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Résumé de l'article

Au cours du dix-neuvième siècle, à Saint-John, le travail de débardeur se développa en même temps que le commerce du bois. Les organisations de travailleurs maritimes rivalisaient périodiquement avec les marchands locaux pour contrôler le marché du travail portuaire. La solidarité du milieu de travail se trouvait souvent minée par les divisions ethniques et religieuses ainsi que par la segmentation du travail. Malgré l'introduction des vaisseaux à vapeur, le procès de travail des débardeurs demeura relativement inchangé, mais la situation se transforma au tournant du siècle quand Saint-John fut aménagé en port d'hiver. Le Grand Capital confronta le Travail dans une lutte à outrance pour le contrôle des quais. Grâce à ces conditions liées à la Grande Guerre, les débardeurs réussirent finalement à imposer de nouveaux règlements de travail et à exercer un contrôle partiel sur l'embauche. Après l'armistice, toutefois, les compagnies maritimes imposèrent de nouveau leur autorité. Devant cette situation difficile, les débardeurs de Saint-John durent abandonner leurs actions de classe pour se tourner vers les palliatifs offerts par la politique régionale.

ARTICLES

Saint John Longshoremen During the Rise of Canada's Winter Port, 1895-1922

Robert H. Babcock

DURING THE EARLY 1900s, labour and capital perennially wrestled for control of the Saint John docks.¹ These waterfront contests differed from other industrial struggles in which entrepreneurs sought "the manager's brain under the workman's cap," as David Montgomery recently phrased it.² Whereas the primary issues in most shore-based industries usually involved the application of new technologies, or greater divisions of labour, or new management theories all designed to appropriate the vital skills of workers, the battles between capital and labour on the docks represented instead a struggle to control the waterfront labour market. This remained the overriding issue until the containerization of ocean-going freight in the 1960s.³

We already know a good deal about the struggles that took place on the Saint John docks before the establishment of the city's winter port business. To date, however, historians have not evaluated these conflicts in terms of the central issue of labour market control. Judith Fingard's study of Eastern Canada's seafarers shows how ship labouring arose in timber ports like Saint John due to the failure of sailors to adhere to their contracts. It was easier for shippers to hire shore-based labour than to compel the sailors to do this work. But when the ship labourers

¹A version of this paper was the W.S. MacNutt Memorial Lecture at the University of New Brunswick campuses in Fredericton and Saint John, 22-23 October 1988. I am grateful to Professors Ian McKay, Richard Judd and Jacques Ferland for their helpful comments.

²The title of chapter 1 in his *The Fall of the House of Labour* (New York 1987).

³Although calling this point by a different name ("dispatch procedures"), John B. Foster makes a similar observation in "On the Waterfront: Longshoring in Canada," in Craig Heron and Robert Storey, eds., *On the Job: Confronting the Labour Process in Canada* (Kingston 1986), 281-308.

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banded together, merchants effectively used seamen as scabs to break up these combinations.⁴ James Richard Rice's MA thesis, based on a reading of the 19th-century local press, chronicles the rise and fall of the Saint John ship labourers' organizations through several titanic battles with local shipping firms. By the 1880s, Rice concludes, local merchants had regained effective control over the waterfront.⁵ In a recent analysis of the spatial evolution of the Fundy port, Elizabeth McGahan retraces these struggles and extends her account from the 1890s into the first two decades of this century. The formation of a local union of the American-based International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) at Saint John in 1911, she concludes, paralleled the loss of local authority over the port to Montreal capitalists and Ottawa politicians. Winter port development completed the transfer of most port functions from local to external control.⁶ To make this point effectively, McGahan did not have to give the longshoremen more than cursory attention. But since her book appeared, the records of the Saint John local of the ILA have become available to scholars. They permit us to trace the evolution of the waterfront labour process after the turn of the century, when exogenous forces transformed relations between labour and capital on the Saint John docks.⁷

Despite the initiation of seasonal agreements between local shippers and ship labourers during the 1880's, only after 1900 did "decasualization" gain significant headway on the Saint John docks. It developed in the context of the rationalization of the North Atlantic shipping industry, the rise of Saint John's winter port activity, the growth of a "new unionism" that swept Europe and America during the first two decades of the 20th century, and the labour shortage brought on by World War I.⁸ With the expansion of transatlantic trade and the development of winter ports at the turn of the century, Montreal shippers won enormous strategic advantage over longshoremen in eastern Canada through their power to force civic officials and stevedoring firms to compete for cargoes. Wielding this powerful weapon, the shippers demanded a reduction in labour costs, provoking a series of violent confrontations on the docks. The intensification of conflict, and the widening of the arena of battle to include several ports along the North Atlantic coast, mobilized Saint John longshoremen to overcome their internal divisions and to link up with

⁴Judith Fingard, "The Decline of the Sailor as a Ship Labourer in 19th Century Timber Ports," *Labour/le Travailleur*, 2 (1977), 35-53. Around the turn of the century, the term "ship labourers" gradually gave way to "longshoremen."

⁵"A History of Organized Labour in Saint John, New Brunswick, 1813-1890," MA thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1968.

⁶*The Port of Saint John, Vol. I: From Confederation to Nationalization 1867-1927* (Saint John 1982), 180-7.

⁷The Minute Books of ILA Local No. 273 covering the period c1900-20 have been deposited at the New Brunswick Museum, Saint John; cit. hereafter as Local 273 MB, followed by the date of entry.

⁸On the 'new unionism' in North America, see David Montgomery, "The 'new unionism' and the transformation of workers' consciousness in America, 1909-22," in his *Workers' Control in America* (New York 1979), 91-112; on similar phenomena in Europe, see Eric Hobsbawm, "The 'New Unionism' in Perspective," in his *Worlds of Labour: Further Studies in the History of Labour* (London 1984), 152-75.

the ILA, the Great Lakes-based union that was becoming the spokesman of waterfront labour groups throughout eastern North America.

From severe industrial conflict came a tenuous accommodation between labour and capital which gave the longshoremen temporary and incomplete control of the labour market and work process on the Saint John waterfront between 1911 and 1919. Industry-wide bargaining gradually standardized wages and working conditions among competing North American ports. The new arrangements implemented after 1900 heavily bureaucratized labour-management relations under the aegis of the state. When the wartime boom gave way to a sharp, postwar depression, the shipping companies regained most of their former dominance over the labour process. As a result, the longshoremen's famed militancy dissolved into a more regionally-based, inter-class outlook during the 1920s, and full decasualization of the Saint John docks had to await the establishment of union-controlled hiring halls during World War II.

Both the terms 'casual labour market' and 'decasualization' are central to this argument, and require elaboration. The first refers to that segment of the wage-earning class, often considered "unskilled," that was available at any hour of the day or night to load or unload vessels for an indefinite period. Due to the uncertainties of ship arrivals and departures, dockworkers were drawn from the pool of wage-workers found in every city who, through choice or circumstance, survived by intermittent work at various jobs. Like casual labour elsewhere, longshoremen usually competed with each other for waterfront work, and so could be readily exploited by shippers and their agents who required the men to work long hours at low wages under sometimes-hazardous conditions. In these circumstances, the only way that longshoremen as a group could protect themselves from exploitation was to wrest some control over the allocation of waterfront work from the shippers and stevedoring firms, a feat requiring extraordinary cohesiveness in the face of glutted urban labour markets. The process of gaining control over who would work on the docks, or "decasualizing" the labour market, became the crucial element of North American waterfront labour's struggles with capital.⁹ Only after the longshoremen had acquired some influence over the employment of casual labour could they introduce formal work rules and bargain effectively for hours and wage rates.

After examining the labour process of the longshoremen, this paper briefly reviews the struggles on the Saint John waterfront during the second half of the 19th century from the perspective of labour-market control. Then, in the context

⁹For a comparable analysis of decasualization at the port of San Francisco during the 1930s, see H. Mills and D. Wellman, "Contractually Sanctioned Job Action and Workers' Control: The Case of the San Francisco Longshoremen," *Labor History*, 28 (Spring 1987), 167-95. In stark contrast to the North American experience, English dockworkers, fearing the loss of their informal work rules, actually resisted the decasualization of waterfront labour markets until the 1960s: see Gordon Phillips and Noel Whiteside, *Casual Labour: The Unemployment Question in the Port Transport Industry, 1880-1970* (Oxford 1985).

of the rise of Saint John's winter port and the consolidation of shipping interests at the turn of the century, the contest between labour and monopoly capital is examined in detail, and the results of partial decasualization are assessed. The paper concludes by evaluating the impact of the politically-mobilized Saint John longshoremen on local and regional labour movements.

The Longshoring Labour Process

HISTORIANS RECENTLY have begun to use the term "labour process" to analyze the manifold workplace factors which evolve through changes in the social structures of capitalist accumulation. At the most basic level, the labour process includes the work itself, the objects such as raw materials on which the work is performed, and the tools or other instruments which facilitate the process of work.¹⁰ For longshoremen, the labour process included not only these fundamental elements (which remained relatively unchanged from the mid-19th century until the containerization of ocean freight in the 1960s), but also the key features (size, job segmentation, mobility, ethnicity, gender) of the local labour market. Other broader, contextual forces such as the structure of the shipping industry, the physical characteristics of a particular port, and the historical pattern of conflict and accommodation between capital and labour on the wharves and in the community influenced the longshore labour process.

On Saint John docks, people like David Allan Daley typified both the work culture and one prominent aspect of the longshore labour process — its hazards. A 54 year-old native of the city's North End, on the eve of World War I he was president of the ILA local and one of its oldest members. One evening, foreman Daley was supervising the loading of a West Indies steamer on Pettingill's wharf when the gangway shifted suddenly, crushing to death one of the best-known dockworkers in Saint John. Witnesses included Daley's brother and son who had been working beside the victim. Several Saint John sawmills closed down for the afternoon to permit millmen to attend his funeral. Members of ILA No. 273 marched together before the coffin to Cedar Hill cemetery. Besides his parents, Daley left a widow and ten children, four of whom had already left Saint John to find work in Montreal or the United States.¹¹

At the turn of the century, the waterfront workplace was complex, variegated, and dangerous. Longshoremen laboured in gangs under the supervision of foremen like Daley, who usually knew each individual's capacities, particularly if they were his relatives. The size of gangs varied from five or six to 25 men according to the work to be done, the availability of labour, and the stevedore firm's desired profit margin. Each gang contained one member who also was the walking boss. A typical hatch gang was made up of pier men, deck men, and hold men. The pier men trucked

¹⁰For a definition, see Craig Heron and Robert Storey, eds., *On the Job*, and also "labour process" in T. Bottomore, et al., eds., *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* (Cambridge, Mass. 1983), 267-70.

