

Labourism and Economic Action: The Halifax Shipyards Strike of 1920

Suzanne Morton

Volume 22, 1988

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/ilt22art02>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (print)

1911-4842 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Article abstract

Post-war industrial action in Halifax culminated in the strike of the Marine Trades and Labor Federation against the Halifax Shipyards Limited. Increased strike activity was accompanied by and enhanced labour's formal political aspirations as expressed in the rejuvenation of the Halifax Labor Party. This article explores the economic and political events leading up to the summer of 1920 when the Halifax Shipyard Strike and a Nova Scotia Provincial election brought local events to a climax. Labourism, the broad political philosophy uniting labour activists in post-war Halifax, initially appeared to offer the ideal medium through which political and economic questions could be filtered and processed. But as labourites attempted to apply their philosophy to concrete situations, they exposed its inherent contradictions. The strike clarified their ideas while it revealed their weakness, and promoted the eventual fragmentation of the Halifax labour movement.

Cite this article

Morton, S. (1988). Labourism and Economic Action: The Halifax Shipyards Strike of 1920. *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 22, 67–98.

Labourism and Economic Action:

The Halifax Shipyards Strike of 1920

Suzanne Morton

IN JANUARY 1919 THE *Labour Gazette* assessed the Canadian employment situation acknowledging that, "With the exception of Halifax and Sydney unemployment was reported in most of the cities and towns in the Dominion."¹ The irony of this description is inescapable and it reveals the distinctive nature of specific Canadian communities immediately following World War I.

Local events in Halifax in 1919 and 1920 must be seen within the context of both regional and national working-class activity. Between 1916 and 1925 the Maritimes experienced unparalleled levels of strike activity. Economic militancy often translated into political action. Miners in Cape Breton, Cumberland, and Pictou counties, steelworkers in Sydney, and industrial workers in Amherst and New Glasgow participated in the upsurge of radicalism seen across the country.

Halifax was not untouched by the radical spring of 1919. A May strike among the building trades was the largest the city had ever experienced. This workplace militance was accompanied by a political awakening as labour broadened its activity beyond a traditional alliance with the Liberal party into an independent third party aimed at capturing power at the municipal and provincial levels. But the forces which resulted in what Greg Kealey has described as "the Canadian Labour Revolt" did not reach their crest in Halifax until the shipyard strike in the early summer of 1920.² The Halifax shipyard strike marked the end of the urban Canadian post-war labour upheaval. The exciting last gasp of a national phenomenon, the strike would remain the largest single manufacturing strike to involve one community's industrial

¹Canada, Department of Labour, *Labour Gazette* (January 1919), 98. Henceforth *LG*.

²Gregory S. Kealey, "1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (1984), 11-44.

workers until after World War II.³ Centering upon Halifax Shipyards Limited, it affected eight employers, an average of 2,000 employees, and lasted 52 working days. With the total loss of 104,000 man-days it accounted for over 12 per cent of the total strike days in Canada during 1920.⁴

If the strike was significant on the national stage, it was central to the evolution of the political consciousness of Halifax workers. In the few months leading to and encompassing the strike and in the formation of an independent political party, the Halifax labour movement confronted difficult questions which had divided and confounded activists across Canada since the late nineteenth century. As Halifax workers engaged in militant action in the workplace and simultaneously attempted to broaden their power into the political arena, they were forced to make hard decisions quickly. These decisions centred on the extent to which united political action should accompany action in the workplace and on the fundamental relationship between political action and work itself. Labourism, the broad political philosophy uniting labour activists in post-war Halifax, initially appeared to offer the ideal medium through which these questions could be filtered and processed. But as labourites attempted to adapt their political philosophy to concrete situations they exposed its inherent contradictions. The forces which clarified their ideas also revealed their weakness, and promoted the eventual fragmentation of the Halifax labour movement.

As a philosophy, attitude, and world outlook, labourism was rooted within the community-based independent labour parties of Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁵ It varied distinctly from place to place according to particular social and cultural structures. The ideology evolved among skilled workers, out of their successful labour organizations and solid parliamentary institutions. Possessing a naive faith in the merits and possibilities of democracy, labourites have been described by historians as carrying the torch of nineteenth century liberalism, American Republicanism, and English

³The International Typographical Union strike which lasted from May 1921 until August 1924 to establish the eight hour day was actually the biggest skilled-labour strike; however, it was directed from international headquarters and affected printers across North America. *LG* (September 1924), 748.

⁴*LG* (February 1921), 181.

⁵This concept of labourism was based on Craig Heron, "Labourism and the Canadian Working Class," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (1984); Ian Turner, *Industrial Labour and Politics: The Dynamics of the Labour Movement in Eastern Australia, 1900-1921* (Canberra 1965); Gad Horowitz, *Canadian Labour in Politics* (Toronto 1968); Martin Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour, 1880-1930* (Kingston 1968); Craig Heron, "Working Class of Hamilton 1895-1930," Ph.D. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1981; Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement 1899-1919* (Toronto 1977); and John Saville, "The Ideology of Labourism," in R. Benewick, R. Berki, B. Parekh, eds., *Knowledge and Belief in Politics: The Problem of Ideology* (London 1973).

Jacobinism.⁶ They accepted the framework of society as basically fair and just and perceived the source of injustice and disparity in the poor condition of popular democracy. John Saville, in commenting on the naivety of labourites concluded that they " ... genuinely believe that by winning a Parliamentary majority they can then proceed to construct a new society without any serious hindrance from those for whom existing society benefits."⁷ While this alone suggested problems for adherents, labourism was also flawed with basic contradictions.

As demonstrated in Halifax, these contradictions and tensions centred around two sets of conflicting principles.⁸ The most serious contradiction lay in the attempt to arouse and solidify a distinct class consciousness while at the same time seeking to appeal to the entire community. In a study of the Australian movement, Ian Turner concluded that its class analysis was clouded by the strong influence of community and nation. Turner wrote that the labour parties expressed " ... the desire to find an effective counter to the anti-labour complaint that the Labour Parties were concerned only to promote 'class legislation,' and hoped to convince the electors that the platform had something for everyone."⁹ The notion of being all things to all people was characteristic of the coalition attitude which existed within most Canadian Independent Labour Parties immediately after World War I. Through community parties, labourite politicians demonstrated the ability to accommodate, to remain pragmatic and flexible in order to survive the frequent schisms and in-fighting. In 1919 and 1920, the independent labour party in Halifax held together a coalition which included Marxists, ethical socialists, and temporarily disillusioned Liberals and Conservatives.

Labourism was found among the skilled and semi-skilled workers of the building, metal, and printing trades and in Halifax also among the longshoremen. Its adherents were aware that this constituency was too restricted to achieve the support necessary for political victory.¹⁰ This realization, in combination with unique labour and industrial conditions after World War I, led to a broadening of labourite rhetoric in the hope of attracting the unskilled and the middle class. With this in mind, the Halifax Labor Party opened its membership to all " ... workers, whether organized or unorganized, mental or manual regardless of race, sex, creed or vocation" who would

⁶Heron, "Labourism," 51.

⁷John Saville, "Labourism and the Labour Government," in *The Socialist Register 1967*, Ralph Miliband and John Saville, eds., (New York 1967), 57.

⁸For a discussion of similar contradictions from an individual perspective see Bryan Thomas Dewalt, "Arthur W. Puttee: Labourism and Working-Class Politics in Winnipeg, 1894-1918," M.A. thesis, University of Manitoba, 1985.

⁹Turner, *Industrial Labour*, 20.

¹⁰Heron, "Labourism," 46-7.

accept labourite principles.¹¹ The party could not be confined to trade unionists and still expect victory at the polls.

It was more difficult to reconcile the second contradiction of labourism which concerned the question of power. Labourites assumed that skilled and semi-skilled workers held power within industry and therefore within the economic sphere. Economic action extended into the political sphere in the hope of establishing a parallel political structure which would complement the existing formal economic structure, international craft unionism. Ideally, when labour was successful in possessing the political power it believed it was entitled to share, this influence would be directed back into the economic sphere, securing better working conditions and collective bargaining.¹² Therefore, labourites presupposed an economic power sufficient to be translated into political power but simultaneously acknowledged the lack of the former.

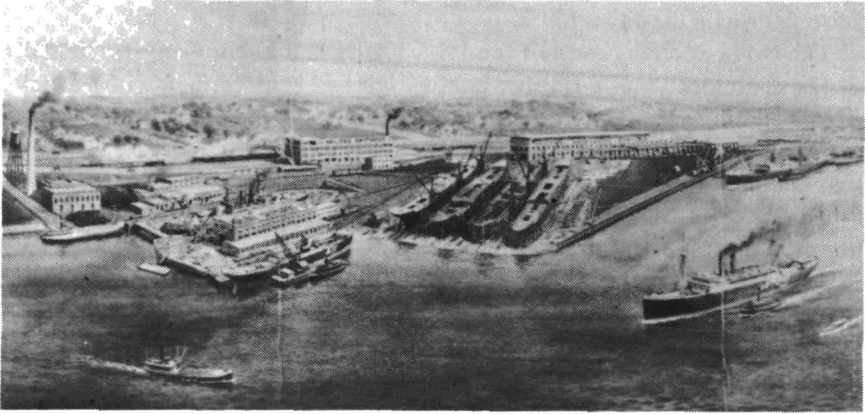
Labourism was by no means the sole influence upon the worker's political consciousness, and seldom was it isolated from other political ideologies. Socialism, often imported by outsiders, mixed with urban partyism and rural populism. After the Halifax Shipyards Strike and in the general economic decline of the 1920s, similar forces resulted in the adoption of new political stances such as Maritime Rights. Surely no political faction could have foreseen the economic collapse which would devastate the local economy. Political perspectives could only be based on past experiences which offered reasonable optimism that strong trade unionism combined with the unity characteristic of Halifax labourism in 1919 held the best course for labour. Labourism and its internal contradictions did not in themselves bring about any decline, rather in a time of crisis, inherent problems within the outlook were exposed and the potential benefits could no longer be accepted without an acknowledgement of compromise. In Halifax, the absence of political alternatives for labour after the war had created a greater breadth and tolerance for extremes within the labour party than in other Canadian centres.¹³ While creating a unified political labour movement, this also meant that political and economic struggle failed to reinforce each other as they were fought from different perspectives. The lack of a cohesive economic consciousness among trade unionists resulted in the corresponding absence of a coherent political class consciousness. The reliance upon labourism in the period leading up to the strike highlighted tensions which shaped and ultimately undermined action in the workplace and the political arena.

