

## Newfoundland Loggers Respond To The Great Depression

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[See table of contents](#)

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### Article abstract

Accounts of the 1959 International Wood workers of America strike in Newfoundland have portrayed the Newfoundland Lumbermen's Association, the local union which held jurisdiction over many of the island's loggers, as a "company union" and its president, Joseph Thompson, as a co-opted unionist. This essay examines the NLA's origins during the 1930s and shows that Thompson built an autonomous union to improve logger's lives. The paper also brings to the fore the loggers' own experience of the Great Depression to show they did not passively accept economic hardship and exploitation and took an active role in the making of their union. At times, the loggers' militancy dictated the NLA's bargaining positions and prompted some social change in the woods. The paper concludes that while Thompson and the NLA did not view class and class conflict in explicitly political terms, it does not diminish their importance in the loggers' working lives during the 1930s.

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# Newfoundland Loggers Respond To The Great Depression

Dufferin Sutherland

IN 1983, H. LANDON LADD, "the barracuda of Newfoundland," returned to the island to deliver a lecture on the 1959 International Woodworkers of America (IWA) strike. During his powerful presentation, Ladd dismissed the Newfoundland Lumbermen's Association (NLA) — the local union whose jurisdiction over many of the island's loggers the IWA pursued in the late 1950s — as a "glorious company union," and condescendingly referred to its long-time leader John Joseph Thompson as "old Joe Thompson." Ladd related that Thompson offered to "sell" his union to the IWA for a pension (the other international union in the field, the United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners, had already offered Thompson one), and then dishonourably attempted to retain power over the poorly-paid loggers after they had voted to join the IWA.<sup>1</sup> This portrait of the NLA as a weak union run for the benefit of its co-opted leader is common in the IWA strike's literature.<sup>2</sup> Even the late Premier Smallwood, who waged war against the IWA "outsiders," judged that Thompson and his union were not fierce enough.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, we leave the IWA strike literature with the impression that the pulp and paper companies had always controlled Thompson and that "old Joe Thompson" was the NLA. Accounts of the NLA and Thompson recall historiographical assessments of another union and its leader, the Nova Scotia Provincial Workmen's Association

<sup>1</sup>H. Landon Ladd, "The Newfoundland Loggers' Strike of 1959," in W.J.C. Cherwinski and Gregory S. Kealey, eds., *Lectures in Canadian Labour and Working-Class History* (St. John's 1985), 150-1.

<sup>2</sup>See Jerry Lembcke and William M. Tattam, *One Union in Wood: A Political History of the International Woodworkers of America* (Madeira Park 1987), 156-7; Desmond Morton with Terry Copp, *Working People: An Illustrated History of the Canadian Labour Movement* (Ottawa 1980), 228-9; Cyril W. Strong, *My Life as a Newfoundland Union Organizer* (St. John's 1987), 97-8; Bill Gillespie, *A Class Act: An Illustrated History of the Labour Movement in Newfoundland and Labrador* (St. John's 1986), 108.

<sup>3</sup>Joseph R. Smallwood, *I Chose Canada* (Toronto 1973), 398-400.

Dufferin Sutherland, "Newfoundland Loggers Respond To The Great Depression," *Labour/Le Travail*, 29, (Spring 1992), 83-115.

(PWA) and its Grand Secretary Robert Drummond, whom Ian McKay recently rescued from the condescension of posterity.<sup>4</sup> Like the standard view of the PWA as the conservative forerunner of a more powerful and radical union, the standard interpretation of the NLA is compelling; it also overly simplifies almost 25 years of the union's history, while largely ignoring the loggers' role in the making and undoing of their union.<sup>5</sup>

This essay does not attempt to rehabilitate the Joseph Thompson and NLA of the 1950s. Rather, it examines the NLA's origins and early years during the 1930s Great Depression to provide a fuller and more complex depiction of the union and its leader. Allen Seager's essay on Minto, New Brunswick miners is helpful in this process. Seager argues that one major reason for New Brunswick's absence from Canada's history of radical, working-class, and popular movements is the province's lack of "an explicitly political context of class conflict and popular protest." He points out, however, that New Brunswickers were not without a history of protest and rebellion to secure an adequate livelihood, and that in the coal-mining community of Minto, "the absence of political insurgency...during the 1920s and 1930s does not negate the importance of class and class conflict...."<sup>6</sup> This explanation for descriptions of a quiescent New Brunswick working class is also relevant to the study of Newfoundland working-class experience generally and the Newfoundland loggers' history in particular. When examining the loggers' experience, it is tempting to conclude that Thompson's and the loggers' lack of political "consciousness" indicated an absence of class and class conflict in the woods.

This paper shows that the opposite was true. During the 1930s, Joseph Thompson may have talked of cooperation between capital and labour, but he sought to establish an autonomous union to improve loggers' lives. In doing so he was willing to ignore the companies' wishes, to trespass on company property, to call strikes and, if need be, to sabotage paper-mill operations. The loggers themselves also responded forcefully to the Great Depression and were instrumental in the making of the NLA. The early 1930s were extremely bleak for Newfoundland loggers. Faced with a decline in the demand and price for newsprint, the Anglo-Newfoundland Development Company (ANDCO) and the International Power and Paper Company (IPPCO) put their mills on short time and halted cutting operations in entire regions of the country.<sup>7</sup> Those loggers who held on to jobs earned wages

<sup>4</sup>Ian McKay, "'By Wisdom, Wile or War': The Provincial Workmen's Association and the Struggle for Working-Class Independence in Nova Scotia, 1879-97," *Labour/Le Travail*, 18 (1986), 13-62.

<sup>5</sup>I must admit I subscribed to the standard view of the NLA in my thesis, "A Social History of Pulpwood Logging in Newfoundland during the Great Depression," MA thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1988.

<sup>6</sup>Allen Seager, "Minto, New Brunswick: A Case Study in Class Relations Between the Wars," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 5 (1980), 81-6.

<sup>7</sup>The ANDCO mill, opened in 1905, was located at Grand Falls in central Newfoundland. The IPPCO mill opened in 1925 at Corner Brook on Newfoundland's west coast.

which barely covered the cost of room and board, while those who did not faced malnutrition like thousands of other Newfoundlanders on the six-cent daily dole.<sup>8</sup> Loggers responded almost immediately to wages and conditions which were among the worst in North America. In the early 1930s, hundreds of loggers simply dropped their bucksaws and returned to their families and communities. In some instances, loggers banded together to strike for improved terms of employment. In almost every case, these were spontaneous actions in isolated regions of the country. The companies' treatment of the men, however, created deeply-held grievances which were forcefully expressed during moments of crisis. The grievances also prompted loggers to react immediately to Thompson's call to form a union. By the late 1930s the NLA claimed 7,800 members. Even if the actual membership was half that number, it would represent a remarkable organizing drive.<sup>9</sup> While influenced by the surge of militancy on the island and elsewhere, the loggers formed an organization which reflected their experience of work, traditions, values, and expectations. The men never talked of cooperation; they fought, in a manner reminiscent of Nova Scotia's coal miners, for "an existence and maintenance independently" for their families.

The story of Newfoundland loggers during the Depression begins bleakly in winter 1929 when a commission charged with easing unemployment in St. John's found places for 150 labourers in the pulp and paper companies' woods camps.<sup>10</sup> Each man hired had to agree to work until the end of March and consent to wage deductions for railway fares and other expenses.<sup>11</sup> Many of the men soon realized they could not clear any money beyond their expenses and returned home to families they had left a few days before Christmas. Some of those who quit and

<sup>8</sup>For conditions in Newfoundland during the 1930s, see Sean Cadigan, "Battle Harbour in Transition: Merchants, Fishermen, and the State in the Struggle for Relief in a Labrador Community during the 1930s," *Labour/Le Travail*, 26 (1990), 125-50; Nancy Forestell, "Times Were Hard: The Pattern of Women's Paid Labour in St. John's Between the Two World Wars," *Labour/Le Travail*, 24 (1989), 147-66; Gillespie, *Class Act*, 53-78; William E. Gillespie, "A History of the Newfoundland Federation of Labour, 1936-1963," MA thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1980; Peter Neary, *Newfoundland in the North Atlantic World, 1929-1949* (Kingston 1988); Peter Neary, "The Bradley Report on Logging Operations in Newfoundland, 1934: A Suppressed Document," *Labour/Le Travail*, 16 (1985), 193-232; Peter Neary, "Canadian Immigration Policy and the Newfoundlanders, 1912-1939," *Acadiensis*, XI: 2 (1982), 42-69; James Overton, "Public Relief and Social Unrest in Newfoundland in the 1930s: An Evaluation of the Ideas of Piven and Cloward," in Gregory S. Kealey, ed., *Class, Gender, and Region: Essays in Canadian Historical Sociology* (St. John's 1988), 143-69; James Overton, "Economic Crisis and the End of Democracy: Politics in Newfoundland During the Great Depression," *Labour/Le Travail*, 26 (1990), 85-124; Sutherland, "Social History."

<sup>9</sup>Thomas K. Liddell, *Industrial Survey of Newfoundland* (St. John's 1940), 47. Liddell was skeptical of the NLA figure.

<sup>10</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 17 December 1929.

<sup>11</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 6 March 1930.

had no money to pay their expenses wound up in magistrate's court charged with obtaining goods on the false pretence that they could earn a living in the woods.<sup>12</sup> Others could not even afford to get home from the woods. In March, the daily press reported the case of Gordon Parsons who quit after he hurt his back cutting. He had no wages coming to him after almost three months' work and ANDCO refused to feed him or transport him home. Along with three companions who had also quit, Parsons tried for more than two weeks to return to St. John's from Millertown in the interior, "sometimes staying in railway stations, sometimes in a shack, being turned off trains and existing on the meagre supplies of food they received from time to time." The men's relatives read the newspaper story and sent them money to get home.<sup>13</sup>



*Loggers in a lumbercamp.* Photo courtesy of John Ashton.

