



4.158 The Union of Municipal Workers in the St. John's Labour Day Parade, September 1930

The first Labour Day Parade in St. John's was held in 1897. Events like this helped create a sense of collective identity among workers.

TOPIC 4.10

The Labour Movement

If you owned a business, would you prefer if your employees were part of a union?

Why are strikes sometimes necessary?

Introduction

The industrial revolution had positive and negative effects. While mass production meant that manufactured goods became more readily available, the rise of factories meant that many employees worked for low wages in unsafe conditions. Over time, workers began to question these conditions and create formal and informal groups to improve their situation. This **labour movement** unfolded differently in Newfoundland and Labrador than it did in many other places in North America.

As many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians were involved in the fishery rather than industrialized pursuits, the pace of the labour movement was slower here than in many of the larger North American cities. There are several reasons why the fishery did not encourage **unionization** in the same way that construction and

manufacturing industries did. First, most fishers were not wage earners – their labour was exchanged for goods provided by merchants on credit as opposed to cash payment. Second, due to the pattern of settlement around the coast, most fishers worked in relative isolation and there was little opportunity to come together in large numbers to discuss and explore common concerns.

Despite these challenges, there are some examples of fishers gathering to protest when they felt they were being treated unfairly – such as the sealers' strikes in the 1830s and 1840s. Over time, formal societies and unions began to be established to represent their members' interests. This process occurred first among craftspeople (skilled workers), then among industrial workers, and finally among fishers.

Early Organizations

The earliest formal workers' organizations in Newfoundland and Labrador were created by skilled workers, or craftsmen. The Mechanics' Society was established in 1827 as a "protective association" and was based on similar organizations in Britain. The Society was concerned with its members' welfare. It established a sickness insurance plan and program of death benefits. Initially it included coopers, shoemakers, tailors, bookkeepers, and bakers. However, by the 1850s many of these groups had formed their own societies.

Neither the Mechanics' Society nor other craft societies had the authority to negotiate wages on behalf of their members. Instead, these organizations tried to limit the availability of members' services. They did this by restricting the number of apprentices, people who could learn and practise their crafts. This happened first among the highly skilled tradesmen associated with the fishery – **shipwrights, caulkers, joiners, riggers, blockmakers, mastmakers, sailmakers, and coopers**. The consequence was an increased demand for their work, and thus higher wages.



4.159 The evolution of the labour movement was different in Newfoundland and Labrador than in many other parts of North America.

In larger cities, many workers were thrown together in unsafe working conditions and child labour was not uncommon. This encouraged many workers to take action for improvements. However, in Newfoundland and Labrador, the isolated work of fishers did not lend itself to the same kind of worker organization. (left) Child labourers at a glass and bottle factory in New York, 1908. This photo was taken by Lewis W. Hine, an American photographer who worked to end child labour by documenting it. (below) Jack Manning and R. Dicks stack their fish in Harbour Buffett, c. 1930s. Although often at the mercy of the merchants who bought their fish, most fishers were technically self-employed. This made it more difficult for them to organize themselves to fight for better working and market conditions.



4.160 A tinsmith at work

Tinsmiths such as the one shown here c. 1900, were one of the groups of skilled tradesmen that formed their own union.



4.161 Those involved in the shipbuilding trade were some of the first tradesmen to organize in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Shown here is the *General Byng* under construction at Stapleton's Point, c. 1918-20.

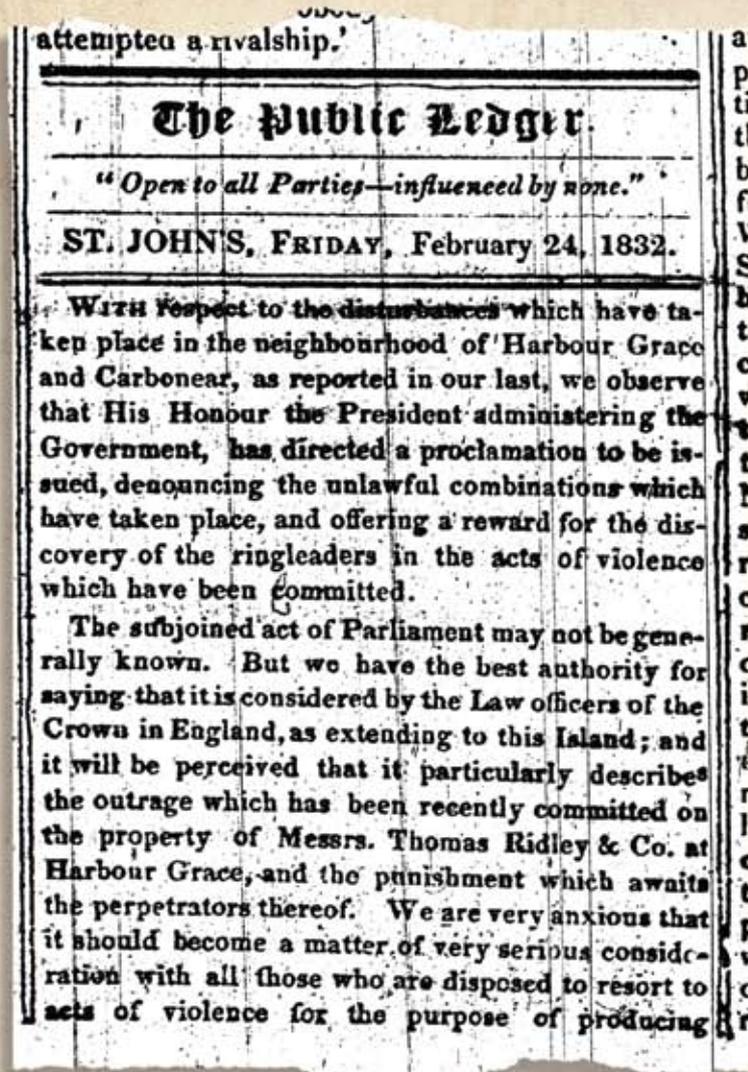
SEALERS' STRIKES & OTHER LABOUR PROTESTS