Halifax labour had been interested in politics since the 1860s, usually in

¹¹*The Citizen*, 23 January 1920.

¹²Heron, "Labourism," 56.

¹³For example, in Edmonton the district labour council split in early 1919 over the One Big Union. *The Edmonton Journal*, 22 April 1919.



An artist's futuristic depiction of the busy yard reveals the optimism shared by the company, community, and labour regarding the potential of the Halifax Shipyards Limited. Note the prosperous community in the background. (Maritime Museum of the Atlantic)

conjunction with either the Liberals or Conservatives.¹⁴ At the turn of the century Halifax also had a chapter of the Socialist Labour Party but this had split by 1903 over the question of dual unionism and the Socialist Trades and Labor Alliance.¹⁵ The Socialist Party of Canada (SPC) was present in the city between 1909 and 1912, but by 1919, the social and economic changes which accompanied the war had wiped out all traces of the SPC.¹⁶ Fred W. Thompson, later active in the Industrial Workers of the World, wrote that Halifax labour politics

... differed so from Saint John socialism that I asked my mentor there whether it would be proper for me to belong to both the Socialist Party of Canada and the Labor Party, urging at the same time it seemed the only way I could be active in the Halifax labor movement.¹⁷

¹⁴Ian McKay, "Class Struggle and Mercantile Capitalism: Craftsmen and Labourers on the Halifax Waterfront, 1850-1902," in Rosemary Ommer and Gerald Panting, eds., *Working Men Who Got Wet; Proceedings of the Fourth Conference of the Atlantic Shipping Project* (St. John's 1980), 309-10; K.G. Pryke "Labour and Politics: Nova Scotia at Confederation," *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, 6 (1970), 48-52; Ian McKay "The Working Class of Metro Halifax 1850-1889," Honours B.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1975, 68-9.

¹⁵David Frank and Nolan Reilly, "The Emergence of the Socialist Movement in the Maritimes 1899-1916," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 4 (1979), 88.

¹⁶*Eastern Labor News*, 18 September 1909; Frank and Reilly, "Emergence," 94.

¹⁷Dalhousie University Archives (DUA) MG MS 10 2 A1, Fred Thompson to John Bell, 9 August 1976, 4.

Perhaps the absence of the SPC after the war was directly related to the strength of trade unionism in the city.

The Nova Scotian report of the 1908 Trades and Labor Congress held in Halifax announced that a Halifax Labor Club had been formed with Patrick J. Healey acting as chairman. "Paddy" Healey played one of the leading roles in Halifax labour politics for nearly 50 years. A mason by trade, Healey was brought up in the labour movement as his father had been one of the founders of the bricklayers and masons' union. An Irish Roman Catholic, he remained interested in Irish politics as a supporter of Sinn Féin.¹⁸

The Halifax Labor Club became the Halifax Labor Party in 1909 and was supported by a Labor Representation Committee which drew upon delegates from many of the city's unions.¹⁹ In December 1909, John T. Joy was nominated as a labour candidate in the next provincial election and in the intervening two years campaigned regularly. Joy was regarded as "the grand old man" of Halifax labour and was credited with the existing organizations of both the longshoremen and the street railway workers.²⁰ His defeat in 1911, despite the support of all three daily newspapers who forsook their strong party loyalties to promote the popular labour candidate, clearly testified to the difficulty of electoral success for any independent candidate in Halifax.

The next attempt at labour politics occurred in 1917, when labour fielded a candidate in conjunction with the Liberal Party. A split in the local party organization following the formation of Borden's Union Government and the last-minute resignation of their candidate, created a situation in which Halifax Liberals needed a Protestant candidate on extremely short notice.²¹ The crisis was solved when the President of the Halifax Trades and Labor Council and member of the Carpenters and Joiners Union, Ralph Eisnor, offered to run as a Lib-Lab candidate.²² Unfortunately, the election never

¹⁸ *Report and Proceedings of the Twenty-Fourth Annual Convention of the Trades and Labor Congress of Canada*, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 21-25 September, 1908 26; Halifax Trades and Labour Council *Labor Journal* 1928, 97; Thompson to Bell, 5.

¹⁹ *Eastern Labor News*, 6 October 1909.

²⁰ *Labor Journal* 1928, 73; *Labor Journal* 1938, 33. A baker by trade, Joy had been a member of the Nova Scotia Reform Council, the Halifax County Tuberculosis League, the St. Mary's Total Abstinence and Benevolent Society, and the Rotary Club. The importance of Joy to the Halifax movement was obvious as he was the city's first labour politician, responsible for the development of workmen's compensation in the province and vice president of the TLC. McKay, "Halifax Waterfront," 298; *Eastern Labor News*, 11 December 1909; *Halifax Herald*, 3 September 1919.

²¹ Joseph Hugh Tuck, "Nova Scotia and the Conscription Elections of 1917," M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1968, 62.

²² Ian McKay, *The Craft Transformed: An Essay on the Carpenters of Halifax, 1885-1985* (Halifax 1985), 57.

took place as the Halifax Explosion of 6 December 1917, followed by a national Unionist victory, led the Halifax Liberal candidates to withdraw allowing the acclamation of the Unionists.²³

The strength of industrial action and organization was reflected or marked by an increased interest in politics. It is significant that the first labour party in the city was formed in a period of industrial unrest among the longshoremen, electricians, bricklayers, and boilermakers at the Halifax Graving Dock.²⁴ Industrial action was common in the building trades with strikes by the plumbers in May 1910 and 1914, the carpenters in 1913, and the electricians in 1917. In addition street railwaymen struck in May 1913 and March 1918. The boilermakers at the Graving Dock also walked out in July 1912 and in September 1915.²⁵ Political activities were considered an important aspect of economic action, a path in Halifax which led to the Shipyard's Strike of 1920.

Regional and national events complemented unique local economic structures and circumstances. During World War I, Halifax did not gain as much war production as Ontario and Quebec, but the economy did benefit from the war. World War I revived the British West Indies sugar trade, facilitated naval expenditures, expanded shipbuilding, and as the closest port to Europe, Halifax prospered from increased trade and shipping.²⁶ Unlike munitions production which ceased immediately with the Armistice, Halifax continued to service the navy and host the North Atlantic Fleet through 1919. The return of troops from Europe throughout the summer of 1919 meant that a war time mentality was perpetuated in Halifax for almost an entire year after the war's end. The continued psychological excitement of victory, generated by the numerous parades and a stream of important visitors, kept patriotism strong and fostered optimism.

The rebuilding of the city in the aftermath of the explosion of 6 December 1917 also kept the economy booming. The explosion, which killed 1,651 people, injured thousands, and devastated two square miles of the city, instigated an unprecedented construction boom.²⁷ Not only did the Halifax Relief Commission undertake the rebuilding of the working-class district of

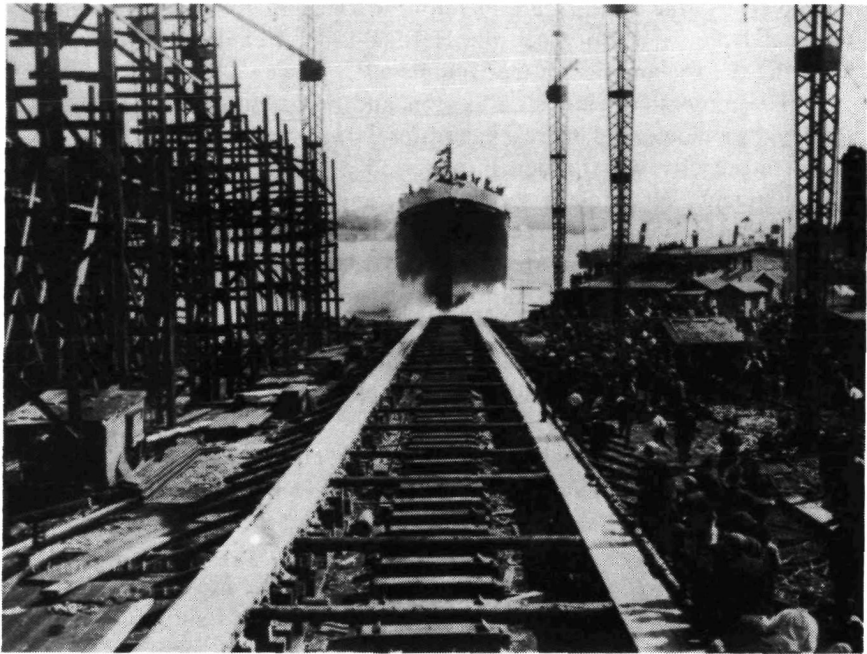
²³Tuck, "Nova Scotia," 126.

²⁴LG (July 1907), 14; (August 1907), 235; (October 1907), 467; (August 1908), 1441.

²⁵LG (June 1910), 1441; (August 1912), 188; (May 1913), 1301; (June 1913), 1416; (June 1914), 1463; (September 1915), 349; (August 1917), 613; (March 1918), 206. See Peter D. Lambly "Working Conditions and Industrial Relations on Canada's Street Railways, 1900-1920," M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1983; Catherine Waite, "The Longshoremen of Halifax, 1900-1930: Their Lives and Working Conditions," M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1977.

²⁶Tom Naylor, "The Canadian State, the Accumulation of Capital and the Great War," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 16 (1981), 38.

²⁷Graham Meison, *The Halifax Explosion: December 6, 1917* (Toronto 1978), 119.



The launching of the Canadian Mariner on 4 September 1920 marked the end of widespread post-war radical labour activity. The crowd which witnessed the event, augmented by many children, appears much smaller than one might have expected. (Photo by Commercial Photo Service, Halifax, N.S. Maritime Museum of the Atlantic)

Richmond, but temporary houses and streets were also erected on the Exhibition Grounds and Commons. The building boom absorbed all available local labour, and workers from outlying Maritime towns and villages and from as far away as Montreal rushed to the city seeking work.²⁸

Continuing activity in these key sectors of the economy was reflected in a healthy labour movement since workers in the building trades and transportation industry were traditionally amongst the most highly organized in Canada.²⁹ In the building trades in particular, successful organizing drives

²⁸*Ibid.*, 158; *LG* (February 1919), 154, 108.

