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The  
Development of  
the  
F. P. U.  
in  
Newfoundland,  
(1908 - 1923)  
by  
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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE F. P. U. IN NEWFOUNDLAND, (1908-1923)

ABSTRACT

It is essential for the reader to bear in mind that the F.P.U. was not only a union, but from its beginning adopted an important role in commerce and politics. It had also functioned as a municipal council in the many settlements throughout the east and north-east coasts, and had many of the characteristics of a fraternal society.

This monograph is an attempt to trace the growth of the F. P. U. in each branch of its development, with particular emphasis on the factors which made such a movement possible and explanations for its ultimate failure. However, before attacking the primary problem, the writer has devoted considerable effort to the background history of the pre-union period in an attempt to make clear to the reader the conditions which existed in Newfoundland before the movement began.

The major problem can be clearly divided into several minor ones. Of primary importance is a study of the inception and development of the union itself, with special reference to why it failed to expand beyond the east and north-east coasts, and to the aims of the union as initially planned by the founder.

In the field of politics each of the following topics has been considered: the original political aims of the F. P. U.,

its role in politics before the formation of the Union Party, the "Donavista Platform", the decision to coalesce with the Liberal Party in 1913, the election of 1913, the record of the Union Party in the House of Assembly before 1917, the National Government (1917-1919), the second Liberal-Union coalition, and the role of the union candidates while part of the Government.

Detailed study has been given to each of the commercial endeavours of the F.P.U. and considerable effort devoted to the effects this activity had on the movement itself and on the country generally. In this respect particular attention has been given to the change that took place in this commercial policy from 1908 to the 1920's.

The writer has also tried to create a verbal picture of W. F. Coaker. Included is a chronological biography and also a detailed character analysis. Particular emphasis has been given to the noticeable changes which took place in his character from the year he founded the F. P. U., (1908), to his retirement in 1932.

Finally, in the conclusion an attempt has been made to show how the F.P.U. compared with similar development in other parts of the world at the same time, and how it has left a mark on the life of the country that in many respects is still apparent today.

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Preface

The Fishermen's Protective Union ceased to be prominent in the commercial and political life of Newfoundland when I was quite young. Nevertheless, as long as I can remember, I have had a strong curiosity concerning this movement. As a boy I remember the "Union Hall" of the small Bonavista Bay settlement where I was born, and vividly recollect, as one of a group of boys, breaking its windows by throwing stones through them. My father had been a union member, chairman of a local council and a delegate to the Annual Convention of 1912. He was also a shareholder of the Union Trading Co. Consequently, the F.P.U. and its leaders were often discussed in our home during my boyhood.

As time passed I found that many people had strong ideas concerning the F.P.U. and its leader. On the one hand, there were those who believed that Coaker had sincerely attempted, through the F.P.U. to uplift the northern fishermen; and on the other hand, there were others who believed that his primary motive was to satisfy his own desire for power and wealth. I often wondered what the true function of the F.P.U. was, and what its leader had tried to do. Investigation on my part showed that no attempt had been made to answer this question. J. R. Smallwood, the present Premier of Newfoundland, in 1927, had written a book entitled Coaker of Newfoundland, but it failed to provide the answer I sought, for it dealt principally with Coaker's ability as an orator and his attempt to regulate and modernize the salt cod industry.

Investigation, however, showed that a great deal of primary material existed. For convenience this material can be divided into four groups: (1) writings of W.F. Coaker in the form of articles contributed to the press, political speeches, addresses delivered before the F. P. U. Annual Convention, etc. (2) the printed records of the

Annual Conventions of the Supreme Council of the F.P.U. from 1909 to 1923. (3) the F. P. U. paper, the Fishermen's Advocate, which devoted a great deal of attention to the union role in politics and commerce; (4) the written opinions of contemporary writers; (5) government publications. It was also still possible to interview several people who had had direct associations with the F. P. U. and its leaders.

While my own curiosity was a primary factor in causing me to select the topic, I soon found that the F. P. U. though seldom mentioned by those who have written on the history of Newfoundland, played an important role in the economic, political, cultural, and social life of the country, during the quarter century from 1908 to 1932. Indeed, in many ways, its influence can be detected today.

An attempt has been made in the first chapter, to describe the economic and political conditions in Newfoundland during the half century preceeding the founding of the F. P. U. The remainder of the monograph is an effort to provide an answer to the question "what was the role of the F. P. U. during the years from 1908 to 1933 and what were its effects on the subsequent history on the country?"