On February 18, 1832, a group of over 100 men protested an attempt by some local merchants to pay sealers with credit notes rather than with cash by destroying the *Perseverance*, a sealing schooner that was tied up at a wharf in Harbour Grace. As participation in the seal fishery was the only way that many east coast Newfoundlanders could earn cash back then, the merchants' efforts were seen as a serious threat to a valuable source of income.

An investigation ensued regarding the destruction of the schooner, but the men involved were never identified. Finally, the merchants agreed to the fishers' demands, and the method of cash payment in the seal fishery was secured. The 1832 strike was a lasting success.

Other sealers' protests occurred throughout the 1840s – especially with regards to the high cost of acquiring berths on sealing ships. Some of these protests were in the form of a “manus” – a refusal to work. According to historian Shannon Ryan, this “seems to have been unique to Newfoundland. It ... differed from a mutiny in that there was no attempt to commandeer the vessel. The men often piled their gaffs and tow ropes on deck and refused to pursue seals, although they would allow others to do so and would agree to work the sails to take a vessel back to port.”

The last formal sealers' strike occurred in St. John's in 1902, when it was announced that the price of seal fat would be reduced. Approximately 3000 men refused to sail north and marched to Government House in protest. There were negotiations between the sealers and ship owners, and after three days the strike ended. Merchants were made aware that sealers were willing to protect their interests, even though a formal sealers' union never emerged.



4.162 News of the sealers damaging the sealing schooner in Harbour Grace from *The Public Ledger*, Feb. 24, 1832

Unionization

The first skilled craftsmen to organize into a union were shipwrights in 1851. Between 1886 and 1898, 18 new trade unions were established. They lobbied for higher wages, opposed wage reductions, and sought better (and often safer) working conditions for their members. These unions contributed to a growing working-class consciousness.