This sort of story was not uncommon in Newfoundland, a staple-producing and export-oriented country which suffered acutely during the 1930s' worldwide economic crisis. Bryan Palmer has written of the Canadian working class in this period that "its culture turned on the response to joblessness and destitution."<sup>14</sup> Those words apply with particular force to Newfoundland loggers, who during 1932-34 fought defensive battles against low wages and reduced cuts, and survived

<sup>12</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 30 December; 7 January 1930.

<sup>13</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 6 March 1930.

<sup>14</sup>Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian Labour, 1800-1980* (Toronto 1983), 207.

as best they could by falling back on a resilient household economy. Even so, Harold Horwood reported that many people around the mill town of Corner Brook told him the Depression was a terrible experience — “that they experienced not just hardship, but actual hunger, for the first time in their lives.”<sup>15</sup> The first reported loggers’ strike during the Depression took place on the west coast in 1932. Severely depressed newsprint prices in the early 1930s had forced IPPCO to reduce wages deeply and scale down operations. In 1931 the company cut wages and salaries 10 per cent and shut down the entire Howley woods division, where all the loggers had to apply for relief.<sup>16</sup> The following year it slashed another 10 per cent from employees’ incomes. Log drivers’ wages fell to 22.5 cents an hour, 12.5 cents below the Logging Act’s minimum wage, while the price the company paid for a cord of wood dropped from \$2.50 in pre-Depression times to a maximum of \$1.30.<sup>17</sup> In Deer Lake, several hundred loggers and drivers staged a strike in May 1932. The action failed because IPPCO had enough wood on hand to operate the mill, while the men were scattered, poorly organized, and had families on the verge of starvation. An angry citizen wrote that “woodsmen by the hundreds this past winter have not earned enough to pay their way home and all the while husbands slaved in the woods for a mere pittance, wives and children at home have eked out a precarious existence on the dole.”<sup>18</sup>

A few months later the company delivered more bad news to the men. IPPCO announced that no wood would be cut the following season in the Deer Lake and Howley districts.<sup>19</sup> An angry and frustrated group of Deer Lake men threatened to destroy company property if they were not given work at higher wages.<sup>20</sup> Government pressure and a discontented labour force at the Corner Brook mill, which had also experienced wage reductions and layoffs, eventually forced IPPCO to agree to make a small cut in the area and slightly increase wages.<sup>21</sup>

River drivers went on strike again the following year. Early in 1933, IPPCO asked the government to suspend the Logging Act’s minimum-wage clause which required that employers pay drivers 35 cents an hour. The company anticipated a favourable response and announced that it had hired contractors who would pay the men 22 cents an hour to conduct the log drive.<sup>22</sup> A large body of men assembled

<sup>15</sup>Harold Horwood, *Corner Brook: A Social History of a Paper Town* (St. John’s 1986), 56.

<sup>16</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 5 September 1931; Horwood, *Corner Brook*, 57.

<sup>17</sup>*Newfoundland Royal Commission 1933* (London 1933), paragraph 420. Referred to as the Amulree Report.

<sup>18</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 25 May 1932.

<sup>19</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 16 July 1932.

<sup>20</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 13 July 1932.

<sup>21</sup>In March papermakers in the mill waged a week-long strike over reductions in staff which “would put unbearable extra work on crews and would also cause the loss of employment to a number of ordinary hands.” See *Evening Telegram*, 29 March, 7 April 1932. Terms of settlement were not reported.

<sup>22</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 1 May 1933.



*Freeing the "wings" on the main river drive. Photo courtesy of John Ashton.*

outside the courthouse in Corner Brook prior to the drive to protest the company's action.<sup>23</sup> Prime Minister F.C. Alderdice stated that the company had to honour the minimum wage clause. A week later, IPPCO offered to pay the men 27.5 cents an hour and reduce meal costs. This time, the Prime Minister supported the company and announced that the offer "was the utmost the companies would agree to."<sup>24</sup> The drivers refused to back down from their demand for the full 35 cents an hour. The mill unions passed resolutions expressing moral and financial support for the drivers and demanded that the government uphold the country's labour laws.<sup>25</sup> A few days later the company acceded to the drivers' demands. IPPCO likely realized that the drivers could maintain a long strike with the support of the international mill unions which would jeopardize the drive for the season and perhaps involve an expensive sympathy strike at the mill. The company also may have made a deal with the government. Two weeks after the strike ended the House of Assembly suspended the Logging Act's minimum wage clause for two years.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 2 May 1933.

<sup>24</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 5 May 1933.

<sup>25</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 10 May 1933.

<sup>26</sup>See "An Act to Amend," "Of the Employment of Men Engaged in Logging," 22 George V, ch. 21 in *Statutes of Newfoundland 1933*. Drivers were extremely bitter about the suspension of the minimum wage clause. See, for example, *Evening Telegram*, 30 March 1935, for a letter from a driver who argued that experienced drivers should earn more than papermakers in the mill who are merely "machine tenders" and not "tradesmen."

Later in 1933, a number of loggers stopped work and held a meeting at the Regent Theatre in Corner Brook "to protest to the company the low remuneration given to them." F. Gordon Bradley, Member of the Assembly for the district, "spoke of the necessity of the men remaining calm and collected and painted a vivid picture of the state of the men in the camps who work but cannot earn enough to keep their families."<sup>27</sup> The men formed a delegation to place their demand for an increase in the price per cord from \$1.10 to \$2. Mill manager K.O. Elderkin responded:

Half of the trouble is that the men who are doing all the kicking are not real woodsmen. Our good men cut two cords a day easily, and have no difficulty in keeping themselves and their families. As for paying \$1.10 a cord, we are doing so where the chance is good. The men receiving that rate are cutting one of the best stands of wood in the country. It is not really a question of paying a living wage, there is not a living wage in it for the company, as you will probably have noticed from our last half year's balance sheet.... You must remember that when the men were paid \$2 a cord for cutting wood, paper was selling at \$70 a ton (compared to \$36 at present).<sup>28</sup>

IPPCO threatened to put the mill on half time and halt all cutting in the woods unless the men gave way.<sup>29</sup> The following day another hundred loggers dropped their bucksaws and came out of the woods to join the strike. The press reported "400 loggers on strike at Corner Brook and Deer Lake."<sup>30</sup> The Salvation Army in Corner Brook provided free dinners to one hundred of the hungry loggers from food collected from the congregation and strike supporters.<sup>31</sup>

Prime Minister Alderdice and Labour Minister K.M. Brown held a meeting in St. John's with representatives of the loggers and the company in order to end the dispute. The loggers rejected a company offer of a 15-cent per cord increase and demanded a 25-cent boost.<sup>32</sup> On 2 October, the *Evening Telegram* reported that the men had returned to work for \$1.25 a cord after almost a month on strike. The

<sup>27</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 12 September 1933. The following year Bradley headed a commission of inquiry into conditions in the lumberwoods. See Neary, "The Bradley Report," and J.K. Hiller, "The Career of F. Gordon Bradley," *Newfoundland Studies*, 4: 2 (1988), 163-80.

<sup>28</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 12 September 1933. Elderkin's statement about how much "good" men cut in a day appears false and deceiving. The following year, IPPCO woods manager A.W. Bentley testified before the Bradley Commission about how much the company's loggers had cut: "Our records show that 22 per cent of the men cut less than one cord per day in 1933; the balance, 78 per cent of the men, cut 87 per cent of the wood at a rate of 1.3 cords per man day." IPPCO file, Evidence, *Report of the Commission of Enquiry On The Logging Industry*, referred to as the *Bradley Report*, Centre for Newfoundland Studies Archives, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

<sup>29</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 19 September 1933.

<sup>30</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 20, 22 September 1933.

<sup>31</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 3 October 1933.

<sup>32</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 28 September 1933.



government likely smoothed the way to a settlement by agreeing to pay all loggers' passages home from the camps. The government's explanation for the free trips conceded that many loggers could not make any money at company prices:

The...concession was arranged in order to help out lumbermen who will remain in the camps one month, and avoid their having to look for passes through the Relieving Officers and others if they are fortunate enough just to break square. It might help to make the men more contented and will keep them off the dole at any rate for a month if they will remain.<sup>33</sup>



*Hauling with a single team.* Photo courtesy of John Ashton.

The year 1934 witnessed unrest and desperation in the Newfoundland woods unequalled during the Depression. This turmoil coincided with (if it did not always closely resemble) a Canadian strike 'wave' identified by Gregory S. Kealey and Doug Cruikshank which included many loggers.<sup>34</sup> In all of Canada's major logging areas, workers rebelled against low wages and poor conditions. We hear from Jean-Michel Catta, for example, that wages and conditions were the overriding issues of the 1933 Rouyn loggers' strike.<sup>35</sup> Ian Radforth argues that the 1933-35 Northern Ontario loggers' strike wave resulted from a recovery of the industry from

<sup>33</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 18 October 1933.

<sup>34</sup>Douglas Cruikshank and Gregory S. Kealey, "Strikes in Canada, 1891-1950," *Labour/Le Travail*, 20 (Fall 1987), 114-8.

<sup>35</sup>Jean-Michel Catta, *La Grève des Bûcherons de Rouyn, 1933* (Temiscamingue 1985), 64-5.

which unionists and long-suffering loggers wanted to benefit.<sup>36</sup> Gordon Hak also notes that a vigorous union drive took place in the British Columbia coastal woods after the industry was running at full strength by the end of 1933.<sup>37</sup> It is in the New Brunswick forest industry, however, that we find conditions most similar to those in Newfoundland. Bill Parenteau describes how wages and conditions became so appalling in the New Brunswick woods in the early 1930s that some loggers refused to work because they cleared no money and "they only seemed to wear out their clothes." By 1934 the Opposition, press, organized labour, and individual citizens had forced the government to institute, as in Newfoundland, a minimum wage for woodsmen. In New Brunswick, though, the \$32 monthly minimum was \$7 more than in Newfoundland.<sup>38</sup>

In Newfoundland, almost 700 men either quit or went on strike for higher wages in 8 separate incidents in 1934. These disputes accounted for more than 38 per cent of all loggers' strikes and collective actions during the 1930s (See Table 3.) What explains this unparalleled feeling of discouragement and anger among loggers? First, loggers had been working for starvation wages for almost five years; they were exhausted, malnourished, and wretched as never before. Second, and more importantly, by 1934 many regular loggers and contractors refused to work in the woods for the rates the companies offered. Contractor Jesse Ball, for example, testified,

I belong to Northern Arm, Botwood. I have not been doing woods work for the past two years because I could not get enough for the wood to make a living myself and give my men a living. I was offered a contract by [ANDCO] last fall to cut 6,000 cords in this bay. The price was \$3.75 landed on board ship and I would not take it. Saunders and Howell took the contract that was offered to me. They paid their men \$2.40 a cord landed on the bank of the bay. That wood had to be hauled from half a mile to a mile and a half and I think in some places two miles. I was considering paying \$3.25 to \$3.50 according to the length of the haul. I know that country and I know that was a fair price. I have been 34 years in the wood business.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>36</sup>Ian Radforth, *Bushworkers and Bosses: Logging in Northern Ontario 1900-1980* (Toronto 1987), 126. Also Bruce Magnuson, *The Untold Story of Ontario's Bushworkers* (Toronto 1990), xix. Magnuson has a similar interpretation of the strike wave.