²⁹To determine that actual nature of the Halifax work force, the 1921 census specifies the employment and occupation of 17,175 men and 5,888 women over the age of ten. The occupational structure of Halifax in 1921 was unique as nearly 20 and 18 per cent of the men were employed in the construction and transportation sectors respectively. These figures were well above the norm and were balanced by an abnormally low level of employment in

brought massive expansion. The International Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners Local 83 offers the best example of this growth. Between the explosion and June 1919 its membership rolls rose by over 425 per cent.³⁰ Unionized workers employed in the building trades and semi-autonomous occupations of the transportation sector tended to favour labourism and the particular strength of this ideology in Halifax can be partly explained by the sheer dominance of these trades in the local work force. Although Halifax's occupational structure, with its high level of organized skilled and semi-skilled workers, made it susceptible to labourism, the weak economic basis of the boom made it quite vulnerable to economic recession. Halifax of 1919 had the ideal constituency for labourism's success, but many of these men were forced to leave in search of work, causing a decline in the total number of men employed in the city between 1921 and 1931.³¹ The occupational composition which had aided the development of labourism in times of prosperity, in the end, was largely responsible for its defeat.

During the prosperous year of 1919, when the Halifax Trades and Labor Council (HTLC) grew to represent 8,000 workers and ranked as the fourth largest local organization in Canada, there was obviously no way in which Halifax labour could have foreseen the future.³² Other occupational, umbrella associations such as the Building Trades Council and the Marine Trades and Labor Federation both increased their power and influence as the fortunes of their members rose. But it was primarily the HTLC which provided the general direction for Halifax labour in 1919 and 1920, uniting the leadership of most of the city's unions in one legislative and advisory council. Its size and strength, and the changing political leanings of individual delegates, measured the day-to-day pulse of local organized labour.

At the annual meeting in January 1919, only eleven unions were represented and the convention re-elected president Eisnor, secretary Joseph Garnett of the Pressmen, and treasurer Michael Coolen of the

manufacturing. The construction sector of Halifax included the shipbuilding industry, the city's single largest employer, and the building trades while the transportation sector included the longshoremen, the street railway workers and the employees of the steam railway. Canada, *Canada Census*, 1921, Vol. 4, 386-99.

³⁰*The Citizen*, 6 June 1919. The occupational structure of the community was unusual with abnormally high levels of employment in the construction and transportation sectors; nearly 20 per cent of the 17,175 men over the age of 10 were involved in construction, close to double the level of other Canadian cities; only 10 per cent were employed in the manufacturing sector. (*Canada*, Vol. 4, 386-99.)

³¹*Ibid.*, 1911, Vol. 6, 326-34; 1921, Vol. 4, 382-99; 1931, Vol. 7, 266-77.

³²Canada, Department of Labour, *Tenth Annual Report on Labour Organization in Canada*, 1920 (Ottawa 1921), 276. In 1919 Halifax ranked behind Montreal, Toronto, and Quebec City Councils. By way of contrast in 1925 the Halifax Council registered only 600 members and 22 other cities in Canada claimed larger constituencies. *Ibid.*, 1925, 237.

Longshoremen.³³ The three men were strong supporters of AFL-based international trade unionism but were not adverse to some political activity. The new executive began its mandate by hosting the founding convention of the Nova Scotia Federation of Labor. The 60 accredited delegates from across the province met in Halifax to discuss legislative reforms and the formation of a provincial Independent Labor Party which would be “... backed by organized labor but with no strings tied to various unions.”³⁴ The party would boast a broad platform concerning issues such as the eight hour day, housing, amendments to the Workmen’s Compensation Act, and reform of the school system.³⁵ Labourites were successful in persuading the convention that they had gone “... as far as was possible without breaking with capital” and “... labor men do not want to control the Government, but they do ask for a representation of sufficient strength to get further representation along labor lines.”³⁶

Although the convention was dominated by the more conservative HTLC executive, this forum brought together coal miners and skilled and semi-skilled workers from across the province thus creating the opportunity for the largely Halifax audience to hear miners’ leaders such as J.B. McLachlan and Foreman Waye. Another speaker at the convention was the Australian C.C. Dane, who had been influenced by the industrial unionist ideas of the One Big Union (OBU).³⁷ Thus, from its very beginning, labour’s post-war political movement contained a diversity of ideas held together by a tenuous thread of compromise based on the hope of united success.

The establishment of a labour paper was regarded as a necessary first step for political action. The HTLC endorsed this convention proposal but was unwilling to offer financial assistance. Consequently individuals initially floated the paper.³⁸ One such individual was Joseph S. Wallace, a major exception to the union-based labour leadership, who in May 1919 became editor of *The Citizen*. An advertising agent by profession, Joe Wallace’s influence in working class and labour politics eventually grew beyond the

³³*Morning Chronicle*, 10 January 1919. Michael D. Coolen was the president of the Halifax Longshoremen’s Association, a position he held between Joy’s retirement in 1916, until his death in 1929. Born in Prospect, Nova Scotia, Coolen was a charter member of the union and active at the international level. (*The Citizen*, 14 March 1924; *Halifax Herald*, 17 December 1929; Public Archives of Nova Scotia (PANS), Churches, Halifax, St. Patrick’s Roman Catholic Church, marriage register, September 1897, 45.)

³⁴*Halifax Herald*, 1 March 1919.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 28 February 1919.

³⁶*Morning Chronicle*, 1 March 1919.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 26 July 1919.

³⁸PANS, Halifax Typographical Union Minutes, 11 April 1919.

editorship of the weekly paper.³⁹ More than any other individual in the Halifax movement, Wallace represented the pilgrimage from liberalism to communism. At first active in the Young Men's Liberal Association, he boasted that he had spent an evening alone with Wilfred Laurier in 1918.⁴⁰ Nevertheless he threw his zeal for politics into independent labour action.

The municipal campaign of 1919 offered the ideal opportunity for labour to assert its power in the political arena.⁴¹ The relatively inexpensive nature of campaigns and the fact that votes were not openly tied to traditional party labels at the local level made municipal contests attractive to labour activists across Canada. It was municipally that labour had made its most significant political advances in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. To Halifax labour activists the return to the system of aldermanic representation by ward made 1919 appear unusually promising. The need to elect a completely new Council and three aldermen in each ward meant labour candidates did not confront the entrenched power of incumbents.⁴²

Labour attempted to exploit the peculiar advantages which the political geography of Halifax offered them at the municipal level. Halifax was composed of six wards numbered from the southern tip of the peninsula. Although none of these wards was strictly homogeneous in its class composition, they exhibited generally distinguishable characteristics. The division between Wards Three and Four divided the city in half, roughly indicated the

³⁹Wallace was born in Toronto or Oshawa, Ontario and had lived in Halifax since 1896. In 1919, he was 28 years old, a devote Roman Catholic of Irish origin who fitted in well with Halifax labour, although he was actually the manager of the Wallace Advertising Agency and had attended St. Francis Xavier University. *Halifax Herald*, 11 August 1919; *The Citizen*, 9 July 1920; *McAlpine's Halifax City Directory* (Halifax 1919); Joe Wallace, *The Golden Legend* (Moscow 1958), 17; David Frank, "Joe Wallace, *Poems*," review, *Labour/Le Travail*, 15 (1985), 212-14.

⁴⁰*Morning Chronicle*, 20 February 1919. The other prominent middle class supporter of labour was ex-Mayor Arthur C. Hawkins who ran with labour endorsement in 1919 and 1920. A member of the labour party in 1920, Hawkins was defeated in both attempts after a controversial term in office. *The Citizen*, 23 April 1920; Henry Roper, "The Strange Career of A.C. Hawkins, Mayor of Halifax 1918-1919," *Collections of the Nova Scotian Historical Society*, 41 (1982), 141-63.

⁴¹For a discussion of franchise and electoral restrictions see Suzanne Morton, "Labourism and Independent Labor Politics in Halifax, 1919-1926," M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1986, 28-9.

⁴²The structure of the municipal government was in the midst of change in 1919. After a brief experiment with reforms in municipal structure, the city of Halifax by decision of a plebiscite, returned to the aldermanic system. The aldermanic system was based on six wards, each represented by three aldermen who were elected to three year revolving terms, whereby one alderman was elected annually. The position of mayor was elected city wide. (Henry Roper, "The Halifax Board of Control: The Failure of Municipal Reform 1906-1919," *Acadiensis*, 14 (1985), 46-65.

standard of housing and the occupations of its inhabitants, and provided a crude division by class. In the South End, there were significant pockets of working areas surrounding the railway terminals in Ward One and in the section of downtown east of the citadel which stretched through Wards Two and Three. But Wards Five and Six, in the North End, were the predominantly working-class areas of the city, and it was here that labour centred its political efforts.⁴³ The position of alderman in Ward Six was contested by E. James Rudge, a metal worker at the Halifax Shipyards with twenty-five years experience in the labour movement and a former member of the Glace Bay Co-op executive. Ira G. Mason, carpenter and chairman of the Building Trades Council, ran for alderman in Ward Five.⁴⁴ This move into the political sphere was openly endorsed by and linked to powerful sectors of the labour movement. Both Ira G. Mason and E. James Rudge received the endorsement of their co-workers and of the HTLC, which could claim to offer broader support from organized labour in general. The election results brought no success for labour. In Ward 5, Mason finished last, 139 votes shy of third place, and in Ward 6, Rudge fared better as his fourth place finish fell only eight votes short of an elected position.⁴⁵

In retrospect, much of the blame for labour's disappointment must be placed on the divided energies and foci of labour activists for, throughout the election campaign, the real emphasis had been on a general Building Trades strike, the largest strike in the history of the city. The strike had begun on 1 May and involved 2,000 men in the city's most active economic sector. It had originally centred upon the issue of higher wages and the eight-hour day for, despite the full employment in the building trades, labour faced serious economic problems.⁴⁶ Though wages were low and the hours were long, as the strike continued the overwhelming issue which emerged was the right to

⁴³Of the 231 men who assumed leadership positions in the trade unions or the labour political organizations and who could also be traced in the city directory, over half lived in Wards 5 and 6. Only 63 lived in the South End, and of the 63, 17 were printers or pressmen and 15 were employed in the building trades. Not only was the city broadly divided geographically by class, but it appears that within the division were more subtle nuances relating to level of skill, wage, and job security. A further discussion of the geographical class division of Halifax occurs in Morton, "Labourism," 29-31.

⁴⁴Mason's nomination papers were signed by carpenters and masons of the building trades while Rudge was endorsed by metal co-workers at the shipyards. *The Citizen*, 23 May 1919.

⁴⁵PANS, Minutes of the Halifax City Council, 5 June 1919, 9-10.