¹¹*Saint John Globe*, 5 May 1913; *Eastern Labor News* 10 May 1913; *The Longshoreman*, 4 (July, 1913).

goods from sheds to the edge of the dock near the ship, while deck men prepared for the loading by rigging the ship's winches and gangplanks. Hold men worked below decks stowing or breaking out goods, moving them to or from open hatches, and loading or unloading slingloads. Winchmen, generally sailors until longshoremen had gained full control of the waterfront labour market, operated steam-driven, shipboard derricks that lifted or lowered the slings through the hatches. The hatch-tender, usually the gang boss, and the winchmen regulated the speed and shape of the work, while freighthandlers processed goods from dockside sheds to nearby railway spurs.¹²



A few men engaged in the construction of a wharf rather than loading or unloading steamers at the Saint John waterfront. (New Brunswick Museum, Saint John, New Brunswick/Musée du Nouveau-Brunswick, Saint John, Nouveau-Brunswick.)

Unlike the situation in so many other trades during the transition to monopoly capital, changing technology did not become a crucial variable at the longshoremen's workplace during this period. Steam-powered winches had been stand-

¹²The best description of the longshoremen's world at the turn of the century is Charles B. Barnes, *The Longshoremen* (New York 1915), a thorough investigation of the New York waterfront with chapters on Boston and London; see 31ff. See also H. Mills and D. Wellman, "Contractually Sanctioned Job Action," 172-4. As subsequent footnotes will reveal, the Minute Books of ILA Local No. 273 corroborate these descriptions with only minor local variations.

ard equipment on transatlantic steamships since the mid-19th century. On the eve of World War I, mechanical conveyor-belts attached to Saint John grain elevators permitted shippers to load 36,000 bushels an hour. After the war, the city's sugar refinery occasionally "shot" heavy bags of sugar down a chute into the holds of freighters. But otherwise, the longshoremen of the early 1920s carried, wheeled, or trucked goods in much the same manner as had their fathers and grandfathers. The most-skilled and experienced workers could hope to become foremen like Daley if dire necessity did not drive them from town (as it had Daley's sons) in the perennial search for work.¹³

Sectoralism remained an integral part of waterfront labour everywhere; that is, longshoremen laboured in small groups at a variety of workplaces in relative isolation from each other and spread over several acres of wharves, piers, and sheds.¹⁴ For this reason, workers' attempt to gain control over the workplace posed a formidable task compared to many shore-based employees who worked in closer proximity, often within a single building. The port of Saint John, for example, contained three distinct workplaces located at Lower Cove, near Market Slip, and on the West Side. Longshoremen learned about events in the life of the sprawling port, like Daley's death, not so much at the workplace as through neighbourhood, community, and trade-union channels.

During the 19th century, the decentralized structure of the shipping industry stamped its impress on the longshore labour process. Some longshoremen, instead of working directly for an employer over a period of time, were hired by foremen of the stevedore firms that held contracts to load and unload ships at a given rate. Others worked for men like David Daley, a foreman for H.S. Gregory & Sons, Saint John lumber dealers. Because labour expenses have been estimated to consume up to 60 per cent of shipping companies' gross receipts, managers usually forced competing stevedores to bargain. In order to protect their own profit margins, stevedore firms relied upon hard-driving foremen to get the work done as rapidly and cheaply as possible. As long as the supply of able-bodied men desperate for work exceeded the available number of waterfront jobs, foremen exercised unchallenged authority over hiring and working conditions. Once the loading or discharging of a ship had been completed, longshoremen rejoined the ranks of the unemployed, and foremen assembled new groups of men to work another ship.

¹³The winches are discussed by Michael Kelly, secretary of the Saint John Shiplaborer's Society, in Canada, Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital (1889), *Evidence*, 233-5. At the same hearings, a shipbroker testified that donkey engines were not being used in Saint John to unload vessels because of the strong river current. According to Kelly, the shiplabourers' opposition appears to have been based on the fact that the winches were manned by careless and accident-prone seamen. On the grain conveyors, see *Globe*, 23 October 1913, and Robert H. Babcock, "Private vs. Public Enterprise: A Comparison of Two Atlantic Seaboard Cities, 1850-1925," in G.A. Steller and A.F.J. Artibise, eds., *Power and Place: Canadian Urban Development in the North American Context* (Vancouver 1986), 64, and *Globe*, 17 October 1913. On "shooting" sugar, adopted when the winch was out of commission and considered by longshoremen to be a dangerous practice, see Local No. 273 MB, 31 August 1921.

¹⁴For a definition, see David Montgomery, *The Fall*, 101.

Daley's popularity in the city's North End had been intimately related to his influence on the dockside labour market.¹⁵

In larger ports, the casual labour pool usually was segmented according to skill and experience. Its first and smallest portion consisted of longshoremen like Daley whose broad knowledge of waterfront work accrued from years of experience. The second, and by far the largest, in ports like Saint John was made up of workers seasonally drawn from the surrounding sawmills, fishing vessels, and farms or construction projects during boom times on the waterfront or slack times at shore-based worksites. Another group consisted of "shenangoes" who drifted from city to city, job to job, settling for the most menial tasks that required more muscle than skill. While they generally handled the least-desirable chores, they could be pressed into service elsewhere if labour was scarce.¹⁶

Occasionally, job segmentation was reinforced by ethnic, religious and racial cleavages on the waterfront. During the 19th century, Irish immigrants gravitated to work on the docks along the North American east coast, and soon dominated waterfront labour markets in Halifax, St. John's, Saint John, Portland and Boston.¹⁷ The waterfront in these cities remained for the most part ethnically homogeneous and by 1915, the predominant Irish-Americans or Irish-Canadians had organized into strictly union ports. The North End where Daley had been so popular was a longstanding Irish enclave. In Saint John, shippers could exploit the hostility between Irish Protestants and Catholics, as we shall see later on. The two American ports excluded blacks and confined Italians to a separate local, while the Saint John longshoremen seemed reluctant to admit Eastern Europeans.¹⁸ In sharp contrast, ethnic cleavages between Irish- and French-Canadians delayed unionization of the Montreal docks until the ILA organized Boston, Portland, Saint John, and Halifax workers.¹⁹ Thus, ethnic, racial and religious ties reinforced the longshoremen's mutualism, whereas divisions along those lines invariably undermined it.

Other factors (such as the nature of the cargo and the type of vessel carrying it) affected the labour process, adding to the enormous variations associated with dockwork. One should not conclude that all longshore work required little skill or

¹⁵The estimate on shippers' labour costs is from E.J. Hobsbawm, "National Unions on the Waterside," in his *Labouring Men* (Garden City 1967), 250, and from Foster, "On the Waterfront," 291.

¹⁶See Barnes, *Longshoremen*, 31ff.

¹⁷On the predominance of the Irish at Saint John, see Rice, "A History"; at Boston, see Barnes, *Longshoremen*, 181-5; at Halifax, see Catherine Waite, "The Longshoremen of Halifax, 1900-1930: their living and working conditions," MA thesis, Dalhousie University, 1977; at St. John's, see Jessie Chisholm, "'Hang Her Down': Strikes in St. John's, 1890-1914," unpublished paper, 1987, 45; at Portland, see Michael Connolly, "The Longshoremen and Irish Culture in Portland," thesis draft in the author's possession.

¹⁸Barnes, *Longshoremen*, 181-5; Portland Longshoremen's Benevolent Society, *Minute Books*, Maine Historical Society, Portland; Saint John ILA Local No. 273 MB, 17 February 1905.

¹⁹*The Longshoreman*, 7 (July 1916). A notable exception occurred in New Orleans, where longshoremen formed an interracial alliance to gain control over the local casual labour market: see Eric Arnesen, "Learning the Lessons of Solidarity: Work Rules and Race Relations on the New Orleans Waterfront, 1880-1901," *Labor's Heritage*, I (January 1989), 26-45.

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experience. Because ships' holds were not standardized and each cargo invariably possessed certain characteristics that affected how it should be loaded or discharged, a gang's skills greatly influenced both the speed and efficiency of the work. Loading packaged goods required the greatest talent. Even the loading of deals, for instance, which David Daley had been supervising for the S.S. *Briardene*, demanded a rigorous and lengthy training akin to an apprenticeship.²⁰ In contrast, the movement of bulk cargo generally required more brawn than brain. Longshoremen shoveled grain and coal into tubs or wheelbarrows until the advent of conveyor-belts. The dust clogged their lungs and left them susceptible to tuberculosis.

At the turn of the century, longshoremen in North Atlantic ports worked both on steamers and sailing ships. By then, most (but by no means all) of the former were engaged in the transatlantic trade; most of the latter, particularly the smaller sailing vessels, served maritime coastal ports. Because they required shorter turn-around times as well as night and weekend service, steamers intensified the labour process, but also created a bottleneck which the longshoremen could exploit. Partly for this reason, wage rates charged sailing vessels leisurely plying the Atlantic coast generally were lower than for steamships engaged in transatlantic commerce.²¹

The labour process engendered an ethos among longshoremen which placed the welfare of the group above that of individuals. The men worked in pairs to perform closely-coordinated work, frequently singing or chanting to maintain a rhythm. Longshoremen suffered from 15- and 20-hour bouts of work, from accidental death and injury, from the effects of waiting for work in dockside saloons, from irregular mealtimes, from the lack of basic workplace amenities such as washrooms, toilets or lockers, and above all from low wages and underemployment. In particular, safety depended upon mutual regard.

Mutualism reinforced by ethnic, religious, and kin ties among dockworkers did not always extend to other segments of the urban working class. Although the longshoremen might lend their meeting hall to shore-based workers, they often found themselves in conflict with the building trades, for instance, because the seasonality of both occupations forced the two groups into conflict for scarce jobs. Even among themselves, mutualism frequently was undermined by competition for work and for the better waterfront tasks. Stevedore firms weakened the longshoremen's group ethos by cultivating favorites, blacklisting rebels, importing strikebreakers, and promoting dual unions.²²

²⁰Barnes, in particular, stresses the skills involved in much longshore work. On those skills relating to the loading of timber see Waite, "Longshoremen of Halifax," 100.

²¹Testimony of John Thompson in Canada Royal Commission on the Relations Between Labor and Capital (1889), *Evidence*, 64-5. On the eve of World War I, approximately three-quarters of longshore work in Saint John was performed during the winter months: *Globe*, 11 October 1913.