<sup>37</sup>Gordon Hugh Hak, "On the Fringes: Capital and Labour in the Forest Economies of the Port Alberni and Prince George Districts, 1910-1939," PhD Dissertation, Simon Fraser University, 1986, 208-10.

<sup>38</sup>Bill Parenteau, "Pulp, Paper and Poverty," *New Maritimes* (March/April 1989), 23-4; For a New Brunswick local study see Nancy Jon Colpitts, "Alma, NB and the Twentieth Century Crisis of Readjustment: Sawmilling Community to National Park," MA thesis, Dalhousie University, 1983. On the Newfoundland Commission of Government's attempt to institute a minimum wage in the woods of \$25 per month see Neary, "The Bradley Report."

<sup>39</sup>Botwood file, Evidence, *Bradley Report*.

## 92 LABOUR/LE TRAVAIL

More and more, IPPCO and ANDCO recruited inexperienced labour from the south coast and the Avalon peninsula to supply their camps. Most newcomers were unemployed labourers and banker fishermen with no knowledge of the conditions in the woods. Many quit when they realized they were bound to end up in debt to the company after two or three months of hard labour.

Eighty-five men from Grand Bank and Fortune on the south coast, for example, faced with a failing fishery, signed on at Burin at the end of June to work for ANDCO. As they later related, the men took the coastal boat to Argentia where they thought they would connect with a train to central Newfoundland. At Argentia, they found they had to wait a day for the train. The company made no arrangements for the men so a few who had money stayed the night at an inexpensive boarding house. The rest slept on the railway station floor. They had nothing to eat.<sup>40</sup> The following morning the train carried the men as far as Whitbourne where they had to wait another day for a train to Badger. Again they had no place to sleep and "the kind friends that had a dollar or so, had to spend it buying food and sharing it amongst his comrades."<sup>41</sup> Railway workers, realizing that the Whitbourne station had room for only half the men, "opened an old condemned car with no stoves or windows in it, with the wind blowing bitterly cold. Some of the men who could sleep, woke in the morning bitterly chilled to the bone to face another day's travel without any breakfast."<sup>42</sup>

After another day and night on the train the men finally arrived in Badger where they had their first decent meal in three days. They also learned from one Mr. Cole of ANDCO that they were not going to earn \$30 a month as the company representative in Burin had told them. Cole informed them they would earn \$1.26 a cord less \$18 a month for board, \$11.55 for train fare, doctor's fees, and the usual expenses of fly oil, saw blades, clothing, and tobacco. The bad news did not end there. The men discovered the camps were to close down in a month and a half. They calculated that if they cut a cord a day, which was highly unlikely given their inexperience, they would clear \$1.55 the first month to which they would add whatever they earned during the season's final two weeks.<sup>43</sup> Half of the men

<sup>40</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 27 August 1934. The Burin men, upset at the reaction of the press to their actions, wrote a long letter to the paper outlining the way ANDCO had treated them.

<sup>41</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 27 August 1934.

<sup>42</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 27 August 1934.

<sup>43</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 27 August 1934. The men included their calculations:

25 cords per month @ \$1.26 ....	<u>\$31.50</u>
Board per month .....	\$18.00
Passage .....	\$11.55
Doctor .....	<u>\$ 40</u>
	<u>\$29.95</u>
	\$31.50
	-\$29.95
1 month's work .....	\$ 1.55

decided that if they were going to have anything to take home to their families they could not work for less than \$2 per cord. The men reported what happened when Cole refused:

...we said we would stay if he would not take our passage money out of our wages, we'd still be satisfied to stay on. Mr. Cole refused to come to any terms, so we packed up and left. There have been many things said about our behaviour which is [sic] very untrue and unjust. Most of the public are under the impression that there was a riot, well there wasn't. We weren't at all unreasonable, we just wanted our passage paid back. It is true some said if it was not granted they would board the train next morning....<sup>44</sup>

At this point, Cole must have wired the Commission of Government about the men. The Commissioner of Justice feared that trouble might develop and dispatched a sergeant and six officers to Badger.<sup>45</sup> Sir John Hope Simpson, the Commissioner of Natural Resources, who was on his way to the west coast, also stopped in Badger to interview the men. Hope Simpson agreed to grant the men passage home. But because they had refused to work on the company's terms, they were not to receive any more dole or fishery advances.<sup>46</sup> The men protested in vain: "It was said we refused to work. That is absolutely untrue, in one sense of speaking, but that was on account of low wages. We were willing to work if we could see any way clear."<sup>47</sup>

A few days after the Burin men quit, 34 Conception Bay men who were at work for William Dawe and Sons at Western Arm, White Bay, decided to return home because they could not earn any money. They were part of a group of 100 unemployed men on the dole in various Conception Bay outports whom Dawe and Sons had hired to cut and peel wood for \$4 a cord.<sup>48</sup> Eighteen of the men illegally boarded the coastal boat at Pacquet and were arrested when they reached St. John's. They were jailed for 30 days.<sup>49</sup> William Dawe sent the rest of the men home where the government cut them off the dole.<sup>50</sup>

To close out the week, 70 more south-coast men abandoned work. They left the woods and boarded the train having endured a week more than their Burin compatriots. The police arrested the penniless fishermen in Clarenville for failing to pay their fares and conducted them to St. John's where they wound up in court and subsequently in prison.<sup>51</sup> Gordon Bradley, who was collecting evidence for a

<sup>44</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 27 August 1934.

<sup>45</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 6 July 1934.

<sup>46</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 13 July 1934.

<sup>47</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 27 August 1934.

<sup>48</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 27 June 1934.

<sup>49</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 10 July 1934. For an account of the men's sentences in Magistrate's Court see, *Evening Telegram*, 11 July 1934.

<sup>50</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 11 July 1934.

<sup>51</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 16 July 1934.

report on the logging industry, interviewed some of them at the police station. One Edward Lee of Grand Bank explained his predicament:

I am a fisherman, and foreign going seaman mostly. I have never been in the woods using a bucksaw before. It was going around the crowd that we could get \$1.32 a day and found. I wired Magistrate Hollett to Burin to see if I could get a job. He telephoned Constable and he gave us a pass to go to Millertown. I went up to Lake Ambrose, Peter Rowsell's camp. I worked there about 12 days. We used start [sic] about 6 or 7 in the morning and knock off about 7 and go back and pile wood after tea. I got \$1.30 a cord. I never got any higher than three sticks out of a tree. It was branchy, scraggy, stuff, in swampy ground. In 12 days two of us put [up?] about 9 cords. Samuel Butler, aged 35, was with me. That was as good as we could do. The flies were numerous. I had one bottle oil. Thirteen came out of my camp. There were about 5 or 6 stayed in. There were some Gander Bay men in the camp who were used to the bucksaw and could do better than us. Some of them came out too. If men used to the bucksaw did not see their way clear it was no use for us.<sup>52</sup>

The St. John's penitentiary could not incarcerate all the prisoners and housed most of them in canvas tents in the prison yard. On 23 July, the governor extended clemency to the inmates and sent them home.<sup>53</sup>

A few days after the men jumped the train, the press reported about ten more south-coast men who had stopped work and decided to walk home from central Newfoundland. They had marched as far as Placentia where hunger and fatigue drove them to ask for assistance. After the relieving officer refused to help them they requested that the Magistrate charge them with vagrancy so they could go to jail where they would be housed and fed.<sup>54</sup>

First word of a major loggers' strike in Labrador came on 18 July when the *S.S. Imogene* sailed from St. John's to Alexis Bay, Labrador, with a detachment of 45 fully armed constables.<sup>55</sup> The Labrador Development Company had chartered the coastal boat to bring back 225 dissatisfied loggers from its large Alexis Bay cutting operations. The press recounted that ten days earlier, 500 men had gone on strike at the company's five camps. Until then the company had paid the men \$3 per cord for cut and peeled wood. Most loggers found peeling wood difficult and time consuming.<sup>56</sup> Gordon Bradley argued men should receive a minimum of \$3.58 per cord of peeled pulpwood.<sup>57</sup> Many men at Alexis Bay could not cut and peel even half a cord a day. They later reported other reasons for their low production: there were large quantities of rotten wood in the Labrador timber stands which led the company to reject much of what was cut; in most areas the ground sloped steeply

<sup>52</sup>Burin file, Evidence, the *Bradley Report*.

<sup>53</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 23 July 1934.

<sup>54</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 17 July 1934.

<sup>55</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 18 July 1934.

<sup>56</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 26 July 1934.