⁴⁶*The Citizen* claimed that the cost of living in Halifax was the highest in Canada, and according to figures published in *LG*, in May 1919, it cost \$24.78 per week to feed, clothe and shelter a family in the city. At the existing scale of 50 cents an hour, a carpenter who was able to work a full 54 hours a week earned little more than basics and certainly not enough to save for seasonal layoffs, bad weather, or emergencies. *Ibid.*, 13 June 1919; 27 June 1919. See also Michael Piva, "Urban Working Class Income and Real Incomes in 1921: A Comparative Analysis," *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, 16 (1983), 145-67.

"collective bargaining" across the trades. In 1919, this form of "collective bargaining" had radical connotations since in practical terms it meant the transformation from strictly-defined fragmented craft unions to agreements which encompassed larger and more powerful bargaining organizations.⁴⁷ The unification of carpenters, plumbers, plasterers, painters, bricklayers, and masons into one city-wide bargaining unit created an organization capable of exerting far more power than a single craft union. The strike achieved a definite victory for the principle and practice of collective bargaining, implanting the seed for a more broadly based worker consciousness which would come to full maturity a year later in the Shipyards strike.

At the 14 May meeting of the HTLC, the Building Trades Council requested that the central organization call a city-wide sympathetic strike.⁴⁸ This request was issued the day before the commencement of the Winnipeg General Strike, and the seriousness with which the Council considered this action indicates that Halifax was not unlike other Canadian centres in the spring of 1919. The general strikes in nearby Amherst and in Winnipeg frightened the Halifax employers who saw a potentially explosive situation in their own city. Cries of bolshevism appeared, and reporting of both the local and the national strikes in the daily papers was markedly restricted. A sensationalist *Herald* headline read "Bolsheviks at Work in Halifax."⁴⁹

The strike was formally concluded on 12 June when the last remaining union, the Plumbers, agreed to arbitration.⁵⁰ A tribunal appointed by business and labour granted a pay increase of between ten and sixteen cents an hour, but failed to achieve a standardized wage of seventy-five cents — a differential of ten cents remained between plasterers and masons. Generally, the building trades felt successful and according to one of the members of the Building Trades Council, they received, "Most of what we asked for, as much as we hoped for, [and] more than we feared we might get."⁵¹

As pointed out by Ian McKay, the Building Trades strike was significant as it "... marked a new unified state in the history of the building craftsmen." The act of negotiating together as a single bargaining unit transformed " ...

⁴⁷ McKay, *The Craft*, 71.

⁴⁸ *Morning Chronicle*, 16 May 1919. The secretary of the HTLC was instructed to contact the affiliated unions for their opinions.

⁴⁹ *Halifax Herald*, 11 June 1919. "The paper [*Herald*] nevertheless demonstrated considerable political acumen. It spoke highly of politically minded representatives of organized labour, but did not support the notion of a third party." William March, *Red Line: The Chronicle-Herald, The Mail-Star, 1875-1954* (Halifax 1986) 139-40.

⁵⁰ The painters, carpenters, and bricklayers had been in favour of arbitration on 3 June.

⁵¹ The Building Trades Council appointed J.A. McDonald, President of Amherst Pianos Limited, to meet with the employers' representative, Rev. Dr. John Forrest, retired president of Dalhousie College and University who together named a third party, Rev. Dr. William Foley, rector of St. Mary's Cathedral. *The Citizen*, 27 June 1919.

craft unionism into something more like industrial unionism.”⁵² It was also extraordinary that these separate skilled trades demanded a standard wage across all the crafts. Despite the rather conservative conclusion to the strike, it had radicalized the ideas and strategy of Halifax labour.

The clearest indication of this new activism was the move to resurrect a labour party in July 1919. At a special meeting the HTLC chose a three-person committee to develop a platform of principles and a constitution. The committee included Ronald MacDonald, a 29 year old Cape Bretoner who was president of the machinists’ union at the Halifax Shipyards and a leading challenger to the established leadership of the HTLC; Patrick J. Healey, future chairman of the Party who had also chaired the Halifax Labor Club of 1908; and Rudge, the defeated aldermanic-candidate.⁵³ The absence of Ralph Eisnor from the committee marked a new era in the city’s labour leadership. President of the HTLC and Carpenters’ Union, Lib-lab candidate in the 1917 Federal Election, and the “recognized leader of Halifax labor,” Eisnor had exemplified the war-time leadership of Halifax labour.⁵⁴

The difficulty in understanding Halifax labour in terms of any consistent individual political action is illustrated by a brief look at Eisnor’s political career. In 1919, after the HTLC decided against sending a delegate to the national Liberal conference, the Halifax Liberal Association sent Eisnor as an ex-officio delegate.⁵⁵ In the same year Eisnor also signed the nomination papers of a candidate opposing the labour nominees and appeared as the first signature on Mayor J.S. Parker’s papers even though Parker’s opponent had labour’s unofficial support.⁵⁶ Whether motivated by politics or personality, the only unified action taken on City Council by labour aldermen was the motion to replace Eisnor with Wallace on the Housing Commission.⁵⁷ Later Eisnor became accustomed to being on the outside, but in 1919 he was central. It was not clear whether Eisnor wanted to take a back seat or was shoved to the side line in the formation of the Labour Party, but it is certain that he had already lost his influence among the politically active group which centred around the editorial staff of *The Citizen*.

By December, the Halifax Labor Party (HLP) was well under way. Its first chairman, Patrick J. Healey, told the HTLC that the party platform had been endorsed unanimously and subscription books were being circulated

⁵²McKay, *The Craft*, 69.

⁵³*Morning Chronicle*, 10 January and 26 July 1919.

⁵⁴Labour’s attempt to pursue an independent course was hindered by those unable to break from old alliances. A prime example of this occurred when Council President Eisnor signed an opponent’s nomination papers in the Ward Five contest against Mason. *Ibid*.

⁵⁵*Citizen*, 25 July 1919; *Halifax Herald*, 12 June 1919.

⁵⁶*Halifax Herald*, 12 June 1919.

⁵⁷PANS, RG 102-35, Series 1A (Microfilm), Minutes of Halifax City Council, 7 May 1920, 17.

with all labour men invited to join.⁵⁸ The platform covered 22 points and concerned changes in social programmes, labour legislation, the structure of the state, and economic reforms. The commitment anticipated in building the new party was so great that Wallace resigned his editorship of *The Citizen* on 1 December and devoted all his energies to the advancement of the party.

The fragile balance of ideas and perspectives within Halifax labourism was demonstrated in the first public meeting of the HLP. Although the daily press reported that "... the organization desired to have little in common with ultra radicals" and Ronald MacDonald, who would later be active in the Workers Party of Canada, warned agitators that "You're going to get fired out if you start any dirty work," the discussion had a decidedly radical edge.⁵⁹ Strong arguments were made for the class basis of society as people were divided into "those who own but do not produce, and those who produce but do not own."⁶⁰ George Borland, another employee of the Halifax Shipyards and president of the Marine Trades and Labor Federation (MTLF), expanded this argument and spoke of the need for worker representation in parliament as it related to parallel economic gains and the creation of a just society where all could work and possess life's necessities.⁶¹ The fact that Borland, a doctrinaire socialist member of the Socialist Party of Great Britain, spoke at the meeting indicated the type of coalition within the HLP and its political leaning.⁶² Donald Stewart, who had been involved in the organization of the British Labour Party, also spoke and according to Fred Thompson, "... told the chairman and audience that this was no time for small things but a time for old men to have dreams and young men to have visions."⁶³

The revised ten-point platform presented at the meeting called for sweeping change in the electoral system, an expansion of social services, and democratic control of industry. Single tax ideas on land values, ethical socialism stressing co-operation over competition, and labourite industrial reforms in the hours of the workday and a minimum wage were combined into a single policy statement.

Support for the HLP continued to grow. In February, the Great War Veterans Association (GWVA) adopted the labour party's platform and in early March they began serious preparations for the municipal contest with the selection of ward chairmen.⁶⁴ The parallel expansion of the HTLC

⁵⁸*Morning Chronicle*, 13 December 1919.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*

⁶⁰*The Citizen*, 23 January 1920.

⁶¹*Morning Chronicle*, 17 January 1920.

⁶²DUA, Thompson to Bell, 5.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 3. This oral testimony is supported by the article Thompson wrote in *The Citizen* at the time as he was responsible for reporting the meeting.

⁶⁴Generous financial support was received from the Longshoremen and the Carpenters. *The Citizen*, 27 February 1920; 5, 12 March 1920; McKay, *The Craft*, 74.

attracted new organizations which presented their credentials at the annual meeting when new leadership took over the Council. Healey defeated Eisnor for president by a "good majority" and his apparent slate — Peter Garnier, a prominent labourite, Thomas Martin, secretary of the HLP, and MacDonald — were acclaimed vice-president, secretary, and treasurer respectively.⁶⁵ Other members elected to the executive had strong ties to the labour party and a significant number also held positions within the MTLF. Perhaps more remarkable were those excluded from the HTLC executive of 1920; gone were the men who had led Halifax labour through the war.⁶⁶ Clearly the position and outlook of the HTLC had shifted.

Under these circumstances it was not surprising that the municipal election of 1920 was a success for the HLP, notwithstanding problems. Support was high on 11 April when the HLP was able to attract nearly six hundred people to hear J.C. Watters, ex-president of the Canadian Trades and Labour Congress. The campaign suffered a temporary setback when the support of the GWVA was withdrawn at the last moment.⁶⁷ Public embarrassment at this breakdown in cooperation was alleviated on election day when labour candidates were victorious in all three North End wards: Edward Scanlon in Ward Four, Mason in Ward Five, and Rudge in Ward Six.⁶⁸

Fresh from the municipal victories, Halifax labour entered a period of widespread labour unrest which, with the important exception of the building trades, Halifax had generally missed the previous spring.⁶⁹ The Coal Handlers in April and the Teamsters in May struck for a "living wage," while the Bakers and Bakers' Helpers struck throughout May in an unsuccessful attempt for union recognition.⁷⁰ Heightened industrial conflict was accompanied by labour's new confidence in the social and political spheres of Halifax life. The labour movement flourished as *The Citizen* celebrated its first year of publication, the Co-op Society boasted weekly receipts of

⁶⁵Peter Martin would later be named Fair Wage Office for the Maritimes.

⁶⁶*The Citizen*, 16 January 1920.

⁶⁷The HLP believed that it had an agreement whereby the GWVA would nominate candidates for the South End and the HLP the North End, with both organizations lending mutual support. *The Daily Echo*, 12 April 1920.