I am greatly indebted to Dr. G. O. Rothney for supervising my research, for his constant encouragement and constructive criticism. I should also like to express my thanks to the cheerful help of the staff of the Gosling Memorial Library and to Miss Agnes O' Dea who gave invaluable help in my research and for information in preparing my bibliography.

My sincere appreciation also to the many people who co-operated with me in my search for material, in particular Miss C. Coaker, who presented me with several pamphlets otherwise unavailable; and Mr. A. Bailey of Port Union, who placed the files of the Fishermen's Advocate at my disposal. I offer also my grateful thanks to the Canadian Council for the grant which made it financially possible for me to use many sources of material during the summer of 1958 which otherwise would not have been available.



## Chapter 1.

### Economic and Political Background

The problems which Newfoundland faced at the beginning of the twentieth century had their roots in conditions which had already existed for generations. These conditions can be traced to a number of geographical and economic factors. Thus in order to understand the developments of the twentieth century, it is necessary to study the economic and political history of the island from the time of its discovery.

Of primary importance in the study of Newfoundland history is a knowledge of the part played by the fishery. "The country has always been, first and foremost, a fishing country ...." <sup>1</sup> It is in this respect that Newfoundland differed most from other British North American colonies. All the maritime colonies north of the Hudson had an initial fishing economy; all but Newfoundland early developed other interests and in time the fishery became relatively unimportant. In Newfoundland the story was altogether different. The geography of the country, the poor soil, the restrictions on land cultivation and settlement, all played part in retarding the development of the meagre agricultural resources. The forests were of little value for the production of lumber, and there was no demand for pulpwood before the turn of the century. From the mid-nineteenth century mining had attracted many men from the fishery but it had never occupied more than a secondary position in the economy of the country.

1. Newfoundland Royal Commission, 1933, Report, (H.M.S.O., London 1933), p. 73.

Thus Newfoundland has had to rely, from the first, on an economy dependant almost entirely on the production and sale of fish and fish products. The fishermen settled in "places from which the fishery could most easily be conducted".<sup>2</sup> In determining a choice of residence they deliberately avoided the populated settlement and searched out isolated, sparsely populated regions. They preferred the isolated island, the exposed headland or the out-of-way cove.<sup>3</sup> The nature of the industry necessitated a sparse population living in close proximity to the sea-shore but, added to the requirements of the industry, was the desire on the part of the early fishermen to escape the attention of the Naval Authorities.

By the turn of the century, Newfoundland had a population of somewhat less than a quarter of a million people,<sup>4</sup> living in approximately 1300 settlements. The distribution of the population in numerous hamlets, separated from each other by the roadless wilderness or, for the greater part of the year, by the sea made impassable by ice, has had far-reaching consequences. Administration was difficult and expensive. Education, health and welfare presented well-nigh impossible problems and were a

2. Ibid, p. 3.

3. Appendix to Report of the Royal Commission for the Preparation of the Case of the Government of Newfoundland for the Revision of the Financial Terms of Union, 1957, p. 25.

4. Newfoundland Royal Commission, 1933, Report, Appendix A, p. 23

tremendous burden on the finance of the country. The smallness of the outport settlements has also been a contributing factor to the growth of sectarianism,<sup>5</sup> which in turn has complicated the problem of education and created additional problems in administration.

Newfoundland has also differed from other B.N.A. colonies in its failure to develop a system of local government. An act was passed by the legislature in 1888 providing for the election in St. John's of a group of men to administer local affairs. With this exception there was no local government until 1938.<sup>6</sup> There are several explanations for this dearth of municipal organization. In the first place, there were very few settlements large enough to support a municipal government. In the second place, the standard of academic and civic education was at a very low level. In the third place, the low national and per capita income made it impossible for most communities to support a municipal council.

The absence of local administration was an important factor in determining the nature of the government of the country. The lack of such an institution left the voters with little opportunity to comprehend the purpose and function of government, and they were liable to fall prey to the first lavish promise of an unprincipled politician. The standard of education and the lack of newspapers

5. Rowe, F.W., The History of Education in Newfoundland, (The Ryerson Press, Toronto, 1952). See also, Newfoundland Royal Commission, 1933, Report, pp. 74-75.
6. Report of the Royal Commission for the Preparation of the Case of the Government of Newfoundland for the Revision of the Terms of Union, pp. 488-9.
7. Ibid, p. 492.