<sup>57</sup>Neary, "The Bradley Report," 216.

which slowed cutting and piling; and, finally, many were inexperienced cutters.<sup>58</sup> Another source of discontent was that Labrador Development charged almost 25 per cent more for board than Newfoundland companies, which further reduced earnings.<sup>59</sup>

The loggers had offered to return to work under three possible payment systems: "1) that the rate of pay be \$2 per cord (for rough unpeeled wood) with free board and free transportation, or 2) that the rate be \$2.70 for a cord of rough wood at the stump, or 3) that the rate be \$2 per day and found."<sup>60</sup> A week later company officials responded with an offer of \$3.50 per cord for 4,000 cords of cut and peeled wood and after that, \$2.30 a cord for unpeeled wood. They also informed workers that the company would make arrangements to return discontented men home if these terms were unacceptable. Strikers in three of the five camps rejected the proposal and requested passage home. Those in the other two camps returned to work the following morning.<sup>61</sup>

Although there had been no violence during the strike, the leader of the detachment of constables, Superintendent O'Neill, wrote a report on the dispute for the Commission of Government.<sup>62</sup> O'Neill's analysis typified the way government and business officials viewed most loggers' strikes during the 1930s. He began by stating that the loggers had no valid reason for stopping work; he then inadvertently proceeded to supply ample evidence to the contrary. The loggers' accommodations were inadequate when they first arrived, as many of the men had nowhere to sleep. Moreover, many had no forestry experience and thus no hope of cutting and peeling enough wood to make money. Finally, some of the workers expected to receive a daily wage and were disgruntled when they discovered instead that they had to work at piece-rates.<sup>63</sup> O'Neill refused to consider the loggers' demands for higher wages. Instead he used a familiar company ploy and called attention to the case of those few men who had made money as if this proved that the company's rates were adequate.<sup>64</sup> He concluded that the young inexperienced men had persuaded the others to halt work.<sup>65</sup> *The Evening Telegram*, which publicized O'Neill's report, savagely attacked the men:

It is somewhat late for these men to realize that they acted like children. They had the chance to make good and they could not stick it out.... That is not the spirit of their forefathers who carved homes out of the rocks and forests, and all in the hope some time or other of making

<sup>58</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 26 July 1934.

<sup>59</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 26 July 1934.

<sup>60</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 27 July 1934. "Found" meant room and board in the woods industry.

<sup>61</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 27 July 1934.

<sup>62</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 27 July 1934.

<sup>63</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 27 July 1934.

<sup>64</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 27 July 1934.

<sup>65</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 27 July 1934.

a living. The spirit displayed is not that of those Newfoundlanders who twenty years ago helped to man the King's ships and to swell the ranks of the Regiment, and by their contempt of hardship and danger won the highest praise for themselves and honour for their country.<sup>66</sup>

The pulp and paper companies, supported by the government and press, often employed this image of the hardy, independent Newfoundlander to keep wages and conditions at low levels. Like the myth capital perpetrated of the reckless lumberjack in the Pacific Northwest who revelled in poor living conditions and dangerous working conditions, ANDCO and IPPCO maintained the tradition that the Newfoundlander was a special breed.<sup>67</sup> A Newfoundlander was strong, loyal, independent, and able to withstand severe hardship without complaint.<sup>68</sup> Men who stoically accepted low rates of pay and poor living and working conditions were an obvious asset to employers, and easily managed by the government. Such independent men (as defined by the companies) were unlikely to consider collective action which would challenge the companies' authority over the quality of their lives.

Two days after the *S.S. Imogene* sailed for Labrador with its band of constables, 19 men from New Melbourne and Brownsdale, Trinity Bay, halted cutting for ANDCO when they realized they could "not earn even twenty cents a day" for their destitute families.<sup>69</sup> The men walked to ANDCO's divisional headquarters at Bishop's Falls where they requested that the company transport them home. The company refused. After a special meeting, the Commission of Government also declined to pay the men's passages or to feed them.<sup>70</sup> The Commission also threatened to have the police jail them if they boarded the train without tickets. The

<sup>66</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 28 July 1934. The newspaper had advanced similar patriotic sentiments in 1932 to encourage starving people to stay off the dole: "Such is the commendable restraint expected, in a crisis of whatever kind, of people of British stock. The great bulk of Newfoundland's population is determined 'to see it through' in the same spirit as that displayed by those gallant men to whom in almost every district has been erected a memorial commemorating their unswerving devotion and their loyal services, even unto death." Cited in James Overton, "Riots, Raids, and Relief, Police, Prisons, and Parsimony: the Political Economy of Public Order in Newfoundland in the 1930s," unpublished manuscript, Memorial University, 1988, 62.

<sup>67</sup>Gordon Hak, "On the Fringes," 169.

<sup>68</sup>In addition to an editorial in *Evening Telegram*, 28 July 1934, see Draft despatch from Commission of Government to Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, S2-1-1, file 3, 2-3, Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador (PANL). In the despatch, Sir John Hope Simpson, Commission for Natural Resources, describes the expectations of ordinary Newfoundlanders. He argues that a standard of living "sufficient to house, clothe, and feed the family, educate the children, pay the doctor and clergyman and provide a few simple luxuries....is far above anything the fisherman demands or expects."

<sup>69</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 17 August 1934.

<sup>70</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 17 August 1934.

ANDCO manager eventually agreed to pay the men's train fares home if they returned to work for ten days.<sup>71</sup> One logger recounted:

So we said to the manager '...We never thought there was such a meany company in this old world as what ye are. Now, sir, we don't intend to go back in the woods because we are too poor and honest to work for you for 15 cents per day, because we consider the fact that the man who works his utmost and, because of inexperience in the lumberwoods can only manage one cord of wood per day...has worked hard and done his best. We will find ourselves honestly obliged to return to the woods for the very cause that we would not wish to impose upon any one company's expense and so we would work for ten days to pay our retransportation charges.' 'Now,' says the manager, 'Men, my word is my bond.' Our spokesman says, 'I have met men like you often. Educated men are the greatest disapointers...so shake hands on your agreement, and now, what about our fly oil, etc?' The manager says, 'you are sure of that,' so we rushed away up the river.<sup>72</sup>

The men worked the ten days and returned home "with not a five cent piece for our destitute families."<sup>73</sup> By way of concluding his letter, this writer directly addressed the Commission of Government:

Now, leaders of Newfoundland, what do you think of that? Look kindly on the poor hardworking class and give them work. Better to do that than put them in jail and feed them on hard bread and cold water. We ain't looking for any great salary, but just an existence and maintenance independently for our families if we can get work. How is the country going to be raised up if after trying so hard and waiting so long, we got through all these experience[s] in the lumberwoods and then can get no other work and no more dole, so how can the labouring classes live?<sup>74</sup>

To close out a month of unprecedented unrest in the Newfoundland woods, 21 more men quit work for contractors William Dawe and Sons at Western Arm. The company shrewdly paid the men's passages home. Dawe claimed that the 200 men remaining on the job "are continuing to work and doing well."<sup>75</sup> This statement came after a month when a quarter of his work force had abandoned work because they could not earn any money.

Newfoundland loggers in the early 1930s then were clearly discontented and had serious grievances with the companies and their contractors. Poverty and malnutrition weakened the men, and many protested low wages and poor conditions by dropping their bucksaws and returning home where they tried to survive on their highly flexible household economies. Many seasoned loggers, like many New Brunswick woodsmen, would not even go into the woods because they

<sup>71</sup> *Evening Telegram*, 12 August 1934.

<sup>72</sup> *Evening Telegram*, 12 August 1934.

<sup>73</sup> *Evening Telegram*, 12 August 1934.

<sup>74</sup> *Evening Telegram*, 12 August 1934.

<sup>75</sup> *Evening Telegram*, 27 July 1934.



realized that the prevailing piecerates would not allow them to make any money and that instead they would only wear out their clothes. In some instances, as we have seen, loggers banded together to strike for better employment terms. At these critical moments, the loggers clearly voiced what they wanted: enough to allow them to maintain themselves and their families independently of the companies, local merchants, and the government. This desire for what Ian McKay calls "working-class independence" (which the 1986 *Report of the Royal Commission on Employment and Unemployment* describes as the Newfoundland "balanced budget ethic") had a long history in outports where fishermen were often shackled to merchants by the impoverishing truck system.<sup>76</sup> The men's discontent and their organized strength in some regions was soon channelled into Newfoundland's first loggers' union.

While Newfoundland loggers did not gain their own union until the mid 1930s, William Coaker and the Fishermen's Protective Union (FPU) attempted to improve loggers' wages and working conditions in the early 1900s. The FPU was one of the most remarkable reform movements in Newfoundland history. Led by Coaker, the union sought to alter fundamentally the fishery's structure and the fisherman's position within it.<sup>77</sup> As many fishermen also went in the woods, went on the seal hunt, and farmed, Coaker included them as members of his primary producers' union and attempted to improve their working conditions and wages. In 1911, Coaker persuaded Harry Crowe, one of Newfoundland's largest forest-sector entrepreneurs, to improve conditions in his camps.<sup>78</sup> Crowe agreed to employ a doctor for his men, to guarantee a monthly wage, and to pay bonuses for extra work. In addition, Crowe assented that the doctor would bring on his visits to the camps moving-picture equipment and a gramophone and "every night he will exhibit pictures...of an educational and instructive nature."<sup>79</sup> But other operators such as ANDCO, the Norris Arm Company, the Central Forest Company, and the Horwood Lumber Company — which treated their men "like dogs," according to Coaker — refused to improve conditions in their camps.<sup>80</sup> Coaker did not give up the battle. After the 1913 election in which the FPU won eight seats, Coaker induced the legislature to pass a law to protect loggers. The 1915 Logging Act represented a significant advance for loggers: it ensured the men regular pay, and improved their

<sup>76</sup>Newfoundland, *Royal Commission on Employment and Unemployment* (St. John's 1986), 45.

<sup>77</sup>On the FPU, see W.F. Coaker, *History of the Fishermen's Protective Union of Newfoundland from 1909 to 1929* (St. John's 1930); Ian D.H. McDonald, [J.K. Hiller, ed.] "To Each His Own:" *William Coaker and the Fishermen's Protective Union in Politics* (St. John's 1987).

<sup>78</sup>Robert Hong, "The Fishermen's Protective Union and the Sealers' and Loggers' Bills," Unpublished paper, 1985, 4. Copy of paper in possession of the author. I am indebted to Mr. Hong for allowing me access to his essay.

<sup>79</sup>Hong, "Bills," 4.