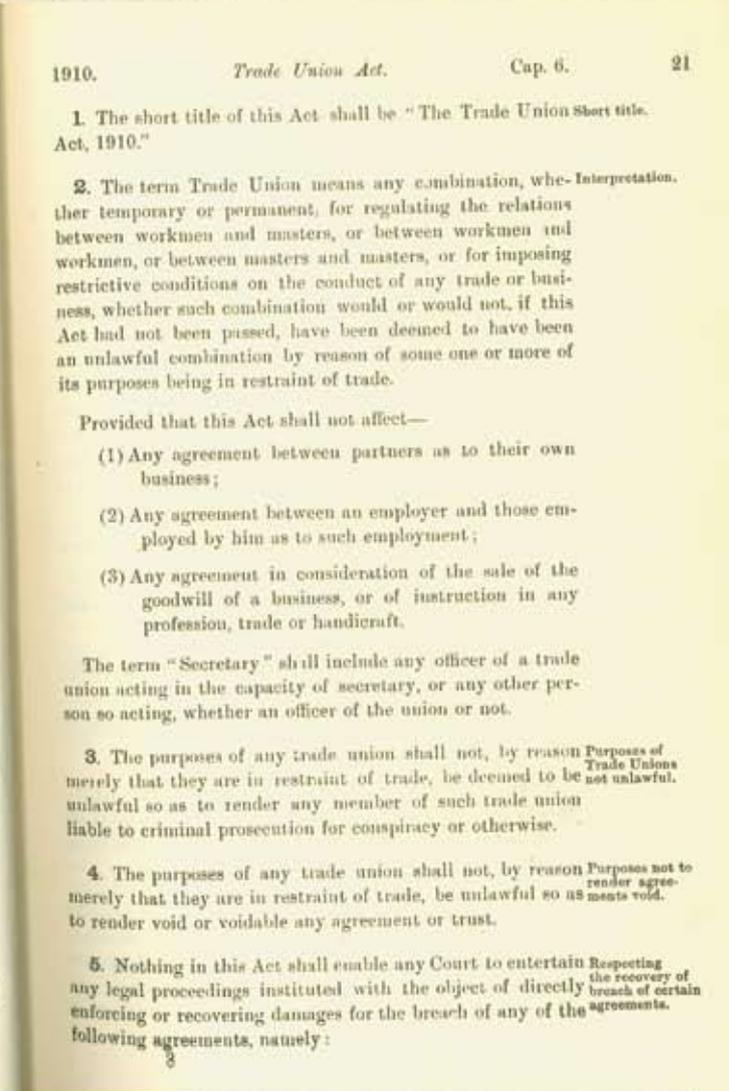
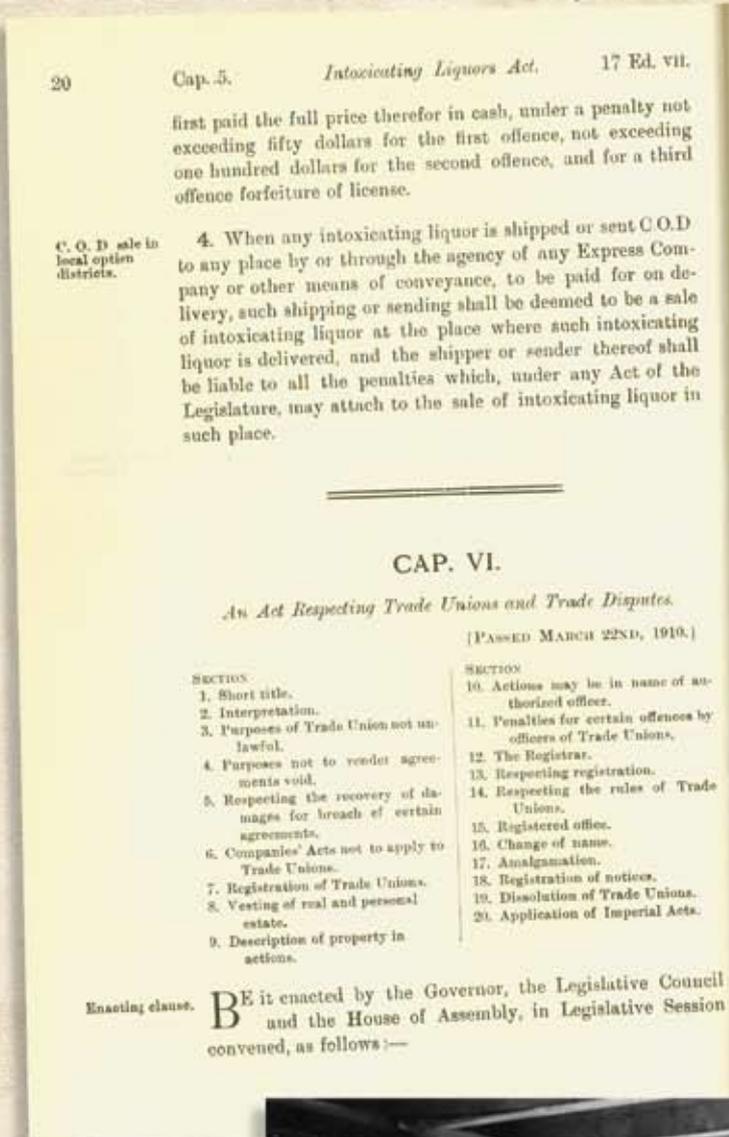
The labour movement in Newfoundland expanded with the construction of the railway and the development of land-based industries. These new industries were operated by large international corporations, some of which introduced local branches of international unions, such as the International Brotherhood of Paper Makers, Local 88 in Grand Falls (1910) and Local 242 in Corner Brook (1925). Unlike craft societies, these unions had the authority to negotiate on behalf of members for changes in wages and other benefits. Unions gained these legal rights under the *Trade Union Act* passed in 1910. Unions were now an established part of Newfoundland and Labrador society.

In addition to the establishment of international unions, “home grown” unions also developed. By the end of the nineteenth century many St. John's merchants began expanding their own factories, warehouses, and fish processing centres – all of which

required greater numbers of employees. Many workers organized themselves and established unions to represent their interests. These included the Wabana Workmen's and Labourers' Union in 1900, the Longshoremen's

Protective Union in 1903, and the Newfoundland Industrial Workers' Association in 1917. These unions fought for increased wages, better working conditions, and recognition.

4.163 The Trade Union Act of 1910 gave trade unions legal rights.



*It is unlikely that this individual was a member of a union. Why?

4.164 The Retail Clerks' Union
 Formed in 1868, this was the first union in Newfoundland and Labrador to include women as members. Shown here is a retail clerk* in a Grenfell Mission co-operative store in St. Anthony in 1939.



'Longshoremen's Protective Union

Unity, Equity, Progress



"None cease to rise, but those
who cease to climb."



4.165 The LSPU logo
from their letterhead.

4.166 Weighing and
tallying seals by
longshoremen,
c. 1920-29

The weighing and tallying
of seals was done by
longshoremen, members of
the St. John's Longshoremen's
Protective Union (LSPU).