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throughout the greater part of the country accentuated these conditions. The failure to develop local administration caused the majority of the voters to dissociate themselves from the government. They had never been called upon to make a direct contribution to the expenses of any administration and did not associate government spending with taxation. On the other hand, the standard of living in many of the outports and the lack of transportation facilities made it difficult for any contact to exist between the voters, scattered over thousands of miles of coastline, and their representatives in far-off St. John's, the seat of all administration for the whole country.<sup>8</sup> This absence of local government not only tended towards a lack of political education on the part of the voters, but left the outport districts incapable of finding local representatives for the House of Assembly. The result was that some districts were consistently represented by St. John's lawyers or professional politicians. Of greater importance, perhaps, than these three factors combined was its tendency to create in the people a reliance on the Colonial government for every communal improvement. This attitude in time created a "spoils system" so vicious that it threatened to destroy the usefulness of the whole civil service.<sup>9</sup> Though recent progress has been made in the development of municipal institutions, there remains still some of the same problems as a heritage of the past

8. Newfoundland Royal Commission, 1933, Report, p. 217.

9. Ibid, pp. 202-203.

Since the F.P.U., in its early years was a strong agitator against the "spoils system" and during its later years helped to perpetuate it, some attention will be given to this system as it existed during the early twentieth century. With each change in government, civil servants, regardless of their efficiency, were liable to lose their jobs. No position was secure, from well-paid officials to the most lowly mail clerk.<sup>10</sup> Because there was no local government, all district grants were handled by the district representative, or, if this member were in opposition, by some other government member.<sup>11</sup> (The Union Party agitated against this policy during its first session in the House.)<sup>12</sup> Quite often the money granted for public use ended up in the hands of party supporters.

By the beginning of the twentieth century the following results of this system were apparent. Firstly, a large percentage of the money granted either ended as a private gift to party supporters or was spent on unnecessary projects. Secondly, the civil service functioned in a very inefficient manner. There was no system of competitive examinations. Practically all appointments were political, and experienced workers recruited in this manner were replaced with each change of government by a new slate of inefficient workers. Thirdly, it tended to make each succeeding government a little more extravagant than its predecessor. This resulted in more and more borrowing and ultimate bankruptcy.

10. Ibid, pp. 87, 202-3. See also, Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1914.

11. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1914, p. 239-243.

12. To prevent this policy from continuing the Union Party advocated that "road boards" be established in every settlement and that all government grants be made through these boards.

These conditions were aggravated still further by the existence of a strong sectarian feeling. In practice all major religious denominations were proportionately represented in the House of Assembly, the Legislative Council and the Executive Council. This same practice was applied to all government appointments; often resulting in an unnecessary multiplication of service and a rigidity in the selection of government officials, which probably contributed to the low level of efficiency in the civil service.

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The Royal Commission of 1934 reported that party politics as then existing in other countries was non-existent in Newfoundland. In place of the political platform calculated to interest the electorate, was an appeal to one or more religious denominations, either threatening what the opposing party would do if <sup>it</sup> were elected, or by promising a greater share of government patronage. There were exceptions to this policy from time to time, but in general, the sectarian appeal played an important part in the majority of elections from 1832 to 1932. This unfortunate influence of sectarianism on politics was and still continues to be one of the most apparent effects of the experiment in Responsible government in Newfoundland. It is to the credit of the F.P.U. and the Union Party that both attempted to remove this insidious growth from the politics of the colony.

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In no small measure, the economic conditions within the country can be traced to some aspect of the political life of the day. As already mentioned, Newfoundland produced principally salt cod for

13. Newfoundland Royal Commission, 1933, Report, p. 88.

14. See below, Chapter 2, p. 37



the various European and South and Central American countries. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there was a ready market and a steady demand for all of this commodity that Newfoundland could produce. But the nineteenth century brought many problems. The catch had not increased in proportion to the number of fishermen engaged,<sup>15</sup> and the European markets began to find a better quality of fish in Iceland and Norway. These countries had adapted themselves to the changing times, and had not only undersold the Newfoundland product but managed to market a better product as well.<sup>16</sup> Neilson claimed that the market for cod "...has been ruined from careless and inferior modes of pack and cure in the past."<sup>17</sup> Almost half a century later we find the following observation: "In the past quarter of a century the quality of Newfoundland dried cod has lagged behind the quality of the dried cod produced by her principal competitors, Norway and Iceland. The difficulty is not that the quality of the Newfoundland product has declined but rather that the quality of the competing product has improved."<sup>18</sup> One of the principal factors which contributed to Newfoundland's failure to improve its salt cod was the