<sup>80</sup>Hong, "Bills," 4.

living conditions and food.<sup>81</sup> However, the government rejected a minimum-wage clause which called for one dollar a day for experienced men and eighty cents for inexperienced loggers as "a hardship on the employer." Advances for loggers, as for fishermen, appear to have been much bound up with Coaker's reformist zeal, which withered and died during the 1920s. Loggers were largely unrepresented until the mid 1930s, while the Logging Act remained on the books unamended until 1931 when the government added minimum wage clauses.

Skilled mill workers established the first unions in the Newfoundland forest industry as they did in most North American industries before the mid-1930s.<sup>82</sup> In 1910, soon after the ANDCO mill opened in Grand Falls, highly-skilled Canadian papermakers formed Local 88 of the International Brotherhood of Papermakers.<sup>83</sup> In 1913, Alphonse Duggan, whose work experience in Glace Bay coal mines convinced him of the value of unions, helped to organize and later became president of the International Brotherhood of Pulp, Sulphite and Paper Mill Workers local in Grand Falls. This organization represented all those mill workers not qualified to join the exclusive Papermakers union.<sup>84</sup> The craft unions must have nettled the British Harmsworth family who owned ANDCO and were notoriously anti-union. The Harmsworths portrayed themselves as paternalistic employers who "did not expect the utmost farthing of profit to the detriment of their workers."<sup>85</sup> ANDCO likely tolerated the unions in order to attract and maintain a stable work force in a relatively isolated town such as Grand Falls. Such a work force was necessary to maintain the continuous operation of highly expensive pulping and papermaking machinery.<sup>86</sup> Despite the workers' independence in the mill, Grand Falls developed into a highly controlled company town complete with company houses, parks, and schools for employees and their families, and a magnificent mansion for Harmsworth *père*. The company did not view loggers as regular employees and excluded them from the town. These men and their families congregated in a dilapidated town on Grand Falls' edge and in communities near the cutting sites.

<sup>81</sup>Hong, "Bills," 15-7.

<sup>82</sup>Radforth, *Bushworkers*, 107.

<sup>83</sup>Rolf Hattenhauer, "The History of the Labour Movement in Newfoundland," Unpublished manuscript, Centre for Newfoundland Studies, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1983, 166.

<sup>84</sup>Hattenhauer, "History," 167. On Alphonse Duggan, see Gillespie, *Class Act*, 63. On the mill unions, see Robert Zieger, *Rebuilding the Pulp and Paper Workers' Union, 1933-41* (Knoxville 1984). Zieger notes that by 1933, this organization had declined to 4,000 members, many of them Canadians. One would suspect that Newfoundlanders also formed a significant portion of the membership.

<sup>85</sup>Exploits Valley Senior Citizen's Club, *The Forest Beckoned: Grand Falls 1905-1960* (Grand Falls 1986), 3.

<sup>86</sup>See Radforth, *Bushworkers*, 107.

Workers' unionization followed a similar pattern in Corner Brook. Skilled workers formed international craft union locals long before the emergence of the first loggers' union. In 1925, mill workers formed Local 64 of the Pulp Sulphite and Paper Mill Workers with the assistance of a dynamic young organizer, Joseph Smallwood. Not long afterward, the mill's papermakers formed a local branch of the International Brotherhood of Papermakers.<sup>87</sup>

For a number of reasons, the mill workers did not help the loggers organize, and this delayed the formation of a loggers' union and undermined class unity in the forest industry. Historians Hak and Radforth have recorded a similar fragmentation of the forest sector labour force in British Columbia and Northern Ontario.<sup>88</sup> Mill workers in Newfoundland, like their counterparts across North America, possessed a job culture distinct from the loggers' work experience. They also earned substantially more than loggers. Newfoundlanders knew that a "Grand Falls job" was a steady, well-paying job, whereas a job cutting wood was low-paying, seasonal employment.<sup>89</sup> As well, the loggers' exclusion from the company towns physically enforced their social and economic distance from mill workers — further obscuring class boundaries in the industry. Mill workers supported only one loggers' strike during the 1930s: a 1933 action in which mill workers saw their own interests at stake.<sup>90</sup>

The belated emergence of loggers' unions in Newfoundland followed a North American pattern. Loggers all across the continent were slow to organize despite their prominence in early economic development and their rich job culture. Indeed, loggers fought the 19th-century assault on the North American forests without the protection of any enduring organization. Historians attribute the absence of durable organizations in the woods to both the nature of the workforce and of the industry. They argue that loggers were highly individualistic workers who, when they had a grievance, would simply ask for their pay and move on rather than form a union. In logging regions such as Northern Ontario and Quebec, ethnic heterogeneity also helped to divide workers. Widespread labour surpluses usually allowed companies to replace agitators with more compliant workers. Meanwhile, the labour-force turnover in most logging areas was unceasing, as migrant workers moved from camp to camp and seasonal workers hired on only to vanish with some cash in their pockets a few months later, taking up farming and other occupations. All of this undermined the development of committed union organization in the woods. And

<sup>87</sup>Hattenhauer, "History," 168; Harold Horwood, *Corner Brook: A Social History of a Paper Town* (St. John's 1986), 43. On Smallwood's role see Richard Gwyn, *Smallwood: The Unlikely Revolutionary* (Toronto 1974), 37; Harold Horwood, *Joey: The Life and Political Times of Joey Smallwood* (Toronto 1989), 46-7.

<sup>88</sup>Hak, "On the Fringes," 316-7; Radforth, *Bushworkers*, 135-6.

<sup>89</sup>Claude Quigley personal communication, November, 1987. Mr. Quigley grew up in Grand Falls and worked in the mill for a few years. His father was an oiler in the mill for 40 years.

<sup>90</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 10 May 1933.

even if workers wanted to organize, the very organization of their industry inhibited unionization. Companies, contractors, and jobbers operated thousands of logging camps scattered across the continent and often employed different groups of workers to undertake the cut, the haul-off, and the drive.<sup>91</sup> The contracting system, in which the companies commonly hired men to organize and undertake parts of their cut including the hiring of loggers and the running of camps, also impeded collective action. Nancy Colpitts has shown how in the sawmilling community of Alma, New Brunswick, a stable workforce of skilled and independent loggers with a feeling of collective identity and who relied to some extent on the abilities of their fellow workers — seemingly all the classical prerequisites for collective action — were disinclined to act collectively. Colpitts argues persuasively, however, that the contracting system bound the workers' interests to those of management, bankers, political parties, government, and pulp and paper companies.<sup>92</sup> Despite these problems, loggers in most of Canada's major logging areas did produce unions during the 20th century and, as we have seen, there was a surge of militancy in the woods during the 1930s.<sup>93</sup>

Newfoundland loggers shared with loggers elsewhere many of the same obstacles to organization. One of the most significant impediments to organization during the 1930s was a labour surplus. On the one hand, the pulp and paper companies curtailed their cutting operations when newsprint prices fell and fewer cutters were required. In some districts, as noted above, the companies stopped logging operations altogether.<sup>94</sup> On the other hand, there were more than enough fishermen and unemployed labourers starving at home on the dole and thus willing to work for low wages that the companies readily found labour to stock their camps. This pool of surplus labour was no doubt augmented by what Peter Neary has called Canada's "exclusionist" immigration policy towards Newfoundland in the 1930s. Emigration to Canada for work, an enduring aspect of Newfoundland life, became much more difficult for fishermen during the Depression.<sup>95</sup> Thus, desperate fishermen and labourers with few options and on low piece-rates could not afford to stop work for any length of time because they would fall more deeply into debt. In this situation, the companies had almost complete latitude in dictating employment

<sup>91</sup>See Vernon Jenson, *Lumber and Labour* (New York 1971); Donald Mackay, *The Lumberjacks* (Toronto 1978), 252; H.A. Logan, *Trade Unions in Canada* (Toronto 1948); Gordon Hack, "On the Fringes," 192; Radforth, *Bushworkers*, ch. 6.

<sup>92</sup>Colpitts, "Alma, New Brunswick," 146-54.

<sup>93</sup>On the resurgence of loggers' unions in British Columbia during the 1930s see Myrtle Bergren, *Tough Timber* (Toronto 1966); Hak, "On the Fringes," ch. 5; Lembecke and Tattam, *One Union in Wood*, chs. 2-3; on Northern Ontario see Radforth, *Bushworkers*, chs. 6-7; Magnuson, *The Untold Story*, chs. 1-5; on Quebec see Catta, *La Grève*; on New Brunswick see Patrick Burden, "The New Brunswick Farmer-Labour Union, 1937-41," MA Thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1983.

<sup>94</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 16 July 1932.

<sup>95</sup>Neary, "Canadian Immigration Policy," 69.

## 102 LABOUR/LE TRAVAIL

terms to their workers. The only way most workers could protest was to quit and go home.

The nature of Newfoundland logging operations also made organizing difficult. Generally, loggers worked alone or with a brother or son on isolated "chances" at piece-rates which emphasized individual achievement and initiative rather than worker solidarity. The logging camps themselves were dispersed across the island, which made the organizer's job of signing up workers difficult and communication among loggers almost impossible. The logging operations' seasonal rhythm kept the work force in flux. After each phase of the operation, many loggers either quit or moved on to another camp and then, after the spring drive, all the loggers returned home. George Edison, for example, described his woods work:

I belong to Fleur de Lys, White Bay.... About 10th June last I started cutting in Millertown. I finished there somewhere around the first week of August.... I left there because the cut was finished. Then I came over to Camp 47 with Harry Ball on Grand Lake. I went up there in September and left in October. I was with Ball about a month and a half... I then went out to Grand Falls cutting with Pat McCormick and remained with him the rest of the winter.... I am now signed on to go into Hancock's camp for this season's cut. This is at Glide Brook.<sup>96</sup>

Even during the course of a single season, loggers might quit at any moment because they were not making any money, had made enough money, were exhausted, or had to attend to family business at home. Albert Hale observed:

I belong to Newstead, Notre Dame Bay. I was cutting last fall with Mr. Lingard on Dog Brook. I began the first of September and remained about a month and a half when I went home to dig up my vegetables.... I could not get back in the woods after I had my work done because the cut was in....<sup>97</sup>

Clearly, the significant number of seasonal workers in the labour force also inhibited worker solidarity. Peter Neary writes that in the 1930s, the ideal outport worker remained the independent, self-sustaining commodity producer:

Rural Newfoundlanders were...as a group remarkably versatile; work was seasonal and there were many fishermen-farmers, fishermen-miners, fishermen-loggers, and various combinations thereof. The frequently itinerant Jack of all trades flourished in outport Newfoundland, where a tradition of self-help was deeply ingrained.<sup>98</sup>

In using logging as one of many routes to survival, Newfoundlanders resembled many Canadian forest workers. Patrick Burden, for example, shows how men in northern New Brunswick had long farmed in summer and logged in winter.<sup>99</sup> In

<sup>96</sup>Deer Lake file, Evidence, the *Bradley Report*.