²²Barnes, *The Longshoremen*, pp. 33-4; Montgomery, *The Fall of the House of Labor*, p. 89; Local No. 273 MB, 9 October 1912, 2 September 1914; 26 September, 21 November 1917; 18 November 1920.

Longshoremen shared personality traits that reflected their work experience. Like many people accustomed to hard, daily physical labour, when provoked they were quick to respond with actions rather than words. Thus the minutes of Saint John's longshoremen's association are dotted with references to members fined or expelled from meetings for fighting, drunkenness, disorderly conduct, and breaking their hall's windows and furniture (and even its stove on one occasion).²³ Gregarious and free-spending among their fellow dockworkers, people like David Daley were shy and hostile toward "outsiders" whom they knew to look down upon them. But longshoremen regularly took up collections for those among them who were injured or distressed, as well as for widows and orphans, and they were among the first group of labourers to organize mutual benefit societies.²⁴ They celebrated the weddings and christenings in each other's lives, and always paid their last respects to recently-deceased members like Daley. Funeral processions provided a means to demonstrate their collective dignity and pride to the larger urban community. At the same time, longshoremen were not adverse to using their numerical strength and unsavoury reputation to intimidate enemies on the waterfront.²⁵

Each harbour was unique in certain respects, and the struggles between longshoremen and shipping companies thus varied from port to port. Both Quebec and Saint John, for instance, were resource-centers that exported large quantities of timber during the 19th century, and there was an overlapping and integration of the sawmilling and longshoring labour markets considered foreign to the English dockside experience. Militancy, spawned in the large sawmills (some of them absentee-owned), was nourished by enormous seasonal swings in activity.²⁶ In contrast, the port of Halifax handled a higher proportion of general cargo, which provided longshoremen there lighter, more-individualized and diversified work throughout the year. The steadier dock work at Halifax undoubtedly stabilized the casual labour market, and probably explains why longshoremen at the Nova Scotia port established a more-accommodating relationship with shippers.²⁷

The militancy of Saint John longshoremen stemmed from their experiences during the 19th-century era of "King Lumber." Sawyers cut timber from the start of the spring runoff through the summer months. During fall and winter, some

²³See, for example, Local 273 MB, 11 July, 31 October 1904; 20 February 1905; 15 January, 2 April 1913; 9 June 1915.

²⁴According to Maude Russell, *Men Along the Shore* (New York 1966), 76, the Saint John benefit society, organized in 1849, was the first longshore group in the western hemisphere.

²⁵Barnes, *Longshoremen*, 13-20; on the intimidation in Saint John, see 13ff.; on the Saint John longshoremen's funeral processions see Eugene Forsey, *Trade Unions in Canada, 1812-1902* (Toronto 1982), 72.

²⁶In "A History," Rice demonstrates the close connection between working-class militancy (that is, trade-union organization and strike activity) in the sawmills and on the waterfront.

²⁷On Halifax longshoremen, see Ian McKay, "Class Struggle and Merchant Capital: Craftsmen and Labourers on the Halifax Waterfront, 1850-1902," in Bryan Palmer, ed., *The Character of Class Struggle* (Toronto 1986), 17-36, and Catherine Waite, "Longshoremen of Halifax," esp. 47.

remained in the city to load square lumber and deals into the holds of scores of three-masted vessels, while others migrated to lumber camps in the interior. In the early 1800s, employers exercised untrammelled control over this labour market, generally paying the men between three and four shillings for 14- and 15-hour days. But common skills and experiences often knit lumber workers into a cohesive group unafraid to assert its rights. As early as 1835, Saint John sawyers joined forces to demand a wage increase. The pioneering effort by city longshoremen to seek a fairer distribution of the work occurred in 1849, when about 400 of them placed a large bell on the waterfront in an attempt to enforce the ten-hour day. During the 1860s, the port's 1,500 ship labourers regrouped as the Laborers' Benevolent Association (LBA) and pushed for a standard wage-rate.²⁸



Photo is taken at the head of Saint John Harbour, probably in the 1880s. Two-, three-, and four-masted ships are receiving squared timber. (New Brunswick Museum, Saint John, New Brunswick/Musée du Nouveau-Brunswick, Saint John, Nouveau-Brunswick.)

By the early 1870s, a considerable proportion of the Saint John casual labour market, whether millmen or longshoremen, had gathered into groups willing to battle employers. Three times in four years, the LBA struck to compel non-mem-

²⁸Ward Scrapbook (2), #6, undated newspaper clipping, 108-9, on the history of the Saint John Shiplaborers' Union, in New Brunswick Museum, Saint John. See also Rice, "A History," 6, 21, 28, 32, 49.

bers to join the longshoremen's society. By 1874, they had garnered sufficient control over the waterfront labour market to anger Saint John's merchants. Led by Alexander "Boss" Gibson, New Brunswick's famous lumber baron, the merchants refused LBA demands for recognition and a \$3-daily wage guarantee. After losing a strike, the longshoremen suffered a series of wage reductions, and ended up working for less than \$2 a day of 10 hours. As the 1870s Depression worsened, only 250 dockworkers could find work on the waterfront.²⁹

During the early 1880s, Saint John's waterfront labour was organized into several trade associations, including two formed by longshoremen. After losing a strike in 1883, the longshoremen regrouped in 1886 and exerted enough control over the local labour market to extract a written agreement with the shippers for a daily, \$3-wage to cover the 1887 season. The contract also banned kickbacks to stevedores. But the settlement did not begin to solidify the labourers' influence over the waterfront. The wage applied only to work on steamers; anyone could work coastal sailing vessels at a rate determined by whatever the traffic would bear. Ship captains remained free to use seamen to do longshore work, and no restrictions were placed on the size of gangs.³⁰

In the absence of any other mechanism to extend their control over the waterfront labour market, the longshoremen resorted to threats and intimidation. "When they wish to prevent any vessel being loaded by outsiders," a ship broker complained, the LBA men "knock off work on all the vessels in the harbour, and congregate by the hundreds, perhaps 600 or 700 on the wharf watching and talking. They may offer no violence to any body, and perhaps say nothing that could be construed into being illegal, but it is a species of intimidation, the effect of which is that these outsiders are so frightened that when they get home at night they ... will not come back to work."³¹

TABLE 1
Longshoremen in Saint John, 1849-1895

Year	Number	Source
1849	400	[Rice, 28]
1865	1,500	[<i>Globe</i> , 3/1/95]
1874	1,400	[Rice, 54]
1883	800 +	[Rice, 109]
1888	420	[Rice, 109]
1895	387	[<i>Globe</i> , 3/1/95]

²⁹Rice, "A History," 71ff; Forsey, *Trade Unions*, 72-8.

³⁰Testimony of John Thompson, Royal Commission on the Relations Between Labor and Capital (1889), *Evidence*, 65; Rice, "A History," 106-7; Forsey, *Trade Unions*, 300-2.

³¹Testimony of Samuel Schofield, shipbroker, to Royal Commission on the Relations Between Labor and Capital (1889), *Evidence*, 209, 212. In 1889 the longshoremen suffered a serious setback when they lost the right to place observers on board ships to enforce the contract and keep watch on non-union workers: *Daily Telegraph*, 5 April 1889.

By the early 1890s, both port business and the plight of the Saint John longshoremen had worsened considerably. Timber shipments had declined sharply; desperate for work, many longshoremen left the city to seek jobs in Montreal or American ports. Rival groups of ship labourers vied for the limited remaining opportunities. Saint John merchants tried to perpetuate their authority through traditional patronage mechanisms, sponsoring old-fashioned trades processions after these rituals had fallen into disfavour among workers in other cities.³² In the context of economic stagnation, massive out-migration, a flooded and fragmented casual labour market, and with authority concentrated in the hands of a small group of local merchants, the immediate outlook for Saint John longshoremen appeared bleak at the end of the 19th century. But during the next two tumultuous decades, the situation in Saint John changed dramatically.

The Casual Labour Market in the New Winter Port

FIRST CAME THE WINTER PORT that ultimately placed most of the harbour activity under the operational control of the Montreal Shipping Federation. Bowing to political pressure from the Maritimes, during the 1880s the Macdonald government had financed the Canadian Pacific Railway's "short line" from Montreal across Maine to Saint John.³³ With these tracks in place, 200 citizens gathered one evening in September 1889 to discuss the future of Saint John harbour. "The professional man, the laborer, and the mechanic, the merchant and the tradesman, all alike seemed intensely interested in the question."³⁴ Under the leadership of local civic and merchant elites, during the next decade the city acquired the accoutrements of a modern port facility. Ottawa underwrote regular winter service between British ports and both Saint John and Halifax, and the mail contract was transferred to the Maritime ports from Portland, Maine. Confident of an impending boom, city longshoremen agreed to be paid henceforth by the hour rather than by the day. Soon the ocean tonnage shipped to and from Saint John rivalled Portland figures, but the Montreal Shipping Federation, rather than Saint John merchants, siphoned off the bulk of the profits.

In general, the shipping industry on both sides of the Atlantic lagged somewhat behind other industrial sectors in achieving rationalization and integration during the transition to monopoly capitalism. At midcentury, the opening of the Suez Canal and the advent of the submarine cable had improved gradually both the scale and efficiency of the shipping industry. Refinements in the marine steam-engine slowly reduced coal consumption to the point where steamers began to take over long-voyage traffic from three-masted sailing ships. By 1900, larger steamships and an improved balance between outward and homeward traffic on the North Atlantic routes had brought about increases in volume and economies of scale

³²Lawrence Scrapbook (58), undated newspaper clipping, 169, New Brunswick Museum, Saint John.

³³On the rise of the winter port in Saint John, see Babcock, "Private vs. Public Enterprise," 58-67.

³⁴*Daily Telegraph*, 7 September 1889.