15. Newfoundland Royal Commission, 1933, Report, Appendix D, p. 24.
16. Mr. Adolph Neilson was a Norwegian inspector in the employ of the Newfoundland Government during the last decade of the nineteenth century.
17. Annual Report of the Newfoundland Department of Fisheries for the year 1894, (St. John's, Newfoundland, Queen's Printers). Reprinted, (St. John's, D.R. Thistle, 1936), p. 78 (pamphlet).
18. MacKay, R.A., Newfoundland, Economic, Diplomatic and Strategic Studies, (Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 83.

lack of centralization. The fishery was carried on as an individual enterprise. The fisherman himself owned his equipment and caught, cured and marketed his own catch. Under such a system there was no uniformity of cure, neither could division of labour, effective supervision nor specialized machinery be applied. Thus the basic cause of the marketing problem was the failure to apply new methods of catching and curing. Newfoundland had continued to practise the older methods and, in consequence, could not compete with Norway and Iceland, where the industry was highly concentrated and subject to division of labour and specialized machinery.<sup>19</sup> These countries continued to improve and increase their catch and gradually replaced Newfoundland as a supplier of salt cod to the European markets.<sup>20</sup> Newfoundland was therefore forced to search for less discriminating markets and sold more and more of her catch to the West Indies, which demanded a low priced product and was satisfied with poor quality.<sup>21</sup>

\* Another serious drawback to the fish trade was the failure of the government to take any interest in regulating the cull of salt fish or in controlling shipment to foreign markets. The merchant paid

19. Ibid

20. See Newfoundland Royal Commission, 1933, Report, p. 109, for the following data:

Date	1885	1892
Newfoundland	1,300,500 quintals	1,113,000 quintals
Iceland	100,000 "	1,500,000 "

21. Report of the Department of Natural Resources, Fishery Section, Newfoundland, 1935.

the culler and set the standard. He also determined the quality to be shipped to the various markets. There were hundreds of merchants engaged in the salt fish trade, and there was no central control. Each merchant determined his own standard, and consequently, the foreign buyer could never be sure what quality he would receive when he bought Newfoundland fish. These merchants shipped when and how they wished, with the general effect that a strong market was often flooded overnight and the captains of various vessels forced to sell at a reduced price or run the risk of having the whole cargo spoiled. This state of affairs was allowed to continue decade after decade, not because of ignorance of the<sup>22</sup>true conditions, but because every attempt to bring improvement<sup>23</sup>was sabotaged by the "corrupt" political machine.<sup>23</sup> In this respect it is also significant that two of the first demands of the F.P.U. concerned a uniform cull of dried cod, and the placing of trade agents by the government in each country that bought Newfoundland<sup>24</sup> fish.

Because of the numerous variations in the fishing industry found throughout Newfoundland's 6,000 miles of coastline, it is difficult to give a complete picture. The method of catching, curing and marketing was not uniform but varied extensively. Thus it is convenient to limit this description to the three main divisions of the fishery, namely the shore, Labrador and bank.

22. While inspector, Neilson warned the Government of the true conditions of the fish trade. See Annual Report of the Department of Fisheries for the Year 1894.
23. Newfoundland Royal Commission, 1933, Report, pp. 104-115.
24. Coaker, W.F.(ed.), The History of the Fishermen's Protective Union of Newfoundland, (St. John's, Union Publishing Co., Ltd., 1920) pp. 4,7.

The shore fishery was carried out along the whole coast, often in conjunction with some other branch of the fishery, such as salmon, herring, lobster, turbot or squid. In this group the standard of living varied greatly, and depended to some extent on individual initiative and the amount of capital involved. All shore fishermen except those of some parts of the south coast, supplemented their earnings with various agricultural pursuits. In addition, a great number took part in the annual seal hunt out on the ice-fields of the North Atlantic and the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

The Labrador fishery can be conveniently divided into two types, "Floaters" and "Stationers". The first group were those fishermen who visited the Labrador coast in vessels ranging from 20 to 150 tons. The fishing was done from the vessel and the fish cleaned and salted on board. The men remained on board during the fishing season, and moved from harbour to harbour until a load was procured or until the approach of winter forced them to return to their home ports.

