, Reports and Resolutions, 1842. Smith was of opinion that although it might not have been the direct cause of the assault on Mr. Poole's house, the ease with which the miners could obtain liquor at the Company's store was bound to result in mischievous consequences.

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