TABLE 2
Winter Port Activity at Saint John, 1895/96-1905/06

Season	Sailings	Tonnage
1895-96	22	50,892
1897-98	48	102,316
1899-00	63	153,592
1901-02	70	103,582
1903-04	92	326,739
1905-06	113	385,918

Source: *Labour Gazette* 9 (June 1909), 1291.

sufficient to warrant introducing regular steamship service to ports like Halifax and Saint John during winter months. In the decade before World War I, intensified competition among the transatlantic lines waging periodic rate-wars in order to gain larger shares of the traffic resulted in consolidations of steamship companies and a rationalization of labour-recruitment practices. Canada's Beaver Line, which had initiated Saint John's winter port service in 1895, soon merged with Elder-Dempster Lines. The Canadian Pacific Railway, in turn, bought out Elder-Dempster in 1903 and raised its flag on their 13-knot vessels. By summer 1905, the fierce competition and rising costs among transatlantic shippers had persuaded CPR leaders to mount a two-pronged offensive. To gain a larger share of the luxury passenger trade, they built two new 20-knot liners. To contain their operating expenses, they cooperated with other shippers, notably the Allan Line, to reduce labour costs at the port of Saint John.³⁵ Hence the Montreal Shipping Federation moved quickly to exploit divisions among waterfront workers. Aided by a dissident former business agent, they encouraged Saint John longshoremen, who regularly worked the Allan Line mail-boats, to form their own separate group.³⁶

At this time, longshoremen received 30 cents an hour during the busy winter season, and 35 cents an hour in the slack summer months. Because so much of the longshoremen's work was interspersed with waiting periods, annual earnings drifted downward. During the summer of 1905, shippers granted them 40 cents an hour, and afterward the longshoremen demanded this sum for the next winter season as well. But now the cost-conscious Shipping Federation turned them down.

³⁵C. Knick Hartley, "Aspects of the Economics of Shipping, 1850-1913," in L.R. Fischer and G.E. Pentling, eds., *Change and Adaptation in Maritime History: The North Atlantic Fleets in the Nineteenth Century* (St. John's 1985), 173-6; Edward F. Bush, "The Canadian 'Fast Line' on the North Atlantic 1886-1915," MA thesis, Carleton University, 1969, 112, 127, 144ff; T.E. Appleton, *Ravenscrag: The Allan Royal Mail Line* (Toronto 1974), 134, 159-65, 168-71; Hobsbawm, "National Unions on the Waterside," 250, and "The 'New Unionism' in Perspective," 159.

³⁶*Labour Gazette*, 4 June 1904, 1188; Local No. 273 MB, 3 October 1904. Two waterfront factions had briefly amalgamated in the spring of 1903 under the auspices of the local trades council. Within a year, however, they had split again, perhaps along Protestant/Catholic lines.

As a result, more than 800 Saint John longshoremen walked out on strike in the fall of 1905. Led by the Allan Line management, the shippers refused to budge and immediately dispatched Italian-speaking strikebreakers from Montreal. According to the Longshoremen's Association, only 40 of the 113 scabs actually worked once they had learned of the strike. But the trains brought more replacement workers every day, and local police interfered with efforts by the longshoremen to talk the immigrants out of scabbing. Concerned elites, believing the future of the winter port to be threatened, called a public meeting. They told the longshoremen that they already had won a moral victory and urged them to settle quickly. Confronting the united opposition of the shippers (by then using ship crews and 225 scabs to keep the work moving) and a community worried about the fortunes of the winter port, the longshoremen settled for the previous year's 30-cent winter rate.³⁷

Foremen working on the Allan Line boats had played an important role in undermining waterfront support for the conflict. When called before Association officers to explain why they had hired men at the old rate during the negotiations, most denied the charge. One said he had been chased "around the street" by men desperate to work at 30 cents an hour. Although the foremen subsequently were expelled from the Longshoremen's Association, Allan Line officials continued to employ them, and thereafter the Company relied upon non-unionists or dissidents within the Association to staff its gangs.³⁸ The end of the fishing season and the seasonal shutdown of the sawmills had glutted the casual labour market in Saint John. When Association leader Michael Kelly went down to an Allan boat and ordered those who were still Association members to cease working with scabs, some came ashore but "a lot more of them went on with the work and refused to obey his orders."³⁹ The new group, informally called the Allan Line Club, contained more than 100 men, many apparently of Protestant-Irish extraction. In the aftermath of the 1905 strike, then, rival unionism had acquired a new lease on the Saint John waterfront, for now, unlike in the 1890s, it was promoted actively by the Montreal steamship agents.⁴⁰

During the winter months, mail boats run by the Allan Line and subsidized by Ottawa kept Club members busy. But by arrangement with the Canadian government, these vessels called only at Halifax or Montreal during the summer season, threatening to drive the Fundy port's Club members out of work and their dual organization out of existence. To remedy this, the Saint John agents for the Furness Line decided to award a contract to the Allan Line Club to handle its vessels during the summer of 1906. Not only did this action take away work from the Long-

³⁷*Labour Gazette*, 5 (June 1905), 1307; 6, (July 1905), 19; (August 1905), 192-3; *Daily Sun*, 3-13 May, 18-30 November 1905; Local No. 273 MB, 20-27 November 1905. A succinct account of the strike appears in *Labour Gazette*, 6 (December 1905), 672.

³⁸Local No. 273 MB, 10-18 December 1905; *Daily Sun* 15-19 December 1905.

³⁹Local No. 273 MB, 19 December 1905.

⁴⁰*Daily Sun* 20 December 1905. A split along Catholic-Protestant lines was forecast by the *Daily Sun*, 19 December 1905. While most longshoremen in Saint John were known to have been Irish Catholics, some of the city's numerous Irish Protestants also worked on the waterfront.

shoremen's Association members, it kept the Allan Line Club in business throughout the summer doldrums until the Montreal Shipping Federation faced another round of negotiations. As one longshore leader observed, "the steamship people realize that keeping the two unions alive will tend to keep down wages and hold the men within their power." Rather than demand a 40-cent wage and remain unemployed while Allan Line dissidents picked up the work, members of the Longshoremen's Association settled for five cents less.⁴¹

Meanwhile, the Association men resorted to their traditional tactics. Gathering on a wharf, they hurled epithets at workers unloading a Furness Line boat. After one threw a piece of lumber, striking a shipboard worker, police were called upon to defend the dual unionists. Nevertheless, the Club lost the Furness Line business because it could not supply a sufficient number of dockers. Some who originally had joined the dissidents ultimately returned to their seasonal work on fishing boats or in the sawmills. As a result, the shippers turned to the Longshoremen's Association, which agreed to provide labour at 35 cents an hour summers, 30 cents an hour winters, with overtime and holiday pay. The Association had gained the upper hand for the moment in its battle with the Allan Line dissidents, but only at the expense of an advance in its members' wages.⁴²

Both sides girded for the anticipated contest over the 1906-7 winter contract. During summer 1906, the CPR's new vessels — the *Empress of Britain* and the *Empress of Ireland* — were put into service. The company reported an "exceptionally large increase in business," but expected competition to be even keener during the coming year. Association members decided to settle for the previous year's rates, but to demand union recognition in order to contain, if not eliminate, the Allan Line Club. When the first winter steamer arrived, shippers countered by verbally agreeing to the 35-cent wage rate, but refused to sign any document. Instead they verbally promised to employ Association members "if their numbers were sufficient," implying that without a written contract, they would be free to turn to the Allan Line Club for labour. So once again, the Montreal shippers preserved their dominance over the waterfront labour market.⁴³

The Saint John longshoremen's two-year struggle with the Montreal shippers came to a head in autumn 1907. Upon the arrival of the CPR's *Empress of Ireland* in late November, 1,049 dockworkers walked off the wharves when the companies refused to raise their wages to 40 cents an hour. Initially, the strike forced the companies to use ship crews. When the Association offered to reduce its request to 35 cents an hour, one or two of the shipping companies accepted the proposal, but retained 2.5 cents of the increase, they said, to insure the good faith of Association members until the agreement expired. Others, like the CPR and Donaldson Lines, imported hundreds of workers from Montreal, paying the re-

⁴¹Local No. 273 MB, 23 April 1906; *Daily Sun*, 4, 8 May 1906.

⁴²*Daily Sun* 8-9 May 1906; *Labour Gazette*, 6 (June 1906), 1306, 1386.

⁴³*Labour Gazette*, 6 (December 1906), 689; *Daily Sun*, 22-23 November 1906. Apparently about eight-five longshoremen struck for one day during the controversy.

quired fee of \$7.50 a head to Saint John civic authorities.⁴⁴ "Even with this held," observers noted, "the work was severely handicapped." Smug officials of the Allan Line declared themselves "perfectly satisfied" with the 30-cent rate which they still paid to members of their dual union "club."⁴⁵

Again the Longshoremen's Association faced combined opposition by the CPR and most of the Montreal shippers who cleverly exploited rivalry between the two longshoremen's unions while importing hundreds of strikebreakers to keep the port functioning. Civic authorities nervously overheard Captain Walsh of the CPR tell the press that he could get "wharf room and plenty of men at Halifax" if they were forced out of Saint John by the strikers.⁴⁶ Haunted by visions of the impending demise of the hard-won winter port facility, public opinion ran strongly against the longshoremen. As scabs poured into Saint John, the mayor managed to bring the opposing sides together. In early December, they agreed to a wage of 32.5 cents an hour for a 10-hour day. Henceforth longshoremen would receive double time on Sundays and Christmas, time-and-a-half on all work after 7 p.m. or when they were unaccountably delayed in going to work. Grain handlers received ten cents an hour extra for this hazardous work. Although the agreement initially was signed only by three shippers, the others soon fell into line; the strike was over before Christmas. From the viewpoint of Association members, the continuing existence of a dual union left them still vulnerable to the Montreal Shipping Federation. Therefore, the Longshoremen's Association voted on 23 December to draft a blacklist of the members of the Allan Line Club.⁴⁷

Throughout 1908, the Association waged war on the Allan Line men. Expul-

TABLE 3
Longshoremen in Saint John, 1905-1911

1905	1,000	Association [<i>Labour Gazette</i> , 12/05]
1906	?	Association
	125	Allan Line [<i>Sun</i> , 5/8/06]
1907	1,049	Association [<i>Labour Gazette</i> , 12/07]
1908	?	Association
	393	Allan Line [cut from Assoc. rolls]
1909	?	Association
	250	Allan Line [cut from Assoc. rolls]
1911	1,000 +	ILA No. 273 [<i>Eastern Labor News</i> , 12/2/11]

⁴⁴Local No. 273 MB, 21-22 November 1907; Department of Labour, Strikes and Lockouts File, NAC RG 27 v. 285 No. 3021 (microfilm). See p. 33 for a discussion of the Saint John head-tax.

⁴⁵Department of Labour, Strikes and Lockouts File, NAC RG 27 v. 295 No. 3021, letter from Powell and Harrison, solicitors, to the Minister of Labour, 5 December 1907; Capt. Walsh, CPR Marine Superintendent, 28 November 1907.

⁴⁶Department of Labour, Strikes and Lockouts File, NAC RG 27 v. 285 No. 3021, newspaper clipping dated 22 November 1907.