<sup>97</sup>Bishop's Falls/Millertown/Botwood file, Evidence, the *Bradley Report*.

<sup>98</sup>Neary, *Newfoundland*, 9-10.

<sup>99</sup>Burden, "The New Brunswick Farmer-Labour Union," 27.

the Newfoundland woods, many loggers were fishermen or the sons of fishermen who logged during the winter to gain some cash which they might not get from the fishery or to reduce or pay off their debt with the merchant.<sup>100</sup> These men saw themselves as temporary members of the woods labour force. They often favoured the piece-rate system because — so they thought — it offered them a way to make money quickly and were unlikely to withdraw their labour for an extended period in order to maintain a strike.<sup>101</sup>

Certain aspects of Newfoundland logging did encourage a sense of solidarity among workers. The men lived, slept, and ate together and thus shared the experiences of leaky bunkhouses, bad food, and lousy clothes. As Ian Radforth has explained, "unlike most workers who returned to their homes and families at the end of a shift, woodsmen lived with their workmates — no sharp line was drawn between work and leisure. The camp was an all encompassing experience, a fact that would have important consequences for woods unionization."<sup>102</sup> Although Radforth was describing Northern Ontario bushworker camps, similar conditions existed in Newfoundland logging camps. In the bunkhouse in the evenings, the men had plenty of time to discuss wages and conditions, and could plainly see the exhaustion in their comrades' faces and bodies. In larger camps there would be men from various parts of the island who could describe wages and conditions in other districts. After each scale, too, the contractor would often read out in the bunkhouse the amount each man had cut and his earnings. As Allan Pritchett from Deer Lake recounted, the men were well aware of each other's paltry earnings:

....The scaler would scale each month around the 11th for settlement-day. And that night the scaler and the men who looked after the van would come in the Bunkhouse and read each man's account viz. saw files, axe hire, frame hire, Board, Tobacco, matches etc. and ask then if it was correct; Doctor fee also included. If the men said it was correct, he would issue him [the] amount at \$1.40 or \$1.45 a cord, he would probably have from \$3 to \$5. Maybe some would have \$12 for 26 days slaving in all weather with Bucksaw, now Sir is it not time for something to be done [?].... Men can work their life-time and be beggars still.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>100</sup>For a good description of the historical workings of the household economy in outport Newfoundland, see *Report of the Royal Commission on Employment and Unemployment*, 44-5.

<sup>101</sup>W.R. Warren, Prime Minister's papers, GN 8/4/8, PANL. See testimony of the W.R. Warren Commission, December 1924. The government commissioned Warren to "enquire into the system of logging as conducted in this colony and into the letting of contracts and subcontracts to loggers for the cutting and handling of wood for pulp and paper mills and for export and into the rate of wages paid to loggers for such cutting and handling." Warren found "a number of men who did not mind hard work and who prefer the contract system [i.e. piece rates] because they can make more per month."

<sup>102</sup>Radforth, *Bushworkers*, 88.

<sup>103</sup>Allan Pritchett to Douglas Fraser, Secretary of Labour, 9 April 1934, Correspondence file, Evidence, the *Bradley Report*.

Finally, when Joseph Thompson came to organize his loggers' union, he could easily address the men in each camp as a group because they congregated each evening in the bunkhouse.

Community and kinship bonds in Newfoundland also clearly diminished some of the obstacles to worker solidarity. Family roots extended widely and deeply into 20th-century Newfoundland communities, for the last significant immigration influx had occurred in the 1820s.<sup>104</sup> A contractor often recruited his entire crew from a single community — often his own community — so that men shared family and community connections in addition to the same work experience. The strength of such community ties is vividly apparent in those cases where men quit in large numbers to protest wages and conditions during the 1930s. In almost every collective action, the participants came from the same community or, at most, from just two or three communities in the same district. Moreover, Joseph Thompson did not found the first loggers' union in the woods at the job site but in Point Leamington, a logging and fishing community on the northeast coast. Members of the union's first executive were all men native to the town. Thompson also organized the union along community lines, establishing locals in each of the island's main logging centres.

Faced with the possibilities and obstacles described above, in the mid-1930s Joseph John Thompson undertook the enormous task of channelling the loggers' discontent into their own union, the Newfoundland Lumbermen's Association.<sup>105</sup> Thompson was a logger with no formal education who had started work in a sawmill in Point Leamington when he was ten. By 1935, he had managed to escape from logging after 35 years in the woods to become a game warden. Two of his sons, however, worked in the woods. When they came home with nine dollars each after eighteen days on the drive, Thompson decided the time had come to change conditions in the woods.<sup>106</sup> In 1967, Thompson recalled, "So this came in me mind: what in the name of God are we going to do? And I made up my mind that I was going to do something about it."<sup>107</sup>

In the beginning, Thompson knew almost nothing about trade unionism. However, he had learned how to run an organization from his experience as a high-ranking member of the Point Leamington Orange Lodge.<sup>108</sup> Once Thompson launched the union, he also benefited from his many meetings with Alphonse Duggan, an organizer at the Grand Falls mill and Newfoundland Federation of Labour pioneer. Duggan taught Thompson organizing methods which he "gathered

<sup>104</sup> S.J.R. Noel. *Politics in Newfoundland* (Toronto 1971), 4-5.

<sup>105</sup> Joseph Thompson, *The History of the Newfoundland Lumberman's Association* (St. John's 1956), 16.

<sup>106</sup> Joseph Thompson interview, 1967. Rolf Hattenhauer interviewed Thompson at Point Leamington. Tape 84-224 C7231 and C7232, Memorial University Folklore Archives.

<sup>107</sup> Thompson interview.

<sup>108</sup> Thompson interview.

up, like the scripture treasure all these lessons into...[his] heart."<sup>109</sup> Thompson's biblical imagery suggests a source of inspiration for his project. In the 1930s Thompson was a Salvation Army soldier and a deeply spiritual man.<sup>110</sup> Perhaps organizing the loggers offered him a mission.

On 5 August 1935, Thompson held a meeting of loggers in Point Leamington. The loggers elected him president and seven other men officers of the Newfoundland Lumbermen's Association. Thompson then wrote Sir Richard Squires, a lawyer and former Prime Minister, for legal advice. He also wrote to ANDCO divisional manager J.J. Kennedy of Bishop's Falls to determine the company's reaction to the loggers' union. Squires agreed to represent the loggers, while ANDCO flatly refused to deal with Thompson or the new union.<sup>111</sup> He and Squires then drafted up the NLA constitution and by-laws. The NLA's general objectives were:

To develop throughout the Island of Newfoundland and its dependencies the business of lumbering in all its phases whatsoever and secure as high a standard of living as possible for all those engaged in the business of lumbering whether as employer or employee and to regulate relations between employer and workman and between workman and workman in the trade, and to those ends establish a union with a general Committee of Management at Point Leamington and local branches in every city, town, and village throughout the Island of Newfoundland.<sup>112</sup>

From the start, Thompson saw the NLA as a national union with local councils established around the island — much like the Fishermen's Protective Union's councils — and devoted to improving the loggers' wages and working conditions. Clearly, the NLA lacked any strong political orientation or radical ideology which were sometimes present in loggers' unions elsewhere. The NLA constitution required local councils to hold monthly meetings to admit new members, (any logger who "has attained the age of sixteen"), to receive dues, and to "transact business generally." The union's dues were low enough to attract a large membership. The logger had to pay a dollar to join and 25 cents a month while working, or 10 cents "when not working regularly or at all."<sup>113</sup>

Thompson established a highly centralized and authoritarian union structure. The Committee of Management in Point Leamington, composed of a president, vice-president, treasurer, marshal, and three members-at-large, dictated union policy, negotiated agreements, settled grievances, and expelled delinquent mem-

<sup>109</sup>Thompson interview.

<sup>110</sup>Hughlet Edison, interview with the author, November 1987, Botwood. The late Mr. Edison worked in the woods during the 1930s and was an acquaintance of Thompson's.

<sup>111</sup>Thompson, *History*.

<sup>112</sup>*Constitution and By-Laws of the Newfoundland Lumberman's Association* (St. John's 1936), 1-2, located in the Rolf Hattenhauer Collection, Centre for Newfoundland Studies Archives, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

<sup>113</sup>NLA *Constitution*.



bers.<sup>114</sup> This Committee also granted and revoked local council charters, filled its own vacancies, and passed by-laws without a rank-and-file vote. Finally, this powerful executive body determined all union officials' salaries from dues forwarded from the local councils to head office. The constitution demanded annual elections for Committee of Management positions, but included a clause stipulating that "the first President of the Association shall be Joseph John Thompson of Point Leamington."<sup>115</sup> In contrast, the NLA's constitution countenanced rather weak local councils. Each had an executive committee which consisted of a chairman, a secretary-treasurer, and a member-at-large. Council members annually chose one executive council member to represent them at the NLA annual general meeting. Beyond these responsibilities, the councils' mandate extended only to signing up members, maintaining membership records, and forwarding dues to the Committee of Management.<sup>116</sup>

Thompson sought ANDCO permission to visit its camps once he and Squires had registered the NLA under the Newfoundland Trade Union Act. Harry Crowe, the woods manager, refused him permission to enter the camps and threatened to have Thompson arrested for trespassing if company officials caught him on company property. Squires advised the NLA president to hold meetings with loggers outside the camps off ANDCO property.<sup>117</sup> Thompson rejected Squires' advice and bought a bike to visit the camps near Bishop's Falls. As he was about to set off, however, ANDCO management changed its mind and decided to allow him access to their camps. The company even offered Thompson a car to travel in and sent W.D. Alcock, the assistant district superintendent, to accompany him.<sup>118</sup>

Available evidence permits only speculation about why ANDCO suddenly reversed its stance towards Thompson's union. Perhaps the international news was the most important influence on the company's thinking. During the mid 1930s, Roosevelt's New Deal legislation, which gave workers the right "to organize unions of their own choosing" and to engage in collective bargaining, inspired Americans as well as Canadians and Newfoundlanders to join unions and to strike for improved conditions.<sup>119</sup> The ANDCO may have concluded it was safer to deal with Thompson, whom they knew, than to wait until the "new unionism" of the Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO) swept into Newfoundland. Thompson

<sup>114</sup> NLA Constitution.