The Longshoremen's Protective Union (LSPU)

One of the longest operating and most successful unions in Newfoundland was the Longshoremen's Protective Union (LSPU), formed in 1904. The LSPU represented the interests of dockworkers in St. John's, although it was initially created by steamboat labourers – the most skilled workers on the waterfront. The steamboat labourers were responsible for loading and unloading the cargo that passed through the port of St. John's each year. They had the ability to delay the transfer of cargo in order to protest wages or working conditions and held 25 such strikes between 1890 and 1903.

Dockworkers faced poor working conditions. Most were casual employees hired by the hour or by the day. Their work was tied to the arrival and departure of vessels transporting cargo. As a result, employment was sporadic, averaging only about six months per year. Further, wage schedules were not consistent from year to year – or between the various waterfront merchant companies. Dockworkers struck frequently before 1903 in order to gain minimal increases in wages that often were "clawed back."

Were the men always satisfied with the four shillings (80 cents) a day up to now?
"No ... there have been strikes on one or two wharves where cargo was being discharged and on one occasion men got an increase of 10 cents for a while, but the old rates soon resumed."

How do you account for this?

"The men were too poor to stick it out ... and the absence of anything like a combination among the men, accounts for the low wages they have been receiving ..."

4.167 Excerpt from an interview with St. John's dockworkers
in *The Daily Colonist*, Sept. 20, 1890

Participating in a strike could be risky for St. John's dockworkers. Strikers could be replaced by crews of fishing schooners and other transient workers. If a strike was unsuccessful, strikers risked being dismissed by the employer and blacklisted. This made many dockworkers hesitant to strike before the LSPU brought them together in a strong and successful organization. The LSPU was formed in May 1903 to protest the low wages of St. John's steamboat labourers compared to those in Halifax. Although the LSPU only achieved 15 cents an hour (compared to 20 cents in Halifax), they secured a standardized wage schedule from the merchant companies and gained recognition from the merchants as

a formal labour organization. Membership in the LSPU increased from 200 in 1903 to 2600 in 1914.

Over time the LSPU monopolized labour along the waterfront in St. John's. It distributed union badges in order to identify strikebreakers and non-unionized workers, excluded transient workers, and imposed uniform hours and wages. It created a Juvenile Branch in 1913, and started a night school program for boy labourers. Strikes became better organized, and were successful in both gaining and protecting benefits gained by workers. The LSPU brought stability to workers on the St. John's waterfront.

Oh we are the men today,
that struck for higher pay
For we are the bone
and sinew of this land
For our rights we did uphold
and like men we struck out bold,
And determined all to
take a manly stand.

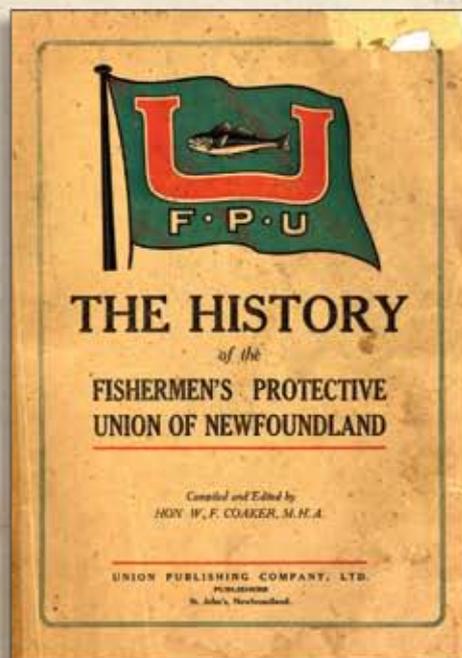
We are the Steam Boat Labor Union,
We got the terms that we did like,
For to help the working man we
were foremost in the van,
The Steam Boat Labor Union strike.

4.168 Excerpt from a Johnny Burke song (title unknown)

The Fishermen's Protective Union (FPU)

Another union that became powerful in the first part of the twentieth century was the Fishermen's Protective Union started in 1908 by William Coaker. The situation for fishers in 1908 was particularly bad as unusually large catches of fish had created a surplus in global markets.

This caused merchants to undercut each other's prices, driving the price of fish down. In the midst of this difficult situation, William Coaker saw an opportunity to organize fishers and help get a fairer deal for those living in outport Newfoundland and Labrador.



4.169 *The History of the Fishermen's Protective Union* (left) was written by William Coaker in 1920.



4.170 The FPU logo (right) A FPU member stands next to the FPU insignia embossed on the Fishermen's Union Trading Company store blind at Port Union (date unknown).



4.171 Sir William Coaker and Governor Allardyce being welcomed in Elliston by a bugle band in 1923.



In historian Ian MacDonald's words:

What was unique about Coaker was ... an unusual degree of social and political acumen, which enabled him to perceive two divergent societies – the outports and St. John's – and the commercial and social factors that linked and divided them. In 1908 he took the fishermen's lot on his own shoulders, and walking the length and breadth of Notre Dame Bay he began to organize them. He was able to formulate for the fishermen the resentments and desires for which they themselves could not find words, and the conviction and courage with which he did so bound his followers to him in awe, admiration and respect.