⁶⁸Labour did not only suffer from the loss of support from the GWVA but also from legal restrictions as in the midst of the municipal campaign, the old City Council's last major action established a restriction on labour's strength in future elections. The City Council charged the legislation committee "to consider and report upon the advisability of applying for legislation forbidding candidates for Mayor and alderman canvassing for votes." This meant that it became a "corrupt practice" to appeal directly for votes, and organizations involved in municipal politics had to resort to more expensive tactics such as newspaper advertising to educate the constituency voters. Minutes of Halifax City Council, 16 April 1920, 993; *Daily Echo*, 24 April 1920; *The Citizen*, 9 April 1920.

⁶⁹Piva, "Urban," 149.

⁷⁰LG (February 1921), 186; *The Citizen*, 14 May 1920.

\$2,500, and in May, the HLP, alive with the prospect of a summer provincial election, received 56 additional paid members.⁷¹ On 27 May, Montreal socialist Rose Henderson arrived in the city sponsored by the HLP and was instrumental in the formation of a women's auxiliary.⁷² In the midst of this optimism, the MTLF quietly presented the Shipyards with its new wage schedule and collective agreement to become effective 1 June.⁷³ The resulting strike was to mark the apex of power and the beginning of a rapid collapse. In response to the situation's most urgent demands and apparently without much open decision-making, the HLP suspended preparation for the possible provincial election. At a critical juncture, direct economic action interrupted and superseded politics.

In a separate council similar to the Building Trades Council, the MTLF brought together those Plumbers, Blacksmiths, Carpenters, Machinists, Boilermakers, Painters, Electricians, Shipwrights, and Marine Labourers employed in the marine trades. Formed in February 1919 as a branch of an organization for shipyard workers east of Port Arthur, Ontario, the MTLF of Halifax was the sole branch in existence by June 1920 and had no connection with any organization outside of Halifax.⁷⁴ Although it undertook the negotiations with the Halifax Shipyards on behalf of the various unions, final acceptance or rejection of any offer was the decision of the separate craft unions which it represented. Each union appointed delegates who met at monthly meetings under an executive composed of politically active men such as Borland, Rudge, and MacDonald of the HLP. A number of the MTLF executive also held important positions within the HTLC. C.A. Greig, secretary of the MTLF, was a HTLC trustee, J.E. Moreash, blacksmith, served on the MTLF executive and as HTLC Sergeant-at-Arms; and finally Graham Galloway, MTLF business agent, was HTLC treasurer.⁷⁵ With the exception of Wallace, economic and political leadership was interchangeable.

In July 1919, the Halifax Shipyards labourers had organized themselves into Federal Labor Union 16573, Marine Trades Branch, and struck for increased wages. During this disturbance, the first indication of the changing nature of yard workers surfaced as many skilled men refused to work with the strikebreakers. Trouble emerged briefly again in October as the MTLF representative MacDonald and the Fair Wage Officer of Moncton officially

⁷¹*The Citizen*, 21 May 1920; *Halifax Herald*, 5 May 1920.

⁷²*Herald*, 27 May 1920; *Echo*, 3 June 1920.

⁷³In the spring and early summer of 1920 two other shipyard strikes occurred. The first, in Trois Riviere, Quebec lasted from 19 April to 17 May and involved 800 shipbuilders. The second in Port Arthur, Ontario from 15 May to 8 June involved 1,000 men. *LG* (May 1920), 532, 535; (June 1920), 684, 685; (July 1920), 841.

⁷⁴PANS, RG 39, 'C', 629, Case 579, Supreme Court of Nova Scotia 1920, *Halifax Shipyards and John Jones et al.*

⁷⁵*The Citizen*, 13 February 1920.

and unsuccessfully requested that the unskilled rate be raised to 40 cents an hour. Yet, in spite of the low wages, there was probably no industry in the city in which the level of optimism was higher in the spring of 1920. The first steamer, the *Canadian Mariner*, was to be launched in mid June and the prospects of full employment continued as three other ships were planned.⁷⁶

The establishment of a steel shipbuilding industry in Halifax had been a community dream for a number of years. With the end of the era of wooden ships, Haligonians through organizations such as the Halifax Liberal Association in 1897 and the Board of Trade in 1905 had begun petitioning the federal government for assistance; however, it took the war and the explosion to achieve tangible results.⁷⁷ During World War I, Canada realized a critical shortage of ocean tonnage and in 1918 the Department of Marine and Fisheries pledged that steel shipbuilding would be a peacetime priority. C.C. Ballantyne, Minister of Marine, sent Roy M. Wolvin, President of the Montreal Transportation Company, to Halifax where he agreed to enter the shipbuilding industry on condition of receiving the explosion-devastated and expropriated Graving Dock, sufficient space for a plant, and four government contracts for ships.⁷⁸ In June 1918, Halifax Shipyards Limited, organized by Wolvin and J.W. Norcross, President of Canada Steamship Lines, took over the 46 acre site of the Halifax Graving Dock.⁷⁹ The Halifax Shipyards became the first acquisition in what would eventually result in the British Empire Steel Corporation (BESCO).

As the city's most modern and largest employer with nearly 2,000 employees, the Halifax Shipyards dominated the shipbuilding industry in Halifax and typified modern management techniques.⁸⁰ The company went to great lengths to develop employee loyalty through team and individual sports such as hockey, baseball, and boxing, social activities, and a monthly, "breezy little magazine," *The Shipyard Times*.⁸¹ Within the plant was a reading and recreation room, the facilities of the Shipyard Athletic and Social Club, and a canteen where the men could obtain hot drinks and meals.⁸² A participant in the Safety First Campaign, the Shipyards boasted a nurse

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 17 October 1919; 6 February 1920; *Halifax Herald*, 11 May 1920.

⁷⁷National Archives of Canada(NAC), MG 26G, Laurier Papers, vol. 45 14680; vol. 390 103741-3.

⁷⁸Edward J. McCracken, "The Steel Industry in Nova Scotia," M.A. thesis, McGill University, 1932, 185. In 1889, S.M. Brookfield built the Halifax Graving Dock which was leased to the Royal Navy for a period of 20 years. Marilyn Smith, *The King's Yard: An Illustrated History of the Halifax Dockyard* (Halifax 1985), 12.

⁷⁹Canada, *Sessional Papers*, House of Commons, LVI, 1920, no. 7, 16.

⁸⁰See David Brody, "The Rise and Decline of Welfare Capitalism," in *Workers in Industrial America: Essays on the Twentieth Century Struggle* (New York 1980).

⁸¹*Halifax Herald*, 17 March 1920; *The Citizen*, 29 August 1919.

⁸²*The Citizen*, 27 February 1920; *Halifax Herald*, 17 March 1920.

always on duty and a doctor who visited twice a day. The potential benefits of modern management demonstrated by such examples of welfare capitalism was marred, however, by the attitude of the corporation and the General Manager, J. Ernest McLurg. McLurg's attitude towards his employees was best characterized by his famous 1925 remark as BESCO vice-president to striking miners in Cape Breton, "They can't stand the gaff."⁸³ In a modern industry using innovative management techniques, cosmetic changes did not distract from real underlying problems centering upon collective bargaining rights and worker control. Hockey teams, baseball leagues, and hot lunches were no doubt appreciated, but they failed to mollify those who desired real change.

The timing of the strike could not have been more unfortunate from the point of view of both the Shipyards and the strikers. The economic depression which followed the post war boom began almost simultaneously with the work stoppage. According to David Alexander, the 1920s marked not only actual hardship but also a time when the "Maritime consciousness of economic stagnation and relative decline within the Dominion only assumed the stature of certainty and reality."⁸⁴ The economic downturn and strike also coincided with the unsuccessful June 1920 negotiations which surrounded the mergers necessary to create BESCO. In fact one of the proposed amendments involved the exclusion of the Shipyards altogether from the new corporation.⁸⁵

Within the context of this business and economic situation, a series of meetings took place between the management of the Halifax Shipyards and the MTLF during April and May.⁸⁶ The brashness of the men's demands was quite extraordinary, for they demanded not only an increase of nearly 30 cents an hour and a 44 hour work week, but also some significant control over

⁸³B.M. Greene, ed., *Who's Who and Why? 1919* (Toronto 1920), 1443; David Frank, "The Cape Breton Coal Miners; 1917-1926," Ph.D. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1979, 366.

⁸⁴David Alexander, "Economic Growth in the Atlantic Region, 1880-1940," *Acadiensis*, 8 (1978), 48. See also Gordon W. Bertram and Michael B. Percy, "Real Wage Trends in Canada, 1900-1926; Some Provisional Estimates," *Canadian Journal of Economics*, 7 (1979), 299-312; John H. Thompson and Allen Seager, *Canada, 1922-1939: Decades of Discord*, (Toronto 1985) and *The Canadian Annual Review* (Toronto: 1920-1926). For material on the economic depression in the Maritimes see S.A. Saunders, *The Economic History of the Maritime Provinces* (Fredericton 1984); Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *The Maritime Provinces Since Confederation* (Ottawa 1927, 1948), 47-76 and M.C. Urquhart and K.A.H. Buckley, eds., *Historical Statistics of Canada*, (Cambridge University Press, 1983). For specific reference to the effect of the "Economic Crisis" in Halifax see McKay, *The Craft*, ch. 3.

⁸⁵Frank "Cape Breton," 24-34.

⁸⁶Management does not appear to have been co-operative, as on at least one occasion it requested that they meet in the afternoon which would have resulted in the loss of half a day in pay. PANS, *Halifax Shipyards and John Jones et al.*

management decisions. The MTLF proposal requested double pay for work at noon, after five, and on seven holidays throughout the year. In addition, the importance of Labour Day and Sunday as a day of rest was to be underlined by triple pay. The MTLF also demanded control of the company's handling of lay-offs and rehiring, the abolition of physical examinations, a grievance procedure through union business agents, the presence of accredited representatives of the crafts in the yard, control over the number of apprentices and what they were permitted to do, the installation of sanitary lavatories in every department, payment on company time, and five minutes clean-up time.⁸⁷ To this demand for increased wages and a significant degree of control of the workplace, the Halifax Shipyards responded with an offer of five cents an hour. At a meeting of shipyard workers on 31 May, the employees rejected the company's offer. Quietly but unmistakably, the city embarked on its largest industrial strike, as 1,700 workers currently on payroll at the Halifax Shipyards were joined by 800 workers at smaller marine engineering shops in Halifax and Dartmouth, bringing out close to 2,500 men.⁸⁸ The MTLF permitted only six pumpmen to work at the Shipyards in what was otherwise a total strike which paralyzed the city's largest employer and suspended the city's largest payroll.