<sup>115</sup> NLA Constitution.

<sup>116</sup> NLA Constitution.

<sup>117</sup> Thompson, *History*, 5.

<sup>118</sup> Thompson, *History*, 5.

<sup>119</sup> On the US experience, see Irving Bernstein, *The Turbulent Years: A History of the American Workers, 1933-41* (Boston 1970); David Brody, *Workers in Industrial America: Essays on the Twentieth Century Struggle* (New York 1980); on Canada, see Irving Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour* (Toronto 1973); Thompson and Seager, *Decades*, 287-90; on Newfoundland, see Gillespie, *Class Act*, 54-78.

wrote in the 1950s that the company's kindness was something he never forgot. While this attitude attests to the company's long-term shrewdness in having thus gained Thompson's sympathy, it also seems to characterize Thompson as having been a canny leader at this time who was able to use the company's paternalism to advance his union's own interests.<sup>120</sup>

In 1936, Thompson led a successful organizing drive in the Bishop's Falls area and established a local council in Norris' Arm. The initial drive generated enough dues revenue to pay the union's debts and provide Thompson with a \$50-monthly salary.<sup>121</sup> He then continued west to Badger, Millertown, Deer Lake, Corner Brook, and Stephenville. By October 1936 Thompson had established local councils in Deer Lake, Corner Brook, and Stephenville. Loggers elected John Robinson as Deer Lake council chairman, general store owner Pierce Fudge as Corner Brook council chairman, and farmer Thomas Rose as Stephenville chairman. Thompson then appointed five full-time organizers and continued to sign up loggers throughout the winter of 1936-37 until the NLA had 32 local councils which covered the island from Stephenville on the west coast to Trinity Bay in the east.<sup>122</sup>

By 1937, the majority of Newfoundland loggers were NLA members. That spring, Thompson demanded that the companies recognize the union and raise drivers' hourly wages from 22 cents to 30 cents. Both companies refused, and instead compelled loggers to sign forms in which they agreed to work at the old rate. Many men (including some unionists) signed these forms when faced with the alternative of unemployment and the dole.<sup>123</sup> But this was by no means the end of the union. In early May, Thompson held a meeting in Norris Arm where he recruited volunteers to go to ANDCO divisional headquarters in Bishop's Falls and seek employment on the drive. If presented with the employment forms, Thompson told his members to refuse to sign them and proceed to Rattling Brook, a strategic point on the drive. In the meantime, Thompson headed to Grand Falls where he informed ANDCO that unless it began negotiations the NLA would "hang up" the drive.<sup>124</sup> The company again refused to budge, believing that enough men had signed the employment forms to suggest that Thompson lacked widespread support among loggers. Thompson, who claimed to dislike confrontation, later wrote he "reluctantly" called his volunteers at Rattling Brook to send word to the camps to halt the drive.<sup>125</sup> The loggers immediately stopped work and within two days the company agreed to negotiate with the union. ANDCO eventually agreed to raise drivers' hourly wages to 28.5 cents, to provide free saws and axes, pay half-time to loggers prevented from working by bad weather, and to provide free medical

<sup>120</sup>Thompson, *History*, 5.

<sup>121</sup>Thompson, *History*, 6.

<sup>122</sup>Thompson, *History*, 6.

<sup>123</sup>Thompson, *History*, 6.

<sup>124</sup>Thompson, *History*, 8.

<sup>125</sup>Thompson, *History*, 8.

care. The company also dropped daily boarding charges from 66 cents to 60 cents.<sup>126</sup>

Thompson then proceeded to the west coast to deal with IPPCO. According to the *Evening Telegram*, the loggers there were already on strike: "As far as can be learned, the strike began at Deer Lake on Monday and about 200 men quit work. Since then the strike has spread and about 800 are now involved."<sup>127</sup> Once in Corner Brook, Thompson intended to close the Humber canal gates, cutting off the mill's water and power supply and thus forcing the company to negotiate. The local magistrate, however, convinced Thompson not to shut the gates because not only the company but the whole town would be left without power and water.<sup>128</sup> Thompson, who was known to be a very quick-witted man, instantly realized that the loggers depended on the good will of the people of Corner Brook for food and shelter. Therefore, he sent John Robinson, the Deer Lake local chairman, to call off the men who were standing watch over the power plant intake.<sup>129</sup>

A few days later, IPPCO woods manager A.W. Bentley agreed to negotiate with the NLA. Thompson wanted the same terms the union had reached with ANDCO but Bentley made a substantially lower offer. At Bentley's request, Thompson put the proposal to the loggers assembled outside the mill. Clearly, Thompson knew the loggers better than Bentley. Bill Gillespie has described what ensued:

They [the loggers] gathered at the mill... and when the wood's manager's wife came to pick him up in his car, the loggers surrounded it. Some of the men threatened to beat him; others demanded an immediate settlement or they would put him on the next westbound train out of the country 'as they were fed up with foreign control.' All traffic on Corner Brook's main street stopped as the mob filled the street and became more and more agitated. The police tried to intervene but they were badly out-numbered and the loggers began to push the car, with the manager and his wife in it, up the hill until it finally stopped in front of the courthouse. This time the police managed to convince the men that they would lose public sympathy if they were violent, and the couple were allowed to escape.<sup>130</sup>

But the action did not end there. That evening, 200 angry loggers assembled at the mill's water intake. They threatened to close it if the company did not make a better offer. The company now capitulated — by noon the following day Thompson and the mill manager signed an agreement similar to the NLA's pact with ANDCO.<sup>131</sup>

<sup>126</sup>Thompson, *History*, 22.

<sup>127</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 21 May 1937.

<sup>128</sup>Thompson, *History*.

<sup>129</sup>Thompson, *History*.

<sup>130</sup>Gillespie, *Class Act*, 61. Gillespie based his account on a Newfoundland Constabulary report from the District Inspector to P.J. O'Neil, Chief of Police, Corner Brook, Newfoundland, 20 May 1937.

<sup>131</sup>Thompson, *History*, 10.

Once Thompson had secured agreements with the pulp and paper companies, he turned his attention to the smaller independent contractors which supplied wood to IPPCO. He soon had signed agreements with Crosbie and Company of Cox's Cove, Saunders and Howell of Norris Arm, and French's of Burlington.<sup>132</sup> The NLA's 1937 year-end report listed 7,611 members in thirty locals. Assuming that 6,000 men worked for the pulp and paper companies and several thousand for the smaller contractors, the NLA had conducted a highly successful initial organizing drive.<sup>133</sup>

This strong showing, however, did not last. The following year, the Corner Brook and Deer Lake locals left the NLA and formed rival organizations. In March 1938, Pierce Fudge led the 1,500 member Corner Brook local out of the union following an acrimonious annual meeting in Point Leamington. Fudge formed a new body, the Newfoundland Labourers Union.<sup>134</sup> In June, Charles Tulk led Deer Lake's 505 members out of the NLA and established the Worker's Central Protective Union.<sup>135</sup> Each new union claimed to represent "labouring men of all classes" as well as loggers.<sup>136</sup> At the same time, the NLA became involved in a violent jurisdictional dispute with the Fishermen's Protective Union in parts of the island where loggers were also mostly fishermen. These divisions in the woods labour force weakened the loggers' strength in the face of the companies' coordinated power. The unions did not resolve their differences until the Commission of Government established the Woods Labour Board after the outbreak of World War II, which effectively ended militancy in the woods for almost 20 years. The WLB consisted of a government-appointed chairman who met with union and company officials to settle disputes and negotiate agreements.<sup>137</sup> The government considered the board a significant achievement because there were no strikes or lockouts in the woods after 1940 until 1957. At the same time, working conditions in the Newfoundland pulpwoods declined to the point where they were amongst the worst in Canada.

Unlike loggers' unions which emerged in other parts of North America, the NLA did not develop a radical political ideology.<sup>138</sup> Seager's description of Minto miners would also apply to Newfoundland loggers: "Class conflict, though at times quite real, did not generate much rhetoric of class, and only a faint echo of

<sup>132</sup>Thompson, *History*, 12.

<sup>133</sup>Thompson, *History*, 12.

<sup>134</sup>Thompson, *History*, 12.

<sup>135</sup>Thompson, *History*, 16. Figures on each union come from Thomas Liddell, *Industrial Survey*, 46-7. The estimates appear high because of the number of loggers holding memberships in more than one union.

<sup>136</sup>Liddell, *Industrial Survey*, 47.

<sup>137</sup>E.P. Akcampong, "Labour Laws and the Development of the Labour Movement in Newfoundland 1900-1960," MA thesis, Acadia University, 1970, 70.