Coaker felt that fishers needed and deserved some control over their interests in the fishing industry, in which they played such an integral part. He felt the union could "promote the commercial welfare of the fishers by securing the highest price for their fish and the lowest price for their supplies." The organizational framework

4.172 Smallwood was inspired by Coaker and thought of himself as continuing Coaker's legacy.

When describing his hero in *Coaker of Newfoundland* (1927), Smallwood wrote: Coaker was "A man in his early thirties, short, very thick built, strong as an ox, eyes flashing, dressed in the kind of clothes that would be worn by a farmer ... Coaker appeared every inch one of the people ... He pointed out to them their impotence, their weakness and their powerlessness. They were the prey of merchants, of shark lawyers, of a whole horde of parasites who were living in St. John's."

GOALS OF THE FISHERMEN'S PROTECTIVE UNION

1. Economic: The establishment of union-owned businesses which would purchase supplies at wholesale prices and distribute them among the local councils. Ideally, this would allow fishers to bypass the merchants and eventually break the credit system.
2. Education: The union would provide a forum for fishers to discuss and debate relevant issues and to take collective action. The creation of *The Fishermen's Advocate* in 1910 also helped keep its membership and the general public informed about union activities and developments in the fishing industry.
3. Political: In 1911, the FPU established a political party in an attempt to influence government policy. The party did not intend to form a government, but rather to win enough seats in the House to support the party whose policies were most beneficial to fishers and outport people generally.

**The FPU was largely confined to the Protestant northeast coast of Newfoundland. Part of the reason for this was that the socially conservative Roman Catholic Church discouraged Catholics from joining unions and especially the FPU, as it was seen as having links to the Protestant Loyal Orange Association.*

of the FPU was based on the **Loyal Orange Association**, but the thinking which guided its practices was a combination of elements from capitalism, socialism, economic cooperation, and trade unionism.

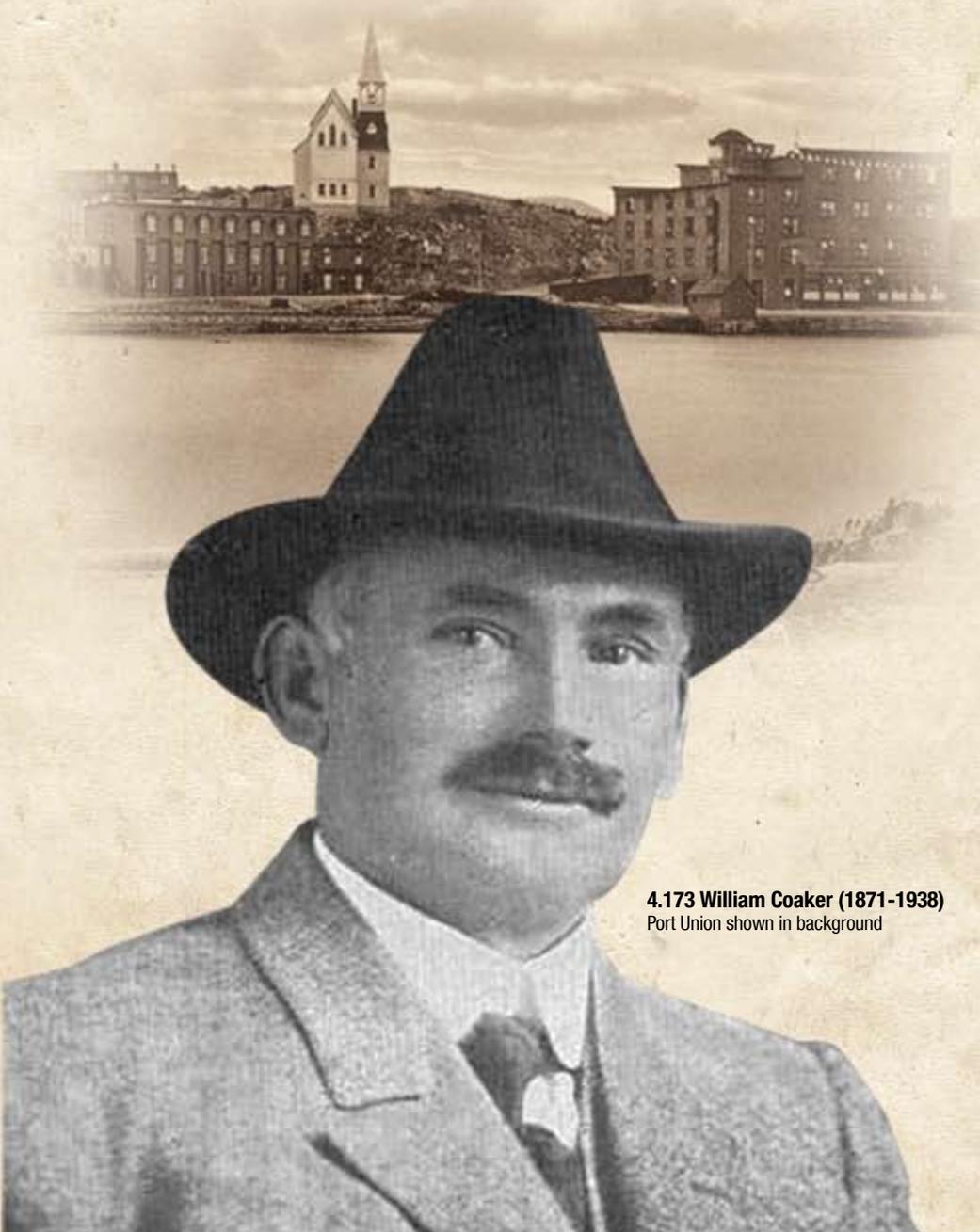
As Coaker spread his message, the union continued to gather support. From the first 19 fishers that signed up as union members in November 1908, the FPU grew to 50 local councils with thousands of members by the fall of 1909, and to approximately 20 000 members from Conception Bay to the northern district* of St. Barbe by 1914. A democratic structure ensured that all members could be represented in the union: local councils elected their own executives, which in turn sent delegates to the governing body, which then elected the FPU's executive officers.