⁴⁷Local No. 273 MB, 23, 30 December 1907; *Labour Gazette*, 8 (January 1908), 758.

sions of defected members, including foremen who had collaborated with the dual union, continued at a brisk pace. Meanwhile, Association leaders sounded out Montreal steamship officials about a three-year contract, and departed from past practice by presenting shippers with a draft agreement months in advance of the approaching winter season. Although the companies accepted the recommendations, they objected to provisions for the business agent to board ships and require the companies to employ Association men only. When the men still resisted, the shippers gave them less than 24 hours to sign the contract or face the consequences. At the same time they let it be known that representatives of the Allan Line Club were waiting in the wings to negotiate if the Association turned the shippers down. Despite the rising cost of living, on 14 September 1908 the longshoremen felt compelled to sign an unprecedentedly long-term, five-year agreement with the CPR and Donaldson Line to work for 30 cents an hour during the winter and five cents more during the summer months. In addition, the union agreed to put up a \$1,000 "good faith"-bond for the life of the agreement. Because the Montreal shippers still did not formally recognize the Association, they remained in a position to divert work to the Allan Line Club at any time. To make matters worse, the Association's business agent now was banned from boarding ships during working hours.⁴⁸

In effect, the shipping industry's monopoly capitalists had gained an enormous strategic advantage. By threatening to shift cargoes to other ports, they had gained unprecedented power to manipulate segmented local labour markets in order to hire anyone they pleased — non-unionists, Allan Club men, or members of the Longshoremen's Association — at bargain-basement wages. As the winter port season approached, the Association business agent desperately tried to line up work by persuading stevedores to replace non-union men with Association men. At the same time, the union suffered a near-fatal internal haemorrhage when it decided to cut nearly 400 Allan Club secessionists from its roster. During the next two years, both shippers and stevedores had a field day in Saint John. Rumors swept the waterfront: one, for instance, suggested that the CPR might go so far as to introduce 15-hour shifts. In order to get work, Association leaders were forced to sign five-year contracts without a quibble so that they could compete with the Allan Line Club. And it proved nearly impossible for the business agent to persuade shippers to replace Club men with Association members. At one point he was told flatly by a dissident that the Association's new five-year contract with the Montreal shippers was "not worth the paper it was written on."⁴⁹

The situation had been provoked by intensified competition and resultant consolidations within the shipping industry, some taking place out of public view, that put a premium on the reduction and long-term predictability of labour costs.

⁴⁸Local No. 273 MB, 16 April, 26 May, 1 June, 27 July, 19, 24 August, 8, 14 September 1908; *Labour Gazette*, 8 (May 1908), 1286; 9 (October 1908), 364.

⁴⁹Local No. 273 MB, 21 September, 6 October, 30 November 1908; 17, 25 May, 1, 8 November, 6 December 1909; 31 January 1910 (quotation).

For instance, in 1909, the CPR secretly acquired financial control of the Allan Line, permitting the latter to preserve its corporate existence in order to maintain the appearance of competition while the CPR began leasing some of the Allan Line vessels. After that date, the Allan Line's all-out war on the Saint John longshoremen's association, perhaps stage-managed from behind the scenes by CPR officials, undoubtedly made Saint John dockworkers more willing to accept CPR offers.⁵⁰

Throughout years of exploitation by the Montreal Shipping Federation, longshoremen in all the rival unions on the Saint John waterfront had suffered steady erosion of their living standards. Through the power to pit dockworkers in Montreal, Portland, Halifax, and Saint John against each other, shippers had broadened the arena of class struggle. Even the Allan Club men (their arrangement with one of the port's key shippers now threatened by consolidations within the industry) were rumoured, in April 1911, to be seeking amalgamation with other Saint John longshoremen groups.

Under the auspices of the newly-reconstituted Saint John Trades and Labor Council, three competing longshoring unions merged into a single association in 1911 and voted to affiliate with the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA), by then a powerful voice along the American east coast. Among the most important catalysts was British immigrant Fred Hyatt. He had come to Canada about 1908 and had worked in Calgary and Lethbridge before settling in Saint John to shovel coal on the docks. Chairing the merger committee, the articulate and class-conscious Hyatt, an inveterate socialist, vanquished all opposition. The ILA enrolled about 80 per cent of the Allan Line Club, the remainder "holding aloof" and staying with the few shippers who stubbornly maintained an open shop. In response to the consolidation of control by external capitalists, most of the men who worked on the docks in Saint John now recognized that their struggles could not be pursued effectively in just one locality but were part of the regional contest going on in all the North Atlantic ports.⁵¹

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THE LONGSHOREMEN'S PROTRACTED struggle during the early 1900s to gain a measure of control over Saint John's waterfront labour force reflected the desire of 'new unionists' everywhere to secure, in David Montgomery's apt phrase, "a firm hold within the congealing structure of monopoly capitalism." But the contest involved more than control of the casual labour market itself, although as we have

⁵⁰ *Eastern Labor News*, 5 February 1910. Since the CPR exercised financial control over the Allan Line after 1909, it seems likely that the Line's persistent anti-union stance received the approval of CPR officials. The relationship between the two firms became public knowledge in 1915 when both fleets were merged into the Canadian Pacific Overseas Services, Ltd: Appleton, *Ravenscrag*, 168-71, 181.

⁵¹ *Eastern Labor News*, 6 May, 3 June, 18 July, 14, 21 October, 25 November, 2 December 1911, and 8 March 1913, where the history of the Saint John longshoremen's union is outlined; *The Longshoreman* (ILA), 3 (March 1912).

just seen, this issue certainly was paramount. After the longshoremen had gained an influence over who worked at the port, they could participate in determining where they worked, when they worked, and how the work was to be performed. Consequently, as the Association's leaders struggled annually to extend their jurisdiction over hiring, they also worked to expand their influence over other facets of the labour process.

Control over the allocation of work involved such issues as the distinctions between handling steamers and sailing vessels, and the treatment of day and night work. Because of differences in types of cargo, there normally was some separation of gangs who worked steamers from those who regularly worked sailing vessels. But in an attempt to distribute the work more evenly during the summer slack season of 1903, for instance, all Association members were given the same privilege of leaving sailing vessels and working steamers.⁵² For the same reasons, the Association tried hard to prevent stevedores from ordering gangs to work consecutive shifts day and night. Those who worked Allan Line boats immediately protested, asking in vain for permission to stay on their jobs until 11 p.m. because "there as not a living at the work for [both] a night and day gang."⁵³ No doubt this issue also drove a wedge between the two groups. At the start of the 1905-06 winter season, the Association demanded that all steamers requiring 24-hour service hire two separate gangs to work days and nights. But they stretched their rules when longshoremen were ordered to work an extra hour or two to permit a ship to catch a tide.⁵⁴

Longshoremen tried to regulate both the casual labour market and the allocation of work by requiring gang foremen to join the Longshoremen's Association. By 1900, this had become standard practice on the Saint John waterfront. In 1903, the Association obliged all foremen coming from Montreal to work during the winter season to join the local group.⁵⁵ Yet foremen still took their orders from stevedores or ship captains and could not always be relied upon to enforce Association rules, especially when they could hire men from a rival union. Thus, on numerous occasions they were ordered to appear before the union's executive board to answer charges of violating contract provisions. In most cases, either the allegations were dismissed or violators received small fines.⁵⁶

As long as rival organizations of longshoremen worked the Saint John waterfront, enforcement of workplace controls proved difficult if not impossible. In January 1909, for instance, some foremen were reported to be working their Association gangs more than ten hours a day because of the ready availability of dual-union labour. Since this directly violated the contract with shippers, the

⁵²Local No. 273 MB, 20 July 1903.

⁵³Local No. 273 MB, 5 December 1903.

⁵⁴Local No. 273 MB, 13 November 1905; 27 December 1912.

⁵⁵Local No. 273 MB, 9 November 1903.

⁵⁶Local No. 273 MB, 4 January 1909; *Labour Gazette*, 8 (May 1908), 1286; *Eastern Labor News*, 18 July 1911. Between 1908 and 1911 work on the Furness, Manchester, and West India Lines was given to a dual union made up mostly of non-residents and transients.

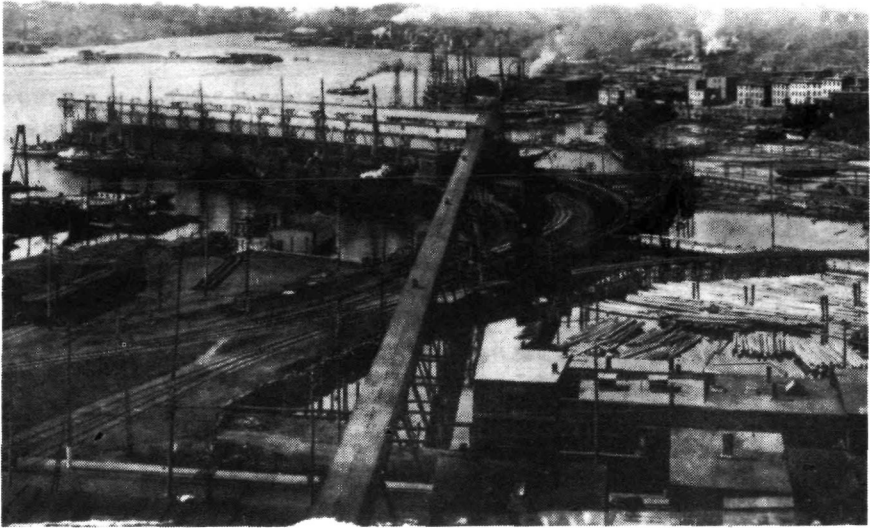


Photo is also taken from the head of the harbour but looks eastward toward the St. John River. In the foreground is the ICR dock with its prominent grain conveyors. Beyond the docks and railway spurs are ponds filled with deals. Trails of vapor from numerous worksites testify to the presence of steam-driven factories, mills, and vessels and help to date the photo to circa 1914. (New Brunswick Museum, Saint John, New Brunswick/Musée du Nouveau-Brunswick, Saint John, Nouveau-Brunswick.)