The "Stationers" were carried to and from the Labrador Coast by schooners or by coastal steamers that made special trips each spring and fall for this purpose. They fished from "rooms" situated in some convenient harbour and normally took their families with them to help in the curing of their catch. They sold their catch to a fish buyer before returning home in the fall. Most of the "stationers" came from the various towns of Conception Bay. Since<sup>25</sup> the number of men who could prosecute the shore fishery in any area

25. For a description of the Labrador fishery, see Smith, Nicholas, Fifty-two Years at the Labrador Fishery, (London, Arthur H. Stockwell, Ltd., 1936)

was limited, (the Law of Diminishing returns is soon reached in respect to any fishing ground), the Labrador fishery played an important role, for it permitted the growth of larger settlements than those dependent solely on the shore fishery. Both the "Floaters" and the "Stationers" worked on a share basis and their earnings were seldom over the subsistence level.

The bank fishery was prosecuted from the south coast and the Avalon peninsula. The vessels used were larger and the method of catch different from that of the Labrador fishery. The "bankers" fished for the greater part of the year. However, they were forced to compete with fishermen from other countries. Consequently, this branch of the fishery was the first to decline.<sup>26</sup>

The fishery was a precarious way of earning a living.<sup>27</sup> There were a number of imponderable factors which could cause a poor season, such as, scarcity of bait, scarcity of fish, poor fishing weather, bad curing weather, very low prices, and the presence of ice on the coast during the fishing season. In the favourable season most fishermen managed to catch enough fish to provide the necessities of life for themselves and their families. During the very bad seasons only the best fishermen managed to remain independent. Since bad seasons came frequently and sometimes several occurred consecutively, a large portion of Newfoundland fishermen were in perpetual debt to their merchants.

26. See Annual Report of the Department of Fisheries for the year 1894, p. 71, for the following comparison:

Year	Number of Vessels	Number of quintals of cod caught
1889	330	336,882
1894	58	53,842

27. For a general description of the Newfoundland cod fishery see, MacDermott, Hugh, MacDermott of Fortune Bay, (London, Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1938).

{The policy whereby the merchant provided the fisherman with food and fishing supplies in the spring and in return took his fish in the autumn and gave him a supply of food for the winter, is known as "the credit or truck system".} If a fisherman were fortunate enough to have a favourable balance at the end of the season it was often carried on the merchant's books. The merchant, in order to cover the loss which he expected to occur through some of his dealers failing to pay their accounts, fixed his prices high enough to cover this possible loss, which made it all the more difficult for the good fishermen to retain their independence. Thus this system left the honest fishermen at the mercy of the dishonest merchant and the honest merchant at the mercy of the dishonest fishermen.

Much has been written describing this "credit system", little of which is favourable. In 1894, Neilson wrote: "The credit and supplying system proves clearly in the long run to have turned out one of the greatest curses that ever fell upon this country and its people...it has had the effect of sapping the very foundations upon which we as an independent people stand." Gosling, a well-known Newfoundland writer, in his book, Labrador: its Discovery, Exploration and Development, wrote: "It is certain that the system is evil, equally bad for both supplier and supplied." The following comment on the effects of the "credit system", by a New

28. Annual Report of the Department of Fisheries for the Year 1894, p. 46.

29. Gosling, W. A., Labrador: Its Discovery, Exploration and Development, (London, Alston Rivers Ltd., 1910), p. 468.



Zealander, A.H. McIntock, in his book, The Establishment of Constitutional Government in Newfoundland, is also noteworthy: "in the primitive and isolated fishing stations, these methods produced a careless and improvident attitude towards life and in years of plenty, habits of profuse extravagance."<sup>30</sup>

Several factors led to the inception and development of this "credit system". In the first place, the uncertainty of the fishery - the hope of a good season encouraged the fishermen to borrow and the merchant to give credit. In the second place, there were numerous small settlements with only one merchant, which eliminated the need for cash as the fishermen could only trade at the local store. In the third place, the settlers who came to Newfoundland brought very little with them in the form of worldly goods and needed a "grubstake" in order to make a start. In the fourth place the low level of education left the fishermen in no position to figure out the disadvantages of this system. Its simplicity appealed to an illiterate people. As a result of these various factors the "credit system" developed over the whole island and although recognized as a menace to the welfare of the country, no effective attempt was ever made to wipe it out. *ended late 1950's*

It is difficult to estimate the entire effects of this system on the life of the country, but the following results are perhaps the most obvious. 1. It affected the moral character of the people by encouraging extravagance, carelessness, luxury, recklessness

30. McIntock, A.H., The Establishment of Constitutional Government in Newfoundland, (London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1941), p. 123.