The strike quickly began to take on characteristics of a lock-out as management made no attempt to meet with the men. Thus, the fight was transformed into a struggle over the right to "collective bargaining." In June 1919, the Shipyards had entered into an agreement with the MTLF governing wages and working conditions. In June 1920, however, after supposedly negotiating with the same organization for over three months, McLurg announced he would no longer recognize the authority of the MTLF to negotiate on the men's behalf and would only deal with the trades separately.⁸⁹ In response to this reversal, the MTLF withdrew the pumpmen and support for the strike extended throughout the HTLC as other trade unionists realized their own hard-won rights were also in jeopardy.

During the second week of the strike, it was estimated that 500 of the striking men had already left Halifax, yet despite the exodus, the HTLC was able to attract over 2,000 people to a meeting on 16 June.⁹⁰ At this meeting, with varying degrees of success, attempts were made to link economic and political action. MTLF President Borland stated that although the conflict had begun as a fight for a living wage, collective bargaining had now become the central issue of the strike. Stressing that Halifax labour was in the fight together, he stated: "If there is any possibility of us losing (I don't think there

⁸⁷*Ibid.*

⁸⁸*The Citizen*, 4 June 1920.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, 18 June 1920. PANS, *Halifax Shipyards and John Jones et al.*

⁹⁰*The Citizen*, 11 June 1920; *Halifax Herald*, 10 June 1920.

is), we will know the cost immediately, but you will know it later on. We're making a fight for you as well as ourselves."⁹¹ Another speaker captured an important aspect of labourism as he drew attention to the disadvantages inherited by a child born into a working-class family. For people who desired equal opportunity, this realization was central to the formation of class consciousness. The recently announced BESCO merger was also criticized. Wallace identified himself as a shareholder and tried to point out the injustice of a system where his holdings increased without any effort on his part while workers were excluded from similar benefits.⁹²

On several occasions the strike came near to engulfing the city with a sympathetic general strike or violence. A Royal Canadian Mounted Police report of 24 June noted that rumours of a sympathetic strike concentrated on electric light workers, street railwaymen, and bakers. Although the HTLC was reluctant, claiming it could better provide moral and financial support, sympathetic action remained a real possibility as the strike extended to the government dockyard on 21 June.⁹³ As late as 8 July, the local reporter for the *Labour Gazette*, warned the Deputy Minister in Ottawa of the possibility of a general strike as the Building Trades Council and the HTLC met to reconsider their earlier decision.⁹⁴

The strikers were generally characterized by their "quiet and orderly manner." The potential for violence, however, was never far from the surface, especially as some of the non-unionized men began to return to work towards 1 July.⁹⁵ On 28 June there were reports of a mild clash on Campbell Road as the gates opened for the first time in four weeks.⁹⁶ Fearing an outbreak of violence, McLurg requested that city police be detailed near the yard and convinced most of the City Council to support his request. Alderman Rudge, who was also a member of the strike committee, claimed that the police were intimidating the men on strike.⁹⁷

The problem of the pickets was brought to a climax after a series of assaults on the picket line in the morning and afternoon of 2 July. The Shipyards filed an injunction with the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia which originally listed the names of fifteen strikers who had supposedly been involved in a confrontation between strikers and strikebreakers. Rudge's

⁹¹*Morning Chronicle*, 17 June 1920.

⁹²NAC, RG 27, vol. 321, Strike 198, Strike and Lockout Files, Halifax Shipyards; *Halifax Herald*, 17 June 1920.

⁹³*Ibid.*; and *Halifax Herald*, 22 June 1920.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*; and *Halifax Herald*, 8 July 1920.

⁹⁵*Ibid.*

⁹⁶Campbell Road was the former name of Barrington Street which ran along the outskirts of the Halifax Shipyards. *Morning Chronicle*, 28 June 1920.

⁹⁷PANS, Minutes Halifax City Council, 2 July 1920, 186-187.

name was later struck off all the documents.⁹⁸ Either the Shipyards feared Rudge's political clout or, more likely, they had too insubstantial a case to risk involving the Ward Six alderman. Nevertheless, a temporary injunction was issued on 5 July which restrained the fourteen remaining men " ... from besetting and watching the place or places where the Plaintiff [Halifax Shipyards Limited] carries on business, or in other place or places in which any person or persons are about to be employed" In a show of strength, the MTLF responded on 8 July with a demonstration of 300 pickets, thus raising the level of hysteria in the city to such a point that it was falsely assumed that strikebreaker Horace A. Watson had been kidnapped when he failed to return to his lodgings.⁹⁹ Subsequently the injunction was extended to include all members of the MTLF.¹⁰⁰ The courts demonstrated support for capital as this new injunction effectively removed all pickets from the Halifax Shipyards. According to the *Montreal Gazette*, injunctions of this sweeping nature had not been used in Canadian labour disputes previously and Judge Humphrey Mellish's decision had important ramifications.¹⁰¹

In mid-July the striking employees refused a Shipyards offer which did not discuss wages, bend on the issues of recognition of the MTLF, or guarantee the rights of former employees. McLurg believed that "the officers and labor agitators were wholly responsible for the present strike" and that the company was acting in the best interests of the men by refusing to recognize the MTLF which had misrepresented the situation of the employees.¹⁰² Returning to the theme of the foreign leadership of the MTLF, McLurg claimed that "men brought up in Nova Scotia and [who] were familiar with local conditions" would not have behaved in such a fashion and "had such men been at the head of the Marine Trades and Labor Federation, the present strike would never have been advised."¹⁰³ McLurg was mistaken when he blamed radicalism on those born outside Nova Scotia. Borland was the only identifiable leader of the MTLF to be born in the United Kingdom and in fact, according to Thompson, the other Scottish-born radical of the city, Donald Stewart, was acting as a strikebreaker.¹⁰⁴ The British and

⁹⁸PANS, *Halifax Shipyards and John Jones et al.*

⁹⁹The underlying panic caused both the *Chronicle* and the *Herald* to report on 9 July that the situation at the Shipyard had calmed down with the presence of police and the only indication of a strike was the men who loitered on the other side of the street and the seven men of picket duty. *Halifax Herald*, 9 July 1920; *Morning Chronicle*, 6, 9 July 1920; *The Citizen*, 9 July 1920.

¹⁰⁰NAC, Strike and Lockout Files, Halifax Shipyards.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, *Montreal Gazette* from *Fredericton Gleaner* 25 July 1920. This decision was ignored by the LG and was apparently never used as a precedent.

¹⁰²*Morning Chronicle*, 19 July 1920.

¹⁰³*Halifax Herald*, 14 July 1920.

¹⁰⁴DUA, Thompson to Bell, 9.

foreign-born formed a disproportionate number of the leadership of the HLP, but in 1920 the leadership of the MTLF, MacDonald, Leo Fudge, Rudge, and secretary C.A. Greig, were all native Nova Scotians. Nativity was an important issue as prejudice against outsiders lessened the potential impact of British-born trade unionists or socialists in labour politics.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, a report by the *Herald* claimed that long-time employees were returning to work while a large number of the strikers "were not men who had been previously working at the plant, but had drifted into the city," contained little truth.¹⁰⁶ Of the five men who testified at the injunction hearings on behalf of the Shipyards, three had been employed only a few months. In the same manner, nearly all of those identified by the injunction as present at the disturbance were listed in the 1919 city directory as residing in either Halifax or Dartmouth.

In response to McLurg's fears of international unionism and his belief that a union consisted primarily of its officers, one unidentified labourite replied that much more was at risk than control by a few radical leaders as the strike had become a battle between international unionism and the alternative exemplified by the OBU. Claiming the MTLF had already averted two walkouts the spokesman predicted: "If they should lose the OBU is a dead certainty. There are men who would starve rather than go to work without recognition of the union. Governments recognize unions and this is the twentieth century. If they'd rather have the OBU than the international they may get them."¹⁰⁷ Although the strike had taken on a radical element demonstrated in the political leaning of the leadership of the MTLF, the principles of union recognition and collective bargaining which seemed to be at risk were so fundamental to international trade unionism that the strike was able to attract a wide coalition of support.

The absence of the weekly payroll and the staggering economic impact on the larger community almost forced the strike into the political sphere. Union members received only ten dollars a week while non-union men received even less from the local strike fund.¹⁰⁸ On 24 July, the Halifax

¹⁰⁵ During the 1921 municipal campaign two labour candidates, Harry Rains and Robert Daw, both born in Britain, faced charges that they "did not belong to Halifax" despite the fact that they had resided in their wards for 28 and 34 years respectively. *Halifax Herald*, 26 April 1921.

¹⁰⁶ The use of "long-term" is clearly relative as the Shipyards was purchased in 1918 and did not appear to hire until early 1919. Based on press reports, the Shipyards tended to have a high turnover of employees with frequent lay-offs and a resumption of hiring.

¹⁰⁷ *Halifax Herald*, 16 July 1920.

¹⁰⁸ *Halifax Herald*, 23 June 1920. The strike fund existed under the generous financial aid of the United Mine Workers of America, the Street Railwaymen, the Sheet Metal Workers, and the Typographical Union. *The Citizen*, 23 June 1920; *Morning Chronicle*, 9 July 1920; *Halifax Herald*, 9 July 1920; PANS, Typo Minutes, 3 July 1920, 293.

Typographical Union held a special meeting at which it agreed to donate a dollar a week per member to the strike fund. This concrete support was provided "to help them in the cause of international unionism."¹⁰⁹ Such efforts could not alleviate the real hardships which the strike induced. Concerned with conditions in the city, the municipal Council offered its service as a third-party arbitrator during the second week of June, but both sides held firm.¹¹⁰

The financial and moral support of city unions during the strike demonstrated the development of tangible solidarity. Trade unionists recognized the important principles at stake and at the same time were drawn into the larger movement as men and women such as Rose Henderson and radical Cape Breton miners' leaders J.B. McLachlan and Dan Livingstone spoke at strike meetings.¹¹¹ Visiting speakers, especially from Cape Breton, played an important role in Halifax labour politics, as they provided links to the national and international movements. *The Citizen* boasted: "The strike has been spoken of all over Canada as one of the finest examples of class consciousness the country has ever seen." Another indication of the economic solidarity aroused by the strike was the difficulty the Shipyards had in finding strikebreakers. *The Citizen* identified the strikebreakers as college students and boys on vacation and argued that it was " ... pathetic to see the sons of the bourgeois class going into the yard and earning pin money at the expense of others."¹¹² This wide-spread, work-based consciousness, however, was not transformed into a mass political movement which could challenge for power.