Association told its foremen to cease this practice "except in cases of necessity."⁵⁷ The next year, a Saint John stevedore firm entered into an agreement with one of the dual unions that was willing to negotiate work for one ship at a time rather than, like the Association, bargain for the entire season. And there were complaints that some day-gangs resumed work at night after labouring all day.⁵⁸

Policing agreements with the stevedore and shipping firms fell upon the shoulders of the Association business agent. Because of the sectoralism so characteristic of this industry, longshoremen had little choice but to select one of their number to patrol the docks, and the Association appears to have been the first trade union in Saint John to appoint such an official. By 1905, contract violations were so common that the union ordered its agent to visit ships in harbour at least once

⁵⁷Local No. 273 MB, 4 January 1909. The phrase reveals just how tenuous a grip the Association exercised on the casual labour market at this time.

⁵⁸Local No. 273 MB, 28 February, 16 May 1910.

every other day. A year later, he was told to make daily visits. Such duties soon gave the business agent first-hand acquaintance with stevedores, shipping agents, ship captains, city merchants, and hundreds of longshoremen.⁵⁹

Another issue involved the formulation of rules to regulate the size and movement of gangs from one workplace to another. The Association's no-transfer rule was designed to prevent gangs from competing with each other for the same work. In summer, when port business dropped off, competition between gangs sharpened to the point that the Association revoked the no-transfer rule and permitted anyone to work whenever he wanted.⁶⁰

Accelerated Decasualization, 1911-1919

THE 1911 MERGER of rival longshoremen's groups signalled a speed-up in the decasualization of the Saint John waterfront labour market. It also reflected much-deeper forces at work in the transatlantic economy. By 1910, David Montgomery points out, less-skilled workers had assumed a new role in North American society as well as in the labour movement. Reorganization of industrial management under the forces of monopoly capital had reduced the control of many skilled workers over the labour process, and brought the everyday experiences of factory labour closer to those of unskilled labour. New waves of immigrants had entered the continental labour pool and now competed for the expanding number of machine-tending, "semi-skilled" jobs.⁶¹ Consequently, leaders of the trade-union movement began to take a greater interest in the organization of the less-skilled. By 1905, the AFL's International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) had enrolled 100,000 members and soon moved from its base of 242 locals on the Great Lakes to set up 34 locals on the Gulf coast, 16 on the Atlantic, 7 on the Pacific, and 6 in Puerto Rico.⁶² Under the leadership of ILA President T.V. O'Connor, the organization won the loyalty of waterfront labour at roughly the same time in Saint John, Halifax, Quebec, Boston, Portland and some other Atlantic ports. In 1912, O'Connor promoted the creation of an Atlantic Coast division within the ILA to bring together all waterfront labour from Baltimore to Halifax for bargaining purposes.⁶³

The new officers of Local 273 in Saint John aimed their initial efforts toward the decasualization of the city's entire waterfront labour market. During 1912 and 1913 Fred Hyatt and J.E. Tighe, the new business agent, signed up the Allan Club men and also organized several different waterfront groups into separate locals chartered by the ILA. The new locals included coal handlers, tugboat firemen, marine warehouse checkers, scowmen, licensed tugboatmen, dredge firemen, and steam-shovel and dredgemen. By early 1913, the last of the dual unionists had taken out ILA cards.⁶⁴

⁵⁹Local No. 273 MB, 10 July 1905, 3 July 1906.

⁶⁰Local No. 273 MB, 13 July 1903, 30 May 1904; 2 July, 16 October 1907.

⁶¹Montgomery, *Fall*, 110ff.

⁶²Russell, *Men Along the Shore*, 82.

⁶³Russell, *Men*, ch. 2-3; *Eastern Labor News*, 7 September 1912.

⁶⁴*Eastern Labor News*, 15 February 1913; *The Longshoreman*, 3 (March 1912), 6 (January 1915).

Why did longshoremen join? Inflation had eaten into the earnings of all waterfront workers, and in some cases these newly-organized groups subsequently waged brief, successful strikes in order to win both higher wages and a closed shop.⁶⁵ For instance, the coal handlers won union recognition, double pay for Sundays and holidays, double pay during meal hours, and portal-to-portal wages, all in addition to 35 cents an hour. "I think this is pretty good," Hyatt said, "considering that we have only been organized for four months."⁶⁶

Record winter-port business during the 1911-12 season strengthened the organizers' hand by drying up surplus labour. There was talk of organizing the millmen, but millowners like J. Fraser Gregory, a leftover in Saint John from the era of mercantile capitalism, adamantly resisted efforts by the ILA to form locals of deal pilers, pondsmen and scowmen. In June 1913, the millowners locked out an estimated 1,600 men and refused to negotiate or tolerate mediation by government officials. By the end of September the men had been forced to return to work at their previous wages and without a union contract. Elsewhere on the waterfront, however, Local No. 273's organizing efforts were more successful and its battles with stevedores were displaced momentarily by minor jurisdictional conflicts between longshoremen, coal handlers, and freight checkers.⁶⁷

It is clear that on the eve of World War I, the longshoremen had extended for the first time their control of the Saint John waterfront casual-labour market to an unprecedented degree. The signs could be seen everywhere: foremen paid fines for using non-union labour, a stevedore firm that wanted to work a gang more than nine hours was ordered by the business agent to procure floodlights and put on a separate night gang, the no-transfer rule remained in place even during the slack summer season, and at last longshoremen were in a position to demand both revisions to and enforcement of traditional work rules. In recognition of the business agent's more arduous responsibilities in the decasualized port, his salary was raised and the union appointed a full-time secretary-treasurer.⁶⁸

New union work rules set the pace of longshore work and introduced a measure of safety at the workplace. As we have already noted, until the longshoremen had gained some control over the casual labour market in Saint John, it had proven impossible to enforce most informal work rules. In fact, before 1912 the minutes

Eventually most of the different waterfront trade locals were dissolved and the men brought into Local No. 273, reflecting a gradual restructuring of the ILA affiliate into an industrial union. With the passing of the lumber mills, the scowmen disbanded in 1924: *Saint John Trades and Labor Council Souvenir* (1929), 97-9.

⁶⁵ *Labour Gazette*, 13 (February 1913), 885. Hyatt estimated a forty per cent drop in the purchasing power of the dollar by 1912: *The Longshoreman*, 3 (June 1912).

⁶⁶ *The Longshoreman*, 4 (December 1912).

⁶⁷ *Eastern Labor News*, 23 November 1912; Local No. 273 MB, 3 January, 17, 24 September 1913. On the millmen's strikes, see Department of Labour, Strikes and Lockouts File, NAC RG 37 v. 302 No. 92 (microfilm).

⁶⁸ Local No. 273 MB, 23 November, 22 December 1912, 6, 14 May 1913, 20 May 1914.

of the Association reveal an effort to introduce only one rule.⁶⁹ After organizing the waterfront, though, the ILA drew up a list of regulations concerning such items as procedures for handling goods and the size of sling loads, and distributed these rules to stevedoring firms and foremen. Thereafter, the bulk of Local 273 meetings were taken up with the refinement and implementation of these new rules, most of which concerned the size of gangs and the number of items of particular goods to be permitted in each sling. To cite a few examples: the new regulations prevented workers from being in the hold of a ship while grain was being taken aboard; all freight had to be trucked by two men from one shed to another; shipping agents could relay orders only through gang foremen. Steamship companies quickly accepted the ILA work rules, some of which may have been already in place as informal procedures. But there were pockets of resistance. On 4 December 1912, Captain Gillis of the Donaldson Line "absolutely refused" at first to abide by the new rules. When he realized the futility of resisting, he finally accepted all except the union's specified limit of five bags of coal to the sling. Later the foreman on a Donaldson boat was reported to be hoisting 15-18 iron pigs in violation of the Association rules. Transgressors paid \$5-fines, but stevedore firms still resisted the 15-man gang rule despite a confirmation of it by a Lemieux Act panel.⁷⁰ Probably the most hardnosed employer on the Saint John waterfront, the sugar refinery, regularly jousted with ILA officials. The company refused to permit longshoremen inside its refinery, allowing them only to unload bags of sugar on its docks. It tried to keep union officer Joe Tighe from enforcing union work rules on the sugar boats.⁷¹

Ironically, the leaders of Local No. 273 had to persuade a good many of their own members to accept the new work rules. Joe Tighe complained that it was a "hard proposition" to enforce the limit of 14 deals a sling when some of the older longshoremen thought more should be permitted. Disputes broke out among the longshoremen themselves in early 1914 over whether 5 or 6 bags of salt, or 4 or 6 bales of oilcake should be permitted in separate slings. By 1917, though, the longshoremen would not even allow appeals to patriotism to prevent one of the gangs from ceasing work because it had received too many boxes of ammunition in a sling.⁷²

In 1913, the longshoremen's five-year contract with the CPR finally expired. Well in advance of the winter port season, Local 273 demanded 40 cents an hour day work and 45 cents night labour for a nine-hour stretch during both summer and winter. Higher rates were requested for cargoes of bulk grain, sulphur, and salt. The union also called for double-time during meal hours, prevailing wages for

⁶⁹ Local No. 273 MB, 14 November 1904: all vessels were supposed to place a ladder over the side for the use of men going down into lighters.

⁷⁰ Local No. 273 MB, 4, 22 December 1912, 19 March 1913, 21 January, 29 July 1914.

⁷¹ Local No. 273 MB, 20 January, 24 February 1915; 26 February 1919, 1 December 1920, 25 May, 1, 15 June, 24 July 1921.

⁷² Local No. 273 MB, 6 August 1913, 18 March, 22 April 1914, 1 August 1917.

rigging gear, half-time while waiting days, full-time waiting nights, double-time Sundays and holidays, 16-member gangs on all cargo boats, and no less than 10-member gangs on deal boats. For the first time, their request was submitted to ILA president O'Connor in Buffalo for his approval before he, in turn, relayed it to the Montreal shippers.

While accepting many of the proposed work rules, the shippers held out for the 10-hour day and a 35-cent hourly base wage rate. And once again they turned to their old ploy. Already in April 1913, the CPR had infuriated Saint John civic leaders when it had accepted Ottawa's million-dollar subsidy for transatlantic mails, but had then decided to unload the letters at Halifax rather than at both maritime ports. Now the Montreal Shipping Federation threatened to cancel all sailings from Saint John between 15 November and 31 December because of its impasse with Local No. 273. This time, public opinion in Saint John could not be stampeded, and shippers finally offered an 8.5-percent wage increase. When the longshoremen demurred, pointing out that their wages had remained practically stationary since 1898 while government statistics showed a 50-percent increase in the cost of living, the Montreal shippers invoked the provisions of the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act (IDIA). But their gamble failed when the investigating board endorsed most of Local No. 273's demands. The Federation backed down and a strike was averted. Jubilant longshoremen soon learned from their leaders that all ships in Saint John harbor were working under the new wage schedule and work rules.⁷³

TABLE 4
Longshoremen in Saint John, 1915-1920

Year	Number
1915	1,215
1916	2,300
1917	2,337
1918	1,578
1919	1,437
1920	1,574

Source: Dept. of Labour, *Report on Labour Organization in Canada*, for the years indicated.