31. Ibid, pp. 121-122.

regarding the future, and dependence.<sup>32</sup> 2. It was the principal factor which caused the poor quality of Newfoundland cod and the resulting loss of markets.<sup>33</sup> 3. It contributed greatly to the high rate of government relief - the people simply substituted their dependence on the merchant for dependence on the government.<sup>34</sup> 4. The failure of the fishery when based on such a system led to the bankruptcy of many merchants<sup>35</sup> and threatened the economy of the whole country. (The financial crisis of 1894 is an extreme example of how serious a failure of the fishery could become). 5. It fostered class feeling - fishermen against the merchant class.<sup>36</sup> 6. It was one of the principal factors which contributed to the stagnation of the fishing industry. 7. In impoverishing the fisherman, it left him but a pawn in the merchant's political schemes. It can be said with<sup>out</sup> risk of overstatement that the "credit system" has exerted a tremendous influence for harm on the whole economic, social, cultural and political life of the country. Its roots have grown so deep that even today (1959) its unpleasant effects are still apparent.

The last half of the nineteenth century brought difficulties not only to the salt cod industry, but also a serious decline in the seal fishery. This industry had reached its peak in the mid-nineteenth century and from this time began to dwindle in importance. During the same period iron ships were introduced which dealt a serious blow to the shipbuilding industry. In 1857, this

32. Annual Report of the Department of Fisheries for the Year 1894, p. 46.

33. Ibid.

34. McIntock, The Establishment of Constitutional Government in Newfoundland, p. 123

35. Harvey, Rev. M. Newfoundland as it is in 1894: A Hand-book and Tourist Guide, (St. John's, J.W. Withers, 1894), p. 202.

36. Newfoundland Royal Commission, 1933, Report, p. 80.

industry employed 400 ships and 13,000 men.<sup>37</sup> Its decline had a great effect on the economy of the country, mainly because of the loss of winter employment that this industry had created. Before 1840, nearly every vessel that had prosecuted the seal fishery had been local built.<sup>38</sup> This provided work for lumbermen, carpenters, sailmakers and riggers. In addition, every winter, a great number of punts, oars, gaffs, etc., had to be provided for the following spring.

The seal fishery was prosecuted from the east and north-east coasts where the cod fishing season was short and thus provided winter employment where it was most needed. This industry was primarily responsible for the growth of many of the coastal towns in this area, and with its decline, they diminished in importance and population. The seal fishery proved complementary to the cod fishery in another important manner. The sealing ships during the summer, fall and winter proved ideal for carrying salt cod to foreign ports. Newfoundland's marketing troubles began only after the steamship replaced the sailing ship at the seal fishery.

The seal fishery played another important role. It brought together hundreds of men from numerous settlements who in time became aware of their unfavourable working conditions. They also learned the value of concerted action, for as early as 1860, a

37. Kean, A., The Seal Fishery, Past, Present and Future, (Lecture delivered by Captain A. Kean before the Historical Society of Newfoundland, January 13, 1921), (Robinson and Co., Ltd., St. John's, 1921), p. 14.
38. Chafe's Sealing Book, (St. John's, Trade Printers and Publishers Ltd., 1924), p. 16.

strike occurred at Brigus, Conception Bay, involving 3,000 men. The strikers demanded that Berth Money (the fee that sealers were forced to pay the owners of the sealing vessels for their berths) be abolished.<sup>39</sup> A similar strike occurred at St. John's in 1902.<sup>40</sup> It is difficult to determine how effective the seal fishery was in fostering a desire for unity. However, it helps to explain the speed with which the F.P.U. movement spread throughout the east and north-east coasts, and its failure to appeal to the fishermen of the west coast.

Hand in hand with the decline of the seal fishery and the marketing difficulties of the cod fishery grew the financial problems of the government. In 1864, Newfoundland's per capita debt was less than a third of that of Nova Scotia and about one-quarter that of Canada.<sup>41</sup> Carter and Shea, the Newfoundland delegates to the Quebec Conference, emphasized Newfoundland's sound financial position. At that time, the national debt was low, the credit good there was a favourable balance of trade and the revenue was adequate for the immediate needs.<sup>42</sup> This was a picture vastly different from that of 1894 when the country was on the brink of utter financial ruin. Two of the best known banks were forced into insolvency, the savings of thousands of fishermen had disappeared overnight, and the government itself was in dire financial straits.