Four weeks into the strike, a provincial election was announced for 27 July. The HTLC immediately passed a motion which endorsed any candidate chosen by the HLP and stated its objection to any member of its affiliates taking part in the Liberal or Conservative campaign. At a well-attended and enthusiastic meeting on 4 July, the HLP selected three candidates, Healey, MacDonald, and Wallace to run as part of its five-member slate in the county of Halifax.¹¹³ It was hoped that the Farmers would field the additional two candidates; they were reluctant to enter the contest, however, and the slate was later augmented by Peter Kuhn of Eastern Passage and John Hugh McKenzie of Ingramport, candidates chosen by Labour to represent the county. Since much of Halifax labour was preoccupied with the strike, it was the building trades who carried the political burden.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹PANS, Typo Minutes, 24 July 1920, 294.

¹¹⁰PANS, Minutes Halifax City Council, 10 June 1920, 145.

¹¹¹*The Citizen*, 11 June 1920; *Daily Echo*, 3 June 1920.

¹¹²*The Citizen*, 9 July 1920.

¹¹³*Halifax Herald*, 29 June 1920; 2, 5 July 1920.

¹¹⁴The labour candidates' nomination papers were signed by members of the building trades and Archibald Pearson of the Plumbers was named as the campaign manager. *Morning Chronicle*, 21 July 1920.

Nothing indicated more the need to link the economic to the political than the issues which emerged in this campaign. Housing, not the strike, became the central issue of the contest and the candidates complained that while hundreds of thousands of dollars were being spent on roads nothing had been allotted for housing. Labour leaders from across the country such as AFL organizer William Varley, John W. Bruce, an organizer for the International Brotherhood of Plumbers and Steamfitters, and Sam McBride, Mayor of Brantford and a labour member of the Ontario Legislature, arrived in Halifax and lent their support to both the strike and election.¹¹⁵

The financial strain of the strike left little money available for the campaign. The generally well-off Typographical Union, already supporting striking workers, could manage only \$100.¹¹⁶ Expenses were heavy as the large geographic size of the riding necessitated the rental of halls throughout the county, the use of cars to cover distances, and the distribution of literature beyond the urban areas of Halifax and Dartmouth. The shortage of funds resulted in the campaign centering upon *The Citizen*, which thus neglected the strike with its coverage of political meetings and editorials.

Since the 1880s, Nova Scotians had elected Liberals to the provincial government, leaving the Conservatives demoralized in perpetual opposition.¹¹⁷ In the general unrest which followed the return to a peacetime economy, the need for change was felt across the province and the Farmer-Labour Party provided a real alternative with almost 31 per cent of the popular vote, sufficient to elect eleven members and to displace the Conservatives as the official opposition.¹¹⁸ The province-wide success of Farm and Labour, however, was not reflected in Halifax. The five Labour candidates for Halifax County only received a majority of the popular vote in working-class areas such as Dartmouth and Woodside, in addition to six of the thirteen North End polling divisions of Wards Five and Six where many of the strikers resided.¹¹⁹ Relative to the Conservatives, Labour did fare better as it received a higher percentage of the popular vote in all but two of Ward Five and Six's thirteen polling divisions. Outside these limited areas, the general picture was

¹¹⁵ *Halifax Herald*, 23 July 1920.

¹¹⁶ *The Citizen*, 9 July 1920.

¹¹⁷ J. Murray Beck, *The Government of Nova Scotia* (Toronto 1957), 350; G.A. Rawlyk, "The Farmer-Labour Movement and the Failure of Socialism in Nova Scotia," in Laurier LaPierre, ed., *Essays on the Left* (Toronto 1971).

¹¹⁸ Ernest Robert Forbes. "The Rise and Fall of the Conservative Party in the Provincial Politics of Nova Scotia, 1922-1933," M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1967, 1; Anthony Mackenzie. "The Rise and Fall of the Farmer-Labor party in Nova Scotia," M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1969, iii.

¹¹⁹ Province of Nova Scotia, *Returns of General Election for House of Assembly, July 27, 1920* (Halifax 1920). Labour received the majority of the popular vote in polling divisions B,D,R,F, and G city Ward Six and polling division C city Ward Five.

dismal. Within the city of Halifax, Healey, Wallace, and MacDonald finished sixth, seventh, and eighth behind the top five Liberals with a margin of 843 votes between the lowest of the victorious Liberals and the highest labour candidate.¹²⁰ The Liberals had clearly been able to maintain the loyalty of their supporters notwithstanding the strike. County-wide, only Wallace, MacDonald, and Healey received more votes than the lowest Conservative candidate. The election results in the following chart demonstrate that it was virtually impossible for labour to elect a candidate in the grouped constituency without strong farming or fishing support.

Election Results for Halifax County July 1920¹²¹

	City of Halifax Wards						Dart- Wood mouth side		County	
	1	2	3	4	5	6				total
Healey	110	322	272	274	437	441	777	86	755	3376
Kuhn	103	263	239	239	353	392	773	105	866	3241
MacDonald	114	285	258	258	407	443	835	104	972	3583
McKenzie	99	272	246	246	364	385	788	104	813	3226
Wallace	119	331	263	263	416	408	833	111	819	3475
Totals for Political Parties										
Labour	545	1473	816	1280	1977	2069	4006	510	4225	16901
Con	1483	1841	784	870	1740	1136	2337	141	8113	18445
Liberal	2553	3714	1314	1787	2726	1904	3045	378	13240	30661

The loss of the election and the collapse of the strike came during the same week. As late as Saturday, 24 July, the number of unionized skilled workers who had broken rank was small; so small that the Shipyard was unable to produce and laid off unskilled workers who had returned.¹²² On 27 July, the day of the provincial election, however, *The Herald* claimed that nearly half the men were back, although the unions continued to claim solidarity. By the end of the first week in August, the number had risen to 1,000. The men were clearly beaten and it remained only a matter of time

¹²⁰Wallace later claimed that the Liberals, together with BESCO officials, bribed the two other Labour candidates to "sabotage the slate." That MacDonald or Healey had been personally compromised seems unlikely in light of the close electoral results and their subsequent devotion to the labour cause; however, it is possible that attempts were made, perhaps funded by Halifax Shipyards officials, to buy votes for the Liberal candidates. J. Murray Beck discusses the extensive presence of corruption in Nova Scotia politics in his "The Party System in Nova Scotia: Traditionalism and Conservatism," *Canadian Provincial Politics: The Party System of the Ten Provinces*, Martin Robin, ed., (Scarborough 1972), 475; MacKenzie, "Rise and Fall," Joe Wallace to MacKenzie, 13 December 1966, 103.

¹²¹Nova Scotia, "Returns," 22-7.

¹²²*Halifax Herald*, 24 July 1920.

until the strike was called off. Hundreds of skilled workers, including Rudge, left the city in search of work. When the harvest excursion trains pulled out on 6 August, they took Thompson and 1,000 other Nova Scotians.¹²³ Four days later, the last union, the Plumbers, Coppersmiths, and Pipefitters, affecting only 100 men, voted to return to work with the company offer of a five cent increase.¹²⁴ *The Citizen* wrote that the strike had ended, when "they were practically starved to submission and a victory for any corporation under such circumstances is not a victory at all."¹²⁵ In practical terms, the company's victory was complete because the strike also succeeded in gutting the local leadership and lowering the general morale of the workers. The Shipyards instituted a blacklist and refused to rehire the strike leaders. Borland and Samuel Alexander, president of the Boilermakers, left Halifax when unable to find work in the city, while others, such as MacDonald, were forced to take temporary employment not related to their skills. Other leadership positions were also abandoned and disrupted by the exodus of workers from the city. The strike resulted in Rudge resigning as alderman and Graham Galloway, MTLF business agent, vacating the HTLC treasury.¹²⁶

The impact on morale was just as dramatic. On 4 September 1920, the Halifax Shipyards launched its first ship, the *Canadian Mariner*, three months behind schedule. Amidst the gala luncheon, which included guests and marching bands, McLurg briefly summarized his version of "the trouble." The Shipyards "had not been fighting the men. They had no quarrel with them but only with the imported Bolshevik agitators who had sought to make trouble. Today the men working in the yards are absolutely satisfied."¹²⁷ Not surprisingly, *The Citizen* in an attempt to describe the effect of the strike on Halifax labour saw the situation in a rather different light. Through the near collapse of the closed shop in Halifax, contractual relationships, which had been established through years of struggle, had been replaced by individual bargaining.

The strike had a depressing effect on the whole Labour movement, both industrially and politically as the disturbance affected many workers, and taxed the resources of not only the union directly affected, but also was a drain upon the treasuries of other trade unions, who contributed liberally to the sustaining fund. It is therefore natural, that the failure of the strike would have its deleterious effect upon Halifax Labor.¹²⁸

Labourism failed to comprehend capitalism. The shocking aspect of the

¹²³*Ibid.*, 6 August 1920.

¹²⁴*Morning Chronicle*, 13 August 1920.

¹²⁵*The Citizen*, 31 August 1920.

¹²⁶*Ibid.*, 6, 13 August 1920.

¹²⁷*Halifax Herald*, 9 September 1920.

¹²⁸*The Citizen*, 31 December 1920.

strike for Halifax labour had been the realization that the economic pressure of withdrawing its labour was totally ineffective because the company was not anxious to have ships completed or launched. The power labour held in the economic sphere was only determined by the value capital was willing to place upon it. While Thompson urged the MTLF leadership to examine other methods or types of pressure such as "the impact of our loss of wages on the local business community or possibly diverse interests even within the shipyard directors," the trade unionists continued to place their primary emphasis upon direct economic action.¹²⁹

The failure of the Shipyards strike and the legacy of frustrations resulting from the provincial election significantly affected the course of labour politics in Halifax. A disillusioned labour movement became more realistic about its relative powerlessness. Economic action had failed and it had been unable to implement political change. One faction of labour abandoned political aspirations altogether, solely concentrating on the defence of previously won economic and industrial victories, while another faction claimed that: "The lesson of the strike surely shows that industrial unionism has reached the zenith of its influence and power, and the workers are being rapidly forced into the political field."¹³⁰ The few who continued to hope that politics could alter economic circumstances were chastened by the realization that in the midst of a heightened economic class conflict, many of the workers of Halifax were not prepared to adopt political class action. Political power could not be achieved until this work-based consciousness was transformed into a mass political movement. Labourism, which was based on the assumption that the workers' right to withhold their skills gave them a broad economic power, had been found wanting and, with the destruction of collective bargaining and the closed shop, had become far less relevant. With the dominance of labourism questioned in the minds of labourites themselves, a less flexible political ideology, incapable of unifying labour into a single coalition, came forward. Trade unions and political action became increasingly polarized resulting in a separation of economic and political leadership within Halifax labour. This division lessened the moderating constraints that international craft unionism had exercised over direct political action, making politics more radical, while simultaneously alienating its basic constituency, the skilled and semi-skilled worker. Indeed, the autumn of 1920 saw the rise of a new type of leadership within the HLP. Ideologically diverse, men and women who had no formal ties to trade unions took on increasing responsibility.¹³¹

¹²⁹DUA, Thompson to Bell, 10.