During the war, the longshoremen took advantage of increased demand for their services and a decrease in the casual labour pool, and refined their influence over the labour market. They instituted citizenship and residency requirements for all members, including foremen. Foremen had to live in Saint John for at least a

⁷³Local No. 273 MB, 10 August, 17 September, 1, 7, 15 October, 12, 16, 19 November 1913; *Eastern Labor News*, 18 October 1913; *Labour Gazette*, 14 (December 1913), 655; *The Longshoreman*, 7 (July 1916). On the cost of living, estimated to be 125 per cent higher than before the war, see the testimony of Peter Sharkey, Mathers Commission (1919), 38.

year prior to their appointment. They also were forbidden to break up established gangs, fire a member without just cause, or hire non-union men without the explicit approval of Local 273. A system of controlling the allocation of work through the dispensation of union work-tickets and the imposition of union dues-books enabled Association leaders to maintain closer control over membership and the job market alike.⁷⁴

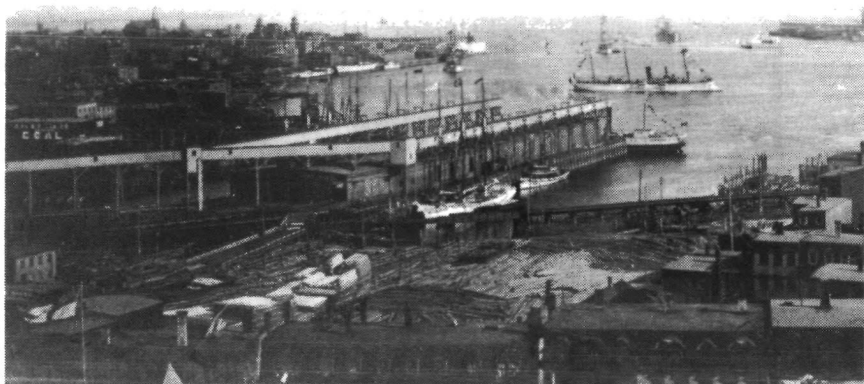


Photo is taken from Long Wharf at the head of the harbour, circa 1914. In the left foreground it shows the Intercolonial Railway wharf and grain conveyors. In the distance on the left side the older wharfs are shown along with a large vessel tied up at Lower Cove. On the right are the new CPR West Side facilities constructed after 1895 when the harbour was transformed into a winter port. New Brunswick Museum, Saint John, New Brunswick/Musée du Nouveau-Brunswick, Saint John, Nouveau-Brunswick.

The decasualization of the Saint John waterfront coincided with the war-accelerated rationalization and integration of the transatlantic shipping industry. As Eric Hobsbawm points out, "coordination between employers [in the shipping industry] suggested a need for coordination among the men."⁷⁵ Hence the ILA had facilitated the growth of industry-wide bargaining on a transnational level through

⁷⁴Local No. 273 MB, 4 April 1915, 9, 11, 18 December 1918, 22, 29 January 1919, 24 March 1920, 14 January, 7 February, 30 November 1921, 6 February 1922. The first reference to the denial of membership in Local 273 because of non-residency occurs in the minutes for 21 January 1918. On 13 October 1919 the longshoremen adopted a resolution requiring all new members to be residents during the previous twelve months. Wartime military requirements substantially reduced the number of available dockworkers. By 1917, 495 longshoremen from Local No. 273 alone had donned uniforms: *Report on Labour Organization in Canada, 1917* (Ottawa 1918), 19.

⁷⁵Hobsbawm, "National Unions on the Waterside," 258.

its Atlantic Coast district. Unlike the demands of their shore-based brethren who were fighting for the eight-hour day, the longshoremen battled to control local labour markets because these were the key both to the allocation of labour at the jobsite and to the imposition of work rules that effectively regulated the labour process.

As the waterfront labour market decasualized, the longshoremen established a closer relationship with shore-based workers in Saint John. More than any other trade union, Local 273 found itself in a position after 1911 to strengthen or undermine the membership rules, jurisdictional boundaries, and workplace struggles of city craft unions, particularly in the building trades. For instance, sometimes a prospective longshoreman was denied a union card because he had scabbed against another local trade union in the city. At other times, seasonally-unemployed longshoremen were barred, albeit somewhat reluctantly, from taking union painters' jobs. Due to Local 273's huge size, other Saint John unionists regularly asked for and received financial assistance. And since a good many products of Saint John mills and factories were exported to distant markets on ships, strikers always hoped that the longshoremen would refuse to load the goods of recalcitrant employers.⁷⁶

The Bureaucratization of the Waterfront Workplace

SAINT JOHN'S LONGSHOREMEN were politicized by their long struggle to gain some control over the city's waterfront casual labour market. Once they had entered into a comprehensive agreement with the Montreal shippers to share in the regulation of the labour process, relations between labour and capital rapidly bureaucratized under the aegis of the state. That is, leaders from each side met frequently and negotiated or arbitrated a wide range of major and minor issues under a growing panoply of local, provincial, and federal laws. Although state intervention had begun even before the turn of the century, World War I greatly accelerated this process. As a result of these changes, local rank-and-file longshoremen sometimes were distanced from the decision-making.

Government intervention had begun much earlier at the local level and had helped to politicize longshoremen at an early stage. Traditionally, the City of Saint John had imposed a substantial "head tax" on non-resident workers who competed with local artisans. At the start of winter port construction, Board of Trade merchants successfully lobbied to reduce this fee from \$20 to \$7.50, an action that

⁷⁶Local No. 273 MB: jurisdictional disputes — 18 November, 4 December 1914, 28 August 1918, 7 March 1920, 25 May 1921; scowmen — 9 April 1919, 20, 24, 27, 29, July, 3 August 1921; street railwaymen — 9 December 1921, 24 August, 11, 25 January, 5, 24, 26 July, 2 August, 13 September, 6 December 1922; nail workers — 2 February, 2 March, 4 May 1921, 15 November 1922; painters — 26 September, 3, 10, October, 21 November 1917, 19 24, November 1920, 19 January, 28 September 1921, 20 December 1922; police — 7, 30 October 1918; machinists — 14 November 1912, 15 December 1920. Most of the meeting on 20 July 1921 was taken up with cases of Local No. 273 members working at shore-based jobs in Saint John in violation of jurisdictional boundaries.

subsequently facilitated the importation of scabs by the Montreal shippers. By 1913, the Board wanted to abolish it altogether. The politically mobilized longshoremen fought many battles with city hall — not only to preserve the head tax, but also to get officials to enforce it during their strikes. Not surprisingly, before the war they supported efforts by a local Labour party to elect a workingman to city council, and in 1921 they promoted Farmer-Labour candidates during the federal election.⁷⁷

As a result of their experience with the head tax, by 1900 Saint John's longshoremen were in the forefront of New Brunswick workers demanding protective legislation. John Killen, a Saint John veteran dockworker, went to the 1897 annual session of the Canadian Trades and Labor Congress to seek help persuading Ottawa to inspect the gear and tackle used to load and discharge ships. Back home, Killen told his comrades about the "excellent hold [that] unionism had in the province of Ontario," and before long, the city labour movement had experienced a rebirth to which the longshoremen contributed substantially.⁷⁸

Longshore leaders circulated petitions calling for a provincial employers' liability law. They met with Saint John progressive citizens, notably tea merchant W. Frank Hatheway, in a Fabian Society to discuss the problems of those maimed or killed at their place of work. As Table 5 shows, longshoremen alone accounted for nearly a fifth of the injured and an even higher proportion of those killed on the job in Saint John. When one remembers that a good many millmen also worked on city docks, one can understand readily why the men on the Saint John waterfront mobilized politically to demand a strong liability law. Thanks in large part to the longshoremen's Michael Kelly, New Brunswick established minimal supervision of factory working conditions in 1905. Three years later, in conjunction with other Saint John workers, longshoremen used their vote to throw out the Grits and put into office a Tory clique committed to a workmen's compensation bill. The 1909 act provided rates of up to one-half of weekly earnings for two years to injured workers, and a death benefit equivalent to three years' earnings. Although this measure was not as far-reaching as workers desired, it gave employers a new interest in workplace safety. During the next two years, not a single work-related death occurred on the winter port docks. Observers noted the "comparative scarcity of accidents around the steamers" after the bill had been enacted, and fatalities like David Daley's occurred less frequently. In 1912, the longshore leaders played a key role in forming a New Brunswick Federation of Labor to promote workers'

⁷⁷The conflict between longshoremen and the Donaldson Line in 1896 is discussed in John Davidson, *The Bargain Theory of Wages* (New York and London 1898), 207-8; I am grateful to Prof. David Frank for this reference. See also Local No. 273 MB, 8 May 1905, 6, 13, 20 May 1914 (Board of Trade); 18 March, 5 April 1914, 28 September 1921 (politics); Minutes of the Saint John Trades and Labor Council, 7 October 1896; Board of Trade Minutes, 11 December 1912, in the New Brunswick Museum, Saint John. Both Rice, "A History," 9ff, and T.W. Acheson, *Saint John: The Making of a Colonial Urban Community* (Toronto 1985), 84-5, discuss the origins of this restriction in the tension between workers and non-resident artisans, mostly Americans, during the late 1830s and early 1840s.

⁷⁸Trades and Labor Congress, *Proceedings*, 1897, 4, 15.

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legislative interests, and five years later the province finally established a commission to handle workmen's compensation. These activities confirmed the longshoremen's passage from the old patronage politics of hearth and pulpit to a modern class-conscious opportunism rooted in their workplace struggles.⁷⁹

State intervention appeared in other forms. Shortly before the onset of World War I, the Montreal Shipping Federation extended the process by which the recommendations of IDIA boards acquired the force of law by successfully invoking the highest judicial authority in New Brunswick to render as a rule of the court the findings of the 1913 board concerning their dispute with Saint John longshoremen. As a result of this action, the recommendations of the Lemieux Act board were converted into binding rules enforceable by provincial judges. Shippers had gained an additional weapon to slow down the erosion of their authority over the waterfront labour market and work process, while longshore leaders could use this "club" to discipline hotheads and malcontents.⁸⁰

TABLE 5
Industrial Accidents in Saint John, July 1904-May 1907

Occupation	Workers Injured	Workers Killed
longshoremen	21	7
millmen	13	4
metal trades	8	1
cotton mills	5	0
railway trades	9	5
teamsters	3	4
seamen	3	4
laborers	5	1
building trades	5	1
others	17	5
TOTAL	116	32

Source: compiled from the *Labour Gazette*

The war greatly accelerated government intervention in labour-management relations. British Admiralty control over Canadian ports and, after 1917, the pooling of American and English transatlantic shipping brought about unprecedented integration and regulation of seaborne transportation along the east coast.