39. Ibid, p. 38

40. Ibid.

41. MacKay, Newfoundland, Economic, Diplomatic and Strategic Studies, p. 415

42. Ibid, p. 421.

\* Thus Newfoundland's unenviable position at the beginning of the twentieth century can be regarded as the result of many unfortunate circumstances. The difficulties were primarily economic. In this respect the following factors played a prominent role. 1. The failure to develop any industry other than the fishery. 2. The failure to introduce modern methods of catching, curing and marketing to the cod fishery, and the consequent failure to compete with European rivals. 3. The unhealthy effect of the "credit system" on the whole country. 4. The dwindling of the seal fishery which in turn contributed greatly to the disappearance of ship-building.

There were also political factors which accentuated the economic difficulties. The absence of local government left the people unprepared for the greater role of responsible government on a colonial level. In addition, the ambitious railway undertakings of the government during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, although it brought temporary prosperity to the people, resulted in strangling foreign debts.

Finally, the country was beset with social problems which were due both to historical and geographical factors. The following bear noting. 1. The low level of education, due to some extent to the failure of the government to maintain effective schools and to the tender age when children, through economic necessity, were forced to work. 2. The presence of a strong sectarian feeling throughout the whole country. \*3. The low standard of social services principally due to the inability of the government to finance such services except by borrowing.

Certainly Newfoundland, by the beginning of the century was greatly in need of reform in the economic, political and social fields. It was with the avowed purpose of providing this reform that the Fishermen's Protective Union: was established.



The Formation and Growth of the F.P.U.

The F.P.U. represents the first effort to unite the workers of Newfoundland into one great union. There were unions in Newfoundland before its formation, but they had limited their membership to one craft and made no attempt to go beyond the narrow confines of that craft. Consequently, the membership of such unions was small and they had no great influence on the economic or political development of their day. The F.P.U. was truly a labour union and did not limit its membership to the fishermen of the colony but also accepted loggers, farmers and coasters. At its peak it had a membership of over 20,000 and certainly played a prominent role in moulding the political and commercial affairs of the country during the period from 1908 to 1932.

This organization was planned and organized by William Ford Coaker, who fifty years ago, emerged from voluntary seclusion on an isolated island of Notre Dame Bay, to become one of the most prominent political and commercial leaders of his day. He was born on October 19, 1871, on the South Side of St. John's. His father had come to this town from Twillingate, a fishing village of Notre Dame Bay. The grandfather of the F.P.U. founder had emigrated in 1830<sup>1</sup> from Devon, England.<sup>2</sup>

He attended Bishop Field College, a Church of England school in St. John's, but his career there was short, for at the age of

1. The Fishermen's Advocate, (St. John's, Newfoundland, Nov. 19, 1910), p. 1.
2. Coaker, W.F., (ed.), Twenty Years of the Fishermen's Protective Union of Newfoundland, (St. John's, Advocate publishing Co., 1930), p. 331.

eleven he left to work on the St. John's waterfront.<sup>3</sup> Even at this tender age he showed a strong interest in politics, for he spent many of his evenings in the House of Assembly.<sup>4</sup>

In spite of his brief scholastic career he had ample opportunity to gain a practical education, for the St. John's of the 80's, the centre of the cod fishery and the seal fishery, taught him much. There is no better proof of his mental and physical maturity than the trust placed in him by the firm of McDougall and Templeman, which appointed him in his sixteenth year to manage its branch at Pike's Arm, near Herring Neck, Twillingate District.<sup>5</sup> Four years later, when this firm dissolved its partnership, Coaker operated the business for himself until 1894.<sup>6</sup>

During the seven years at Pike's Arm, Coaker lost no opportunity to learn everything he could about the life of the fishermen, and when possible to improve their lot. He had a strong interest in the political life of the North, and tried to improve the educational standard of the fishermen by conducting a night school during the Autumn months.<sup>7</sup>

In 1890, he began an agricultural experiment at Coakerville, and continued to farm until the pressure of business after the formation of the F.P.U. forced him to abandon it. However, during his