¹³⁰*The Citizen*, 15 October 1920.

¹³¹A clerk, Hugh Pynn, became the HLP's secretary, Robert Daw, a British-born North End contractor who became vice-president in 1921, and Hawkins assured his status with economic clout through the donation of two pieces of property to the Party, all held positions

The hardship of the strike also presaged future conditions for shipyard workers in Halifax. A large number were laid off in February 1921 and those who remained at work had their wages reduced by five cents an hour, negating the gains of the past summer.¹³² By January 1922 there were only 375 men on the payroll working at further reduced wages of between 27 and 50 cents an hour. High levels of out-migration further diminished the strength of every union in the city and acted as an important force in tempering radicalism as leadership left the city permanently. No industry was more affected than the Halifax Shipyards Limited.¹³³ The city directories of 1919 and 1920 provide 2,064 names of employees of the yard excluding women and those with the untraceable surnames of Brown, Campbell, MacDonald, McDonald, and Smith. Of this large sample only 372 were listed in the 1925 directory, 1,656 were definitely absent and 36 were impossible to determine. Those employed in the most dynamic and assertive industry of 1919 and 1920 only had an 18 per cent chance of residing in the city five years later.¹³⁴ Out-migration and regional movements such as Maritime Rights affected the viability of labourism as the former weakened the working class's strongest cultural and economic institution, the trade union, and the latter offered a seductive alternative to the radicals' class analysis.

After a number of schisms and resurrections combined with much infighting, the Halifax Labor Party finally disappeared after the 1925 Provincial Election. The collapse of the independent vote mirrors the course of labourism in the community and the results reveal that while Liberals remained relatively constant or suffered a slight decline in their popularity from the Provincial Election of 1920, Conservatives reaped the 1920

or influence which had previously been in the hands of trade unionists. The secretary of the women's auxiliary, Ella Paint, was an American who had been active in the Local Council of Women and whose husband had been a Conservative Member of Parliament. Harry E. Rains, Ward IV aldermanic candidate, was manager at Maple Leaf Milling Company. *The Citizen*, 17 September 1920; *Daily Echo*, 12 January 1921; *The Citizen*, 29 September 1921; *Halifax Herald*, 14 March 1930; 18 April 1921.

¹³²LG, March 1921, 302; *Daily Echo*, 24 February 1921.

¹³³The effects of out-migration on the economy is a matter current debate see Patricia Thorton, "The Problem of Out-Migration from Atlantic Canada, 1871-1920: A New Look," *Acadiensis*, 15 (1985), 3-34. This discussion, however, has precluded the 1920s as the dearth of available statistics has made study difficult. Thorton qualified her comments on the period with the statement: "It is frustrating that we do not know more of what happened in the 1920's, when out-migration was once again a topic of national concern." (18). See also Alan A. Brookes, "Out-Migration from the Maritime Provinces, 1860-1900: Some Preliminary Considerations," *Acadiensis*, 5 (1976), 26-55.

¹³⁴Admittedly the Shipyards was one of the hardest hit areas and might reflect the unique nature of the workforce which included many returned soldiers and Nova Scotians who had made the rural to urban migration.

labourite vote *en masse*.¹³⁵

The political movement lost its public face and like Craig Heron's description of Hamilton workers in the 1920s, the working class of Halifax also "retreated back to the private informal world of home and neighborhood."¹³⁶ The fraternal or "hobby-like" aspects of independent politics were carried on by organizations formally outside the ranks of labour, such as the Elks.¹³⁷ The values and ideals of labourism, however, did not disappear as the same men who were attracted to labourism in the early 1920s continued to participate in the Halifax trade union movement.¹³⁸ While the rank and file moved away or became temporarily apathetic, those in leadership positions maintained their concern and involvement in matters concerning the working class. Leaders of the HTLC in the 1920s worked as AFL organizers at the outbreak of World War II.¹³⁹ Healey served as a labour representative on the Nova Scotia Minimum Wage Board and until his death in 1954 sat on the Unemployment Insurance Commission.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁵The Conservatives of Nova Scotia also made a direct appeal for the hearts and minds of the working class. In search of a power base, and realizing the importance of courting the labour vote, the party went out of its way to attract labour support through the populist Conservative papers, the *Herald* and the *Mail*, while " ... the *Chronicle* [Liberal] was busy as one Liberal put it, trying to persuade decent Conservatives to become involved in a campaign against Bolshevism Ernest R. Forbes, *The Maritime Rights Movement, 1919-1927: A Study of Canadian Regionalism* (Montreal 1979), 137. Quoted from NAC, King Papers, H.L. Stewart to W.L.M. King, 9 December 1923.

¹³⁶Heron, "Hamilton," 725.

¹³⁷Labour no longer played a formal role in the community's political culture; however, it left its mark upon the provincial political parties. The platform used by the Conservatives in the 1925 Provincial Election contained labourite concerns beyond Maritime Rights such as responsible government, the end of public corruption, and the immediate amelioration of circumstances in the coal industry. Aspects of labourism were even clearer in the 1930 Liberal platform and it is understandable that many former Liberals returned to the fold. The 1930 Platform not only promised the creation of a Department of Labour, but also contained the old labourite demands of the eight hour day and free text books for children in public schools. Stressing a distrust of Big Business, the platform could have been mistaken for a labourite document as it declared that the Liberals would " ... place the welfare of all the people first denying the right of the private corporations and monopolies to exploit the natural resources of the Province to the injury of our Citizens." *The Citizen*, 21 June 1929; MacKenize, "Rise and Fall," 177; Forbes, "The Conservative Party," 33; 161; quoted 162.

¹³⁸DUA, MS 9-8 A1, Halifax/Dartmouth Trades and Labour Council Delegate Book, 1933-1943.

¹³⁹*The Citizen*, 6 January 1939.

¹⁴⁰Another prominent labourite, Fred Craig, returned to the Liberal Party, but retained his mixture of independent radicalism and self-help characteristic of labourism. In 1939, upon the release of Tom Mooney, *The Citizen* reported that "Delegate Craig in his usual vigorous and outspoken manner paid a high tribute to Tom Mooney" Craig's commitment to self-help was demonstrated as chairman of the Workers' Educational Association (Halifax

Two of the radicals, Wallace and Thompson, went on to important national and international careers in the labour movement. After being soundly defeated in the 1933 Provincial Election when he ran in Halifax Centre for the United Front, Wallace left advertising and worked as an organizer for the Canadian Labour Defense League in Ottawa and Montreal. In 1941, he was arrested under the Defense of Canada Regulations, interned, and upon being released, trained as a lathe operator in order to organize for the United Electrical Workers.¹⁴¹ While Wallace remained in Canada, Thompson, like many other workers from Halifax in the early 1920s, emigrated to the United States where he joined the Industrial Workers of the World, and eventually became the editor of *The Industrial Worker* and the organization's official historian.¹⁴²

In spite of the re-emergence of the Liberals as labour's party, old labourites and the HTLC occasionally turned to independent political action. Periodically the Council contested municipal elections and in 1943 Rudge was named a delegate to the Nova Scotia convention of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation.¹⁴³ With the strengthening of trade unions in World War II, the possibility of an ILP again emerged. At a 1941 meeting, the local Council unanimously approved a motion by Healey "that an independent labor Party be formed in Halifax, sponsored by the Trades and Labor Council."¹⁴⁴

The passage of time had an even stranger effect on the memory of the strike. A 1928 history of the Halifax labour movement written by the local council completely ignored the strike, while mentioning an earlier pre-war dispute between the previous owners of the shipyards and the Boilermakers and Shipbuilders Union.¹⁴⁵ This oversight occurred again in 1938 when newspaper reports concerning a strike in the city described its picket as the first in Halifax since before the war.¹⁴⁶ While the strike disappeared from the written record of Halifax trade unionists, it was not forgotten by Thompson. The newspaper wire report that followed Thompson's death in March 1987 singled out the Halifax Shipyards strike in an impressive career within the

District), a Director of the Halifax Co-op Society, vice-president of the Halifax Civic Credit Union, and a member of the Halifax Co-op Council. *The Citizen*, 14 June 1940; *Chronicle-Herald*, 3 April 1954.

¹⁴¹Nova Scotia, *Journals and Proceedings of the House of Assembly*, Sixth Session of Fortieth Assembly, Appendix 30 "Election Results 1933," (Halifax 1934); Frank, "Joe Wallace," 213.

¹⁴²Melvyn Dubofsky, *We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World* (Chicago 1969), 25, 453. See his obituary in *Labour/Le Travail*, 20 (1987).

¹⁴³HDTLC Minute Book, 19 September 1957; *The Citizen*, 23 September, 8 October 1943.

¹⁴⁴*The Citizen*, 14 November 1941.

¹⁴⁵*Labor Journal* 1928, 81.

¹⁴⁶*Halifax Chronicle*, 8 January 1938. I would like to thank Michael Earle for this reference.

labour movement.¹⁴⁷ Perhaps for those who remained in Halifax, the memory of defeat was too painful as it became clouded by the daily reality of high unemployment, wage cuts, and general economic decline.

For what may now seem only an extended and almost forgotten moment, Halifax possessed a successful, relatively unified labour movement marked by a shared political and economic leadership active in concurrent political and economic action. Men and women drawn to labourism were certainly not unperceptive but were both restricted and encouraged by their strong adherence to liberal democratic values. A stagnating economy and massive out-migration succeeded in weakening labour's most precious institution, the trade union. Halifax labour placed the blame, not on the political, social, and economic structures, but on itself and its constituents for failing to support one unified movement. In the failure of the Halifax Shipyards strike and the loss of the Provincial Election of 1920, we can see condensed into a nine-week period, a crisis which would be extended at a less intense level throughout the following decade. The circumstances surrounding the strike revealed the central contradiction contained within labourism as these men and women attempted to create a new society without changing its economic and political structures.

The paper is based on the second chapter of my Master's thesis "Labourism and Independent Labor Politics in Halifax, 1919-1926." I would like to thank my supervisor Ruth Bleasdale for her assistance.

¹⁴⁷ *Halifax Mail-Star*, 11 March 1987; Dubofsky, *We Shall be All*, 453.