⁷⁹Working-class political activism is discussed in Robert H. Babcock, "Labour, Socialism, and Reform Politics in Portland (Me.) and Saint John (N.B.), 1895-1914," paper to the Canadian Historical Association, Montreal, June 1980, esp. 21-22.

⁸⁰See *In the Matter of the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act, 1907, and in the Matter of the Dispute Between the Longshoremen of the Port of Saint John, Employees—and—the Robert Reford Company, Ltd, et al., Employers* 42 New Brunswick Reports 434 (1914).

Wartime rules not only banned strikes for the duration, but also helped standardize wages on both sides of the Canadian-American border. In 1918, rampant inflation emboldened Saint John longshoremen to demand 75 cents an hour after learning that their United States counterparts had received a settlement of 65-cents hourly from the US Shipping Board. Infuriated when the shippers offered only 50 cents, the city's longshoremen walked off their jobs in late 1918 despite the wartime strike-ban. Winning the support this time of the mayor and Board of Trade, longshoremen appealed to Sir Arthur Harris, Britain's Canadian-born coordinator of North American munitions production, to bring pressure to bear on the Montreal shippers. As a result of his intervention, longshoremen received a 60-cent hourly base rate which brought them considerably closer to east coast norms. In effect, then, a British bureaucrat had intervened in Saint John waterfront bargaining to bring about a settlement based upon wages prevailing at American ports.⁸¹

Although some of the laws and administrative procedures remained in place after World War I, neither the state nor wartime arrangements protected longshoremen from the dire effects of the postwar depression. For all the supposedly beneficial regulation, workers' real earnings fell during the war years. "Today the average man is earning twice or three times as much money as he did fifteen or twenty-five years ago," a Saint John worker told the Mathers Commission in 1919, "but still that wage is not as good as was the lower wage some years ago."⁸² Unlike many shore-based workers, longshoremen now worked a ten-hour day from 15 November to 30 April, and nine hours during the warmer months. According to Commission testimony, few workers owned their own homes in Saint John, and about 1,500 of them were unemployed even before the full effects of the postwar depression were felt. Although longshoremen still received 60 cents an hour, they worked only one or two days a week. "I suppose they don't earn over two dollars or two dollars and fifty cents a day," Judge Mathers was told. By autumn 1921, hardships due to widespread unemployment had exhausted Local 273's sick benefit fund. As the waterfront casual labour market ballooned to pre-war levels, shippers regained the upper hand. They wilfully violated contracts by discriminating against certain gangs, ignoring slingload limits, and denying some men their dinner-hour, while underpaying others. Once again the size of gangs became a bone of contention with shippers.⁸³

In June 1921, 88 longshoremen at the sugar refinery declared a brief strike. This virtually was the first to occur on the waterfront since the 1913 agreement, and reflected management's drive to restore prewar conditions. The refinery

⁸¹Department of Labour, Strikes and Lockouts File, NACRG 27 v. 309 No. 151, and NACRG 42 IIBI v. 292 No. 48042 (microfilm); Local No. 273 MB, 7, 16 October, 14, 26-29 November, 4 December 1918, 6, 16, February, 8 March 1922.

⁸²Testimony of George Melvin, Mathers Commission (1919), 2, 13.

⁸³Local No. 273 MB, 26 February 1919, 26 May 1920, 25 May 1921. In late 1922 the city's longshoremen adopted a resolution requiring stevedores to pass their orders to gangs through Local No. 273's office. But in this case, the men were expressing an old wish rather than enforcing a new rule: Local No. 273 MB, 4 December 1922.

TABLE 6
Longshoremen in Saint John, 1920-1922

1920	1,574
1921	1,100
1922	1,000

Source: Dept. of Labour, *Report on Labour Organization in Canada*, for years indicated.

consistently had violated the 15-man gang rule by using only 12 men, and it had required the men to hoist seven instead of five bags in each sling. After a three-day stoppage, the men returned to work, and later an arbitration panel lightly rapped management knuckles for "technical violation" of work rules. The Association was forced to allow the refinery to put one of its own men on the wharf winch.⁸⁴ In subsequent months, only the scowmen dared to strike for higher wages.⁸⁵

Conclusion

IN MOST SHORE-BASED INDUSTRIES during the era of monopoly capitalism in North America, a highly-centralized management introduced new levels of mechanization and new subdivisions of labour at the workplace. On the waterfront, however, labour and capital battled not over the pace of mechanization, but for control over the allocation of work. Throughout all the years of the longshoremen's advance and retreat, this issue remained central in Saint John as in all the North Atlantic ports.

At once, certain elements in the Saint John casual labour market made the struggle at the Fundy port more intense than it was, say, at Halifax or Portland. In the 19th century, the most important of these elements was the immense lumber trade which increased the size of the city's labour pool, forged an important link between sawmilling and longshoring, and created a group of skilled scowmen, millmen and deal handlers who exerted intermittent control over segments of the waterfront labour market. The millmen's, scowmen's, and ship labourers' struggles helped to mobilize and perpetuate considerable class tension at the port throughout the 19th century. By 1900, however, timber exports from Saint John had declined sharply, and after World War I they virtually disappeared.

Seasonal fluctuations in the winter port-based activity that developed in Saint John after 1895 placed new strains on the casual labour market, which in turn sharpened conflicts between labour and capital during the 1900s. The most important changes were associated with consolidations within the shipping industry, and with the integration of the local waterfront labour processes into national and

⁸⁴Local No. 273 MB, 1, 8, 15, 27 June, 27 July, 1 August, 15 September 1921, 11 January, 26 April 1922.

⁸⁵Local No. 273 MB, 24, 26 July 1921, 11 January 1922.

international configurations. After 1895, "capital" on the Saint John waterfront was represented not so much by local merchants as by CPR magnates and the Montreal Shipping Federation. Initially, these businessmen took up the cudgels of the 19th-century Saint John mercantile elites, and perpetuated their struggle for control over the waterfront labour market. But instead of adamantly resisting labour organizations and attempting to control longshoremen through a network of individualized patron-client relationships, such businessmen tolerated waterfront labour groups while systematically exploiting various divisions among the longshoremen in order to contain wage costs. Only when continuing rationalization and concentration had reduced competition within the shipping industry, and war-related demand had curtailed the casual labour pool, could the CPR and Montreal Shipping Federation accept the partial decasualization of the Saint John waterfront labour market. On the eve of the World War I, they recognized the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) because this trade union offered a certain predictability regarding labour costs, and reduced the probability of disruptions in the industry.

Numerous crosscurrents affected struggles between labour and capital on the Saint John waterfront, and distinguished dockwork from other industrial sectors in the city. In comparison with some shore-based industries, notably the nail works (which relied upon scientific management theories to weaken the authority of skilled craftsmen), no identifiable Taylorism appeared on the Saint John wharves. Furthermore, many longshoremen in the Fundy port clung tenaciously to the "rough justice of casualism" rather than accept the discipline of union membership and the observance of a contract with shippers.⁸⁶ Hence, for almost every occasion when Local 273's business agent called a shipper to task for violating a contract provision, he had to discipline a union member for ignoring a work rule. More important, constant pressure from civic and business elites to promote the winter port interfered with Saint John waterfront workers' efforts to wrest control of the casual labour market from Montreal Shippers. More than once, longshoremen were forced to sacrifice their own class interests on the altar of future port development.

A new relationship between the Saint John longshoremen and the remainder of the city's working class emerged after the turn of the century. First of all, as longshoremen extended their control over the city's casual labour market, they profoundly affected the ability of shore-based workers to win higher wages and better working conditions. Once the nail workers, painters, and other semiskilled operatives had been unionized, their organizations depended upon the often seasonally-unemployed longshoremen to respect jurisdictional boundaries and picket lines. Secondly, Saint John workers relied on the political prowess of longshoremen. Besides being the largest component of organized labour in Saint John, the dockworkers, thanks to their perennial struggles with the shippers over the head tax, had become, by the early 1900s, one of the most highly-mobilized and

⁸⁶The phrase is used by Hobsbawm in "National Unions on the Waterside," 247.

politically-conscious segments of the labour movement in the city and province. Consequently, they nearly always could be found in the vanguard of those demanding protective legislation from federal or provincial governments.

Finally, World War I greatly accelerated both the temporary extension of worker control over the labour market and the more permanent bureaucratization of industrial relations on the Saint John waterfront. Strikes declined in frequency during the war as more disputes were settled by government arbitration or conferences between shippers and business agents. But state intervention did not fundamentally alter the hegemonic relationship of capital over labour on the docks. After the war, it was "business as usual" for shippers who quickly took advantage of economic depression and the glut of unemployed labour, including many returned soldiers, to reclaim traditional prerogatives.

At the start of the 1920s, the docks in Saint John still remained hotly-contested terrain. With the postwar economy in tatters and the future of the port of Saint John uncertain once again, it is not surprising that hemmed-in longshore leaders pledged their support to the basically middle-class Maritime Rights movement.⁸⁷ Not until another wartime crisis occurred during the 1940s could the Saint John longshoremen really complete their control over the labour market through the mechanism of union-operated hiring halls. Thus, in Saint John, the eventual success of the longshoremen's decades-long battle for control over the waterfront casual labour market set the stage for the post-World War II adoption of less labour-intensive methods by the shipping industry. As more and more ocean freight was shipped in containers, the longshoremen's work experience belatedly converged with that of many other groups of "unskilled" labourers throughout North America.

⁸⁷The postwar nationalization of the Grand Trunk Railway had placed the harbour facilities of Portland, Maine, Saint John's most worrisome rival for the winter port trade, in the hands of Ottawa politicians. On the participation of longshore leaders in the Maritime Rights movement, see E.R. Forbes, *The Maritime Rights Movement, 1919-1927: A Study in Canadian Regionalism* (Montreal 1979) 115. "The psychology [of Saint John workers] is all middle-class and there is no cohesion among the workers," George Bagnell reported in *Maritime Labour Herald*, 21 July 1923, 3.