<sup>138</sup>See Mackay, *Lumberjacks*, 252-60; Radforth, *Bushworkers*, 107-58; Hak, "On the Fringes," 148-315; Myrtle Bergren, *Tough Timber*.

proletarian radicalism."<sup>139</sup> The NLA reflected the views of Joseph Thompson — its founder, organizer, and president — who believed in class accommodation. During a 1937 strike, Thompson stated his views on the relationship between capital and labour:

[NLA] policy was not how much we can get for ourselves with no regard to capital, the contractor, or the investor. He said his union did not have any formal slogan but his own personal slogan was "Co-operation between capital and labour for mutual profit...." Mr Thompson does not like strikes, but he is more of the diplomatic type. He thinks that the day of quarrelling between capital and labour should be over. He says every labouring man of his union wants the man who invests his money in labour to feel that his capital is safe, that he is able to make a reasonable profit, and he wants every investor, and every manager of companies with investments in this country to feel, that it is to their advantage to have contented working men, men who are able to reasonably support themselves and their families, and to educate their children as the result of their steady toil.<sup>140</sup>

The principle of working-class autonomy, however, clearly was embedded in Thompson's philosophy of accommodation during the 1930s, and he adhered to it during the NLA's initial organizing campaign. He used force to gain union demands when ANDCO and IPPCO refused to negotiate and the rank and file loggers were prepared to act. But although the power and militancy of the organized loggers were impressive, Thompson's philosophy of accommodation eventually failed. The companies rarely cooperated. From the beginning, they sought to control the loggers' union and to impose downward pressure on wages and conditions. In the 1940s and 1950s, the splits in the union and the Commission of Government's Woods Labour Board, which embodied Thompson's principles of accommodation, effectively weakened the loggers' organized strength and severely limited their union's autonomy. The loggers did not become a militant force in the woods again until the International Woodworkers of America sought to organize them and dismantle the Woods Labour Board during the late 1950s.

During the 1930s, Thompson's belief in class accommodation dovetailed with the tradition of the Newfoundland trade union movement. Trade unionists in Newfoundland preferred to solve their differences with capital through conciliation and compromise. Gillespie's study of the NFL's emergence in the late 1930s illustrates this point. The founders of the NFL, who strongly influenced Thompson's thinking, felt that their success depended on "the degree of respectability they could project to the public."<sup>141</sup> In 1938, NFL leaders wrote,

...we swear the Officers and Members are utterly and unreservedly opposed to the tents of Communism and Fascism or any other ism and forthright [sic] declare ourselves adherents

<sup>139</sup>Seager, "Minto, New Brunswick," 85-6.

<sup>140</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 23 October 1937.

<sup>141</sup>Cited by Gillespie, "A History of the Newfoundland Federation of Labour," 61-4.

of Democratic Principles and unalterable believers in the Christian foundation of Civilization and unserably [sic] loyal to our King and Country.<sup>142</sup>

The democratic principles referred to were the so-called principles of British democracy, compromise, fair-mindedness, and mutual respect in all social and economic relations.<sup>143</sup> Thus, Newfoundland labour leaders like Thompson argued that their efforts to organize workers and to secure higher wages and better conditions were not attempts to alter fundamentally the social system. They simply were trying to restore the proper balance between capital and labour after a period when capital had an unfair advantage.<sup>144</sup> A Labour Day 1937 editorial in the *Evening Telegram* illustrated that the unionists' beliefs had widespread public support:

Few will begrudge to labour the benefits of increased wages and shorter hours or the security which accrues from collective bargaining powers, but the manner they have been sought in America and the violence and bloodshed, which have often accompanied the strikes of unions, have caused a revolt of public opinion.<sup>145</sup>

Gillespie concludes that "the basic right of belonging to a trade union was accepted as consistent with 'British' justice, while the confrontation tactics of the Congress of Industrial Organizations were rejected."<sup>146</sup> One should add that while the *Evening Telegram* and its readers may have rejected confrontation as a means for labour to secure its rights, Newfoundland unionists were willing to use force to gain their rights.

In a recent interview, Frank Chafe, a former Newfoundland Federation of Labour president and Canadian Labour Congress representative during the 1959 IWA strike, argued strenuously that despite what some people said "Joe Thompson was a damned good unionist." In response to a question which suggested the NLA president was in ANDCO's pocket, Chafe recalled an incident when he and Thompson were checking out of a hotel. As Thompson went to pay, the hotel clerk informed him the company had already taken care of the bill. When Thompson heard this, he flew into a rage and slammed down his money, declaring dramatically, "the goddamned company is not going to pay my goddamned bill."<sup>147</sup> While this anecdote does not prove that Thompson always was an effective unionist, it certainly raises questions about the unflattering implication in IWA strike histories that he was *never* an effective unionist. As McKay said of the unforgiving indictment of PWA Grand Secretary, Robert Drummond, "It has...been all far too

<sup>142</sup>Cited in Gillespie, "History," 61-4.

<sup>143</sup>Cited in Gillespie, "History," 62-3.

<sup>144</sup>Cited in Gillespie, "History," 62-3.

<sup>145</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 6 September 1937. Cited in Gillespie, 63-4.

<sup>146</sup>*Evening Telegram*, 6 September 1937. Cited in Gillespie, 63-4.

<sup>147</sup>Frank Chafe interview with the author, 15 August 1991, St. John's.

simple."<sup>148</sup> It has been too simple to dismiss Thompson, this man who had worked in the woods for 35 years and in his retirement set out to establish an independent woods union to improve loggers' lives, as a co-opted union leader. It has also been too simple to assume that Thompson always reflected the loggers' outlook. The example of the workers who were prepared, in 1937, to put the Corner Brook mill manager on the next westbound train out of the country suggests the loggers were quite willing to make their own history.

During the Great Depression, Newfoundland loggers and their leader certainly were willing to protest and rebel to improve wages and working conditions and to establish an autonomous woods union. At heart, loggers, like many North American workers, desired to earn enough from their labour to maintain their families and to keep clear of the companies, local merchants, and government. They did not, however, develop a critique of the social system, as did some of their brothers in Northern Ontario and British Columbia, which would have given them a greater share in their labour's fruits. This is hardly surprising given Newfoundland's political separateness and geographic isolation from the North American labour movement in the 1930s. After 1934, furthermore, the advent of Commission government made political discussion in isolated communities, which never had been easy, even more difficult. As well, Newfoundland was largely bypassed by the waves of North American immigration which, during the late 1800s and early 1900s, brought fully-formed socialist and communist organizers as well as people with work experiences shaped in countries bitterly divided along class lines.<sup>149</sup> To turn again to Minto, New Brunswick, in the 1920s and 1930s, Seager argues that immigrants played "a disproportionately large role in the working-class movement long after they had dwindled to minority status."<sup>150</sup> In Newfoundland, the vast majority of loggers were native-born men, whose families had come from the English west country and from Ireland generations before. James Overton, it should be noted, has found evidence of radical political ideas among the unemployed in St. John's during the 1930s.<sup>151</sup> Loggers in Newfoundland, however, rarely, if ever, went to the city after they finished work. In contrast, historians have long known that British Columbia loggers gathered on certain downtown Vancouver streets where they discussed conditions and met communist and socialist organizers.<sup>152</sup> In Newfoundland, loggers returned to their communities where they formed an organization which reflected their own particular work experience in the woods. Yet, while all this may explain the absence of a "red" loggers union in Newfoundland, it does not diminish the importance of class and class conflict in the loggers' working lives during the 1930s.

<sup>148</sup> McKay, "By Wisdom, Wile or War," 35.

<sup>149</sup> See Gordon Inglis, *More Than Just a Union: The Story of the NFFAWU* (St. John's 1985), 44.

<sup>150</sup> Seager, "Minto, New Brunswick," 100-1.

<sup>151</sup> Overton, "Public Relief," 160.

<sup>152</sup> See, for example, Bergren, *Tough Timber*, 25-7.

*Appendix***Newfoundland Strike Estimates 1930s\***

TABLE 1

**Newfoundland Labour Disputes Estimates 1930s-Yearly Breakdown**

Year	Strikes	Collective Actions	Total	%
1930		1	1	2
1931				
1932	5	2	7	14
1933	6		6	12
1934	1	9	10	20
1935				
1936	2		2	4
1937	7		7	14
1938	9	1	10	20
1939	4	3	7	14
Total	34	16	50	100

Source: *Evening Telegram, Daily News*, 1929-39.

\* A note on data and to define terms. The Newfoundland government did not create a Department of Labour until 1933. The department, unfortunately, only survived six months until the suspension of responsible government and the institution of Commission government. The lack of a labour department meant Newfoundland had no publication equivalent to Canada's *Labour Gazette* or the Strikes and Lockouts files which, of course, are major sources for historians of Canadian labour conflict. I gathered data on strikes and collective actions in Newfoundland from the island's daily press. Generally, I follow the Canadian Department of Labour's definition of a strike (contained in the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act, 1907) as cited by Cruikshank and Kealey: "[a] cessation of work by a body of employees acting in combination, or a concerted refusal or a refusal under a common understanding of any number of employees to continue to work for an employer, in consequence of a dispute, done as a means of compelling their employer, or to aid other employees in compelling their employer, to accept terms of employment." According to Cruikshank and Kealey, the Department of Labour did not count as strikes, among other actions, "Group desertions of workers who did not want to return to work...." See Cruikshank and Kealey, "Strikes in Canada," 126-7. I have broadly defined collective actions as acts (to include the many group desertions of Newfoundland workers during the 1930s) by workers to protest their terms of employment or to improve their lot which do not directly pressure or coerce their employer to make improvements.



TABLE 2

## Newfoundland Labour Disputes 1930s-Occupational Breakdown

Occupation	Strikes	Collective Actions	Total	%
loggers <sup>1</sup>	13	8	21	42
papermill workers	1		1	2
longshoremen	9	2	11	22
miners	2		2	4
labourers		2	2	4
transport workers		1	1	2
merchant seamen		1	1	2
carpenters	2		2	4
blueberry pickers		1	1	2
factory workers <sup>2</sup>	4		4	8
prisoners	1		1	2
fishermen		1	1	2
telegraphers & telephone operators	2		2	4
	34	16	50	100

<sup>1</sup> Includes loggers, river drivers and pulpwood loaders.

<sup>2</sup> Includes fish plant workers, factory workers, bakery workers, confectionary and soft drink workers.

Source: *Evening Telegram, Daily News*, 1929-39.

TABLE 3

## Newfoundland Logger Disputes 1930s- Yearly Breakdowns

Year	Strikes	Collective Actions	Total	%
1930		1	1	4.76
1931				
1932	2		2	9.52
1933	3		3	14.28
1934	1	7	8	38.08
1935				
1936				
1937	4		4	19.04
1938	1		1	4.76
1939	2		2	9.52
Total	13	8	21	99.96

Source: *Evening Telegram, Daily News*, 1929-39.

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