THE MAN BEHIND THE FPU: WILLIAM COAKER

William Ford Coaker was born in St. John's in 1871 to a St. John's mother and outport father. He left school at an early age to supplement the family income by becoming a fish handler with Job Brothers in St. John's. There he organized his first strike while just 13: he led a group of young fish handlers protesting that they were paid less than the boys at Bowring Brothers.

At the age of 16, Coaker moved to Pike's Arm, next to Herring Neck, to run a branch of a firm called McDougall and Templeton. He ran the business until 1894, when the business ran into difficulties during the bank crash. He then established a farm on an island near Herring Neck, which he named "Coakerville," and supplemented his income with fishing and lobster canning. In 1901 he married Jessie Cook and later had a daughter with her.

As Coaker became active in the local community, he became increasingly concerned with the lack of control that fishers had in their own industry. To address this, he founded the Fishermen's Protective Union (FPU) in 1908. The union grew quickly and established many commercial ventures to benefit its members. In 1912, Coaker founded the Fisherman's Union Party. Coaker held positions in government from 1913-1924 and from 1928-1932. However after 1924, Coaker focused more on managing the FPU's business activities. Coaker resigned as President of the FPU in 1926, but remained Honourary President until his death in 1938. In later years, he returned to farming and spent time in Jamaica.



4.173 William Coaker (1871-1938)
Port Union shown in background

“It is not by accident that we have come here. A revolution, though a peaceful one, has been fought in Newfoundland. The Fisherman, the common man, the toiler ... has made up his mind that he is going to be represented upon the floors of the House to a larger extent than he ever was before; and the day will come Mr. Speaker, when the fishermen of Newfoundland will have the controlling power in this House.”

– William Coaker, speaking to the House of Assembly, 1914

THE BONAVISTA PLATFORM

1. Fishery

- standardization of fish
- government-controlled grading of fish*
- inspection of fishery products
- establishment of a commission to oversee these laws
- appointment of trade agents in the fish markets
- weekly reports of conditions in those markets

2. Social Policy

- establishment of non-denominational night-schools in the outports in winter
- schools in every settlement with at least 20 children between ages seven and 14
- free and compulsory education seven months a year
- old age pensions for everyone over 70
- long-distance telephone services to connect settlements
- elected school boards and municipal (town) councils

3. Governance

- recall of members elected to the House of Assembly who no longer had the support of their constituents
- increased salaries for members of the House of Assembly to encourage less wealthy individuals to stand for election

**The grading of fish was handled by the merchants' graders or callers, who often based their judgments on what best suited the merchants' interests rather than the fish's true quality. The lower they graded the fish, the less the merchants would have to pay the fishers for it.*

Coaker and seven other FPU candidates were elected as members of the House of Assembly. It was the first time fishers were represented by their own. Coaker continued on in politics, holding the seat for the district of Bonavista from 1913 to 1915, then representing Twillingate for the next four years, and Bonavista again from 1919 until 1924. He was also a member of the coalition cabinet during the war and minister of marine and fisheries from 1919-1924.

Although the FPU's Bonavista Platform was progressive, many of its "planks" were never realized. Coaker attempted to make many fishery reforms while minister of marine and fisheries, but the Great War, economic depression in the early 1920s, and opposition from many fish exporters prevented most of them from succeeding. Furthermore, Coaker's own position and credibility were

called into question when he supported **conscription** in 1918 (which was especially unpopular among Union members) and became allied with the scandal-ridden Squires administrations of the 1920s. Coaker stayed away from politics from 1924 until 1928, when he was elected in Bonavista East. However, his role in the fisheries was not a strong one during this term and Coaker officially retired from politics in 1932.

Disillusioned with responsible government as it functioned in Newfoundland, Coaker recommended the end of responsible government in 1933 and supported a Commission of Government* to run the country's affairs. Coaker also became less and less involved with Union activities after 1926. The FPU continued its activities, but never recovered the momentum of its early days. The union survived into the Smallwood era, but faded away by 1960.

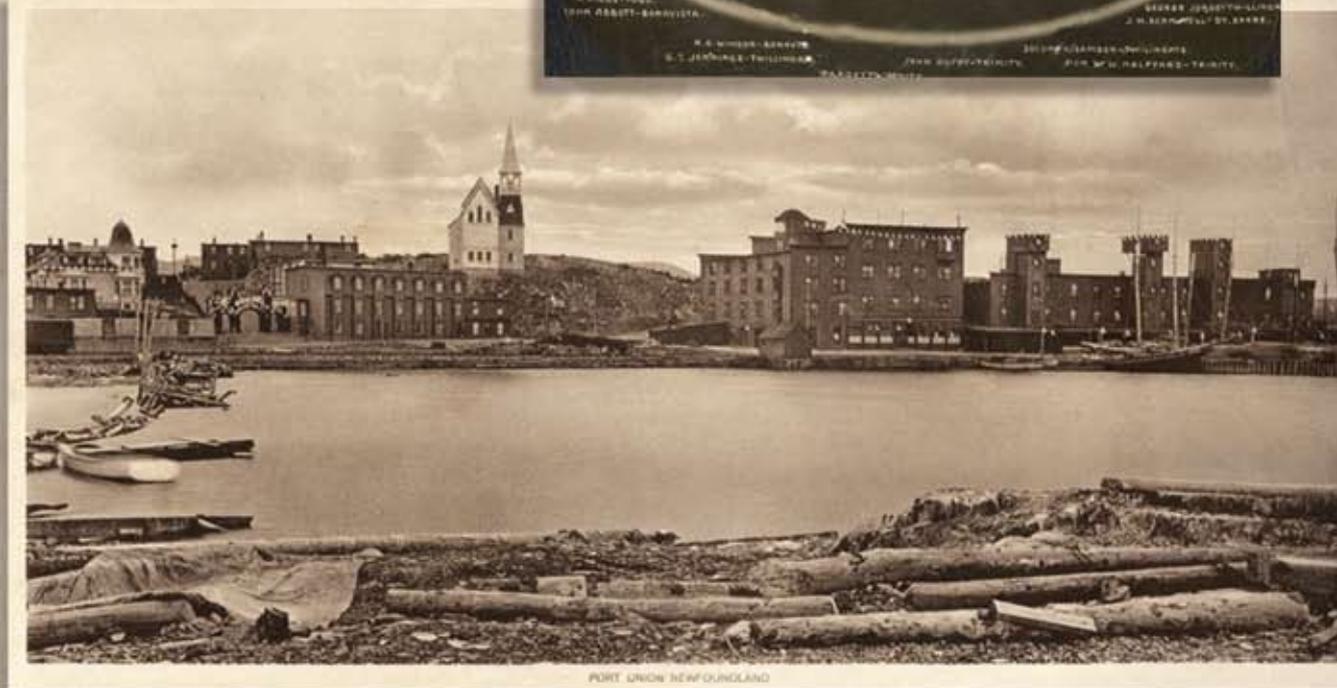
**Although after 1926 Coaker argued for an elected Commission of 10 Newfoundlanders to govern Newfoundland for a period of time, he opposed the form of Commission of Government that was established in 1934 because it was not elected.*



4.177 Fishermen's Protective Union flag

4.179 Fishermen's Protective Union (FPU) members of the House of Assembly, 1919

William Coaker is front centre.



4.178 Port Union, 1923

This view of the waterfront shows (left-right): William Coaker's house known as "The Bungalow," arch on Bungalow Hill welcoming Governor and Lady Allardyce to Port Union, Holy Martyr's Church (built 1923 in memory of Coaker's recruits), Port Union Hotel, and the Fishermen's Union Trading Company and fish store.

The one burning question now is, maintaining regulations and getting banks to advance suitable price for fish; banks want fish at \$8.00 for Number 1. You will see by the ADVOCATE the battle against merchants and banks. The exporters want cheap fish to make up losses of last year. The Government thinks \$11.00 for Number 1 should be paid; no regulations would mean \$6.00 for fish. Don't mind the talk and tattle of buyers or enemies. I am more closely watching your interests than I ever did. Reforms must tread on someone's corns and cause some agitation, and the fish control and standardization of fish surely will cause big changes but changes that must go to make our country better and more prosperous.

The war is over and our big troubles are upon us and they must be faced. When the Crimean war closed, fish fell from 80 sh. to 8 sh. This is what we dreaded- this is why we took power to control prices abroad and demand outright sales. I must be trusted and relied on to do what is best- you must have more confidence than ever. My present struggle should have been fought out 100 years ago; no one dared face it up to the present, but I intend to do so and you will find it will result in accomplishing more than all the other work I have done put together. I know what is best- you may not understand, but you must stand by me. It would be a lot easier to let everything go on as before, but I see it otherwise and prefer the big struggle rather than lose the opportunity to do for future generations something that will change the business of fish exporting from a speculation to a sound business transaction, just as every other part of the world handles their produce.

Cod Oil will likely keep up its price. Lobsters will likely remain about \$25.00. I estimate the fishery as 40 per cent less than last year's catch to date. Labrador news is favourable and catch will be fair.

Have patience and don't lose your heads and all will come out right, and by next May you will be prouder than ever of my work and your union.

Yours sincerely,
(Signed) W. F. COAKER.

4.180 Except from FPU Circular Letter #8 dated Aug. 28, 1920
In this letter Coaker urges Union members not to sell their fish too cheaply and support regulations for minimum fish prices.

Questions:

1. Why did a labour movement emerge in this time period?
2. How would business owners view reforms such as sickness and death benefits?
3. Consider how labour is organized today. What unions are present in your community/area? Identify some of the types of issues unions address.
4. Over time, working conditions have generally improved. One reason is that government legislation helps protect workers. It could be argued, therefore, that unions are no longer necessary. What arguments could support this view? What would be some counter-arguments?
5. In some countries today many workers, including children, work long hours for very low wages. What accounts for the variance in working conditions around the world today? What can you do to help improve this condition?

CASE STUDY

Cause and Consequence
combined with Continuity and Change

Throughout this course we have tended to apply the various dimensions of thinking from the social sciences to past and present issues. But what about the future?

THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE ISSUE OF ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION occupied many of the early administrations under responsible government. Some of these leaders saw railways, steam power, and steel ships as innovations with limitless potential to create a better future for the citizens of the colony. In fact, you might be tempted to argue that premiers such as Whiteway and Bond were visionaries.

While we take them for granted today, developments such as automobiles and air travel were little more than fanciful dreams back then. However, during the first years of the twentieth century, these inventions were becoming embedded in our culture.

Today, governments are much more conscious of the possibility and effect of new innovations rapidly changing our way of life. "A priority ... [is] to make sure our young people can seize the opportunities that innovations in science and technology will bring." (Gordon Brown, former UK Prime Minister)

Researchers looked at developments in science and technology that could happen in the next 20 years and predicted 10 jobs we could be doing in the future. Here are the findings:

1. **Body part maker:** Advances in science will make it possible to create living body parts, so we could need living body part makers, body part stores, and body part repair shops.
2. **Nano medic:** Advances in nanotechnology for creating sub-atomic devices and treatments could transform personal health care so we would

need a new breed of nano medicine specialists to administer these treatments.

3. **Farmer of genetically engineered crops and livestock:** New-age farmers will grow crops and keep animals that have been genetically engineered to increase the amount of food they produce and to include proteins that are good for our health. Scientists are already working on a vaccine-carrying tomato and therapeutic milk from cows, sheep, and goats.
4. **Old age wellness manager/consultant:** We will need specialists to help manage the health and personal needs of an aging population. They will be able to use a range of new emerging medical, drug, prosthetic, mental health, natural, and fitness treatments.
5. **Memory augmentation surgeon:** Surgeons could add extra memory to people who want to increase their memory and to help those who have been over-exposed to information and need more memory to store it.
6. **'New science' ethicist:** As scientific advances speed up in areas like cloning, we may need a new breed of ethicist who understands the science and helps society make choices about what developments to allow. It won't be a question of "can we" but "should we"?
7. **Space pilots, tour guides, and architects:** With companies already promising space tourism, we will need space pilots and tour guides, as well as architects to design where they will live and work. Current projects at SICSA (University of Houston) include a greenhouse on Mars, lunar outposts, and space exploration vehicles.

8. **Vertical farmers:** Vertical farms growing in skyscrapers in the middle of our cities could dramatically increase food supply by 2020. Vertical farmers will need skills in a range of scientific disciplines, engineering, and commerce.
9. **Climate change reversal specialist:** As the impact of climate change increases, we will need a new breed of engineer-scientist to help reduce or reverse the effects. The range of science and technologies they use could include filling the oceans with iron filings or putting up giant umbrellas to deflect the sun's rays.
10. **Quarantine enforcer:** If a deadly virus starts spreading rapidly, few countries, and few people, will be prepared. Nurses will be in short supply. As death rates rise, and neighbourhoods are shut down, someone will have to guard the gates.

THE RUNNERS-UP

Weather modification police
Virtual lawyer
Avatar manager/devotees/virtual teachers
Alternative vehicle developers
Narrowcasters
Waste data handler
Virtual clutter organizer
Time broker/Time bank trader
Social 'networking' worker
Personal branders



4.181

Questions:

Perhaps there are some ideas we can glean from this research. Consider the following questions:

1. What trends are shaping the world at the moment? What trends are declining? What trends are increasing?
2. How is Newfoundland and Labrador influenced by these trends? Which of our primary/secondary/tertiary/quaternary industries will benefit from these trends? Which may suffer?
3. What opportunities do I see around me in relation to these changes?