3. The Fishermen's Advocate, Sept. 2, 1911, p. 1. See also, Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1914, p. 172.
4. Coaker, Miss C., Personal interview, St. John's, Oct. 31, 1957. See also, "Second Draft of Morine's History of Newfoundland", Archives, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Ch. 10, p. 1.
5. The Evening Advocate, St. John's, Dec. 22, 1917, p. 1. (Coaker reviewed his early life and the history of the F.P.U.).
6. Ibid.
7. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1914, p. 172.
8. See below, Ch. 11, p. 20

early years as a farmer, he often spent his winters in other pursuits. For example, he spent two years as telegraph operator and sub-collector of customs at Port Blandford, Bonavista Bay.<sup>9</sup> In 1895, while engaged in this work, he founded a Telegrapher's Union and was also the founder and editor of a paper, The Telegrapher,<sup>10</sup> which this union sponsored. In [1895-6] he took up permanent residence at Coakerville, Twillingate District, where he built up one of the most prosperous farms in the country.

Coaker chose for the site of his farm a low, level island, about three miles in circumference, situated at the eastern end of picturesque Dildo Run, a narrow strait which separates New World Island, Notre Dame Bay, from the mainland. This strait has numerous wooded islands and its unspoiled beauty probably appealed to him. In a shallow cove at the eastern end of this island, he built a home for himself and sheds for his livestock.<sup>11</sup> With the help of Charles Bryant, a young man from the Church of England Orphanage at St. John's, he managed to clear many acres suitable for crops or for pasture for his livestock.<sup>12.</sup>

He was married in 1901 but was separated from his wife and child about five years later. He refused to give financial support to his wife after separation but supported his daughter after her

9. Coaker, W.F., Past, Present and Future, a series of articles contributed to the Fishermen's Advocate, 1932.

10. Coaker, (ed), The History of the Fishermen's Protective Union of Newfoundland, p. 141.

11. The farm is now almost completely covered with forest growth. The concrete foundation of the barn remains and also a concrete well. See, Coaker, (ed), The History of the Fishermen's Protective Union, p. 185, for photos of the house and barn at Coakerville.

12. [Louter, T.E.], "The F.P.U. and its leader", (The History of the F.P.U., edited by W. F. Coaker), pp. 182-187.

13  
eighteenth year.

During the period from 1896 to 1908, he made his home at Coaker-ville. In spite of the apparent inactivity, this was an important period in his life, for through reading, mediation and discussions with his fishermen friends, the idea of a union began to take shape in his mind.<sup>t</sup> The atmosphere was conducive to quiet reading and meditation, and if he wished, he could easily visit his friends of the neighboring settlements. On many evenings, after the day's work was over, he walked over the ice to the nearby settlement of Boyd's Cove, to chat with his old Roman Catholic friend, John Clair; or to Herring Neck to visit his many fishermen friends there. During these friendly visits he not only gained a thorough knowledge of the fishermen, but also discussed some of his theories of unionism with them.

On several occasions Coaker referred to his extensive reading during this period, but he neglected to inform his readers of the nature of his reading material. However, it is significant that the earliest issues of the Fishermen's Advocate show that he was cognisant with the world's labour movements.<sup>14</sup>

During this period he gave much thought to the nature of the union he planned to establish. He had no doubt concerning what its purpose should be, for he believed that the union he planned to

13. Coaker, C., Personal interview, St. John's, Oct. 21, 1957.

14. The Fishermen's Advocate, St. John's, May 14, 1910, p. 1.  
(describes the labour movement in Australia).  
June 21, 1911, p. 1. (refers to labour leaders in England, Ireland and Australia).

establish among fishermen would help them to help themselves. The following passage from his own writing will indicate his thoughts during this period:

The winter evenings and stormy Sundays gave me leisure for reading and study and whatever I worked at I always found myself drifting away to thoughts of the toiler's life and its hardships, while so many lived lives of ease and luxury without toil or producing. 15

Having decided to establish a union among the northern fishermen, Coaker found it necessary to draft a constitution for this union. He left the following description of his efforts:

Many a winter's night when all had retired I spent until morning drafting and redrafting the constitution. The whole of it is original. I had no rules or constitution of any kind to guide me. What the constitution contained in 1908 was original though based on life experience and close observation...I discussed each part with him [Charles Bryant] as we chopped timber together...I drafted and redrafted the sections, erased some and added others until in 1908 it was ready for use. 16

Thus was created the F.P.U. constitution and although it was modified and expanded from time to time, because of weaknesses shown up by the stress of application, in the main, it served the purpose for which it was framed.

✓ Coaker set November 2, 1908, as the day to attempt the unfolding of his plan to a group of fishermen. 17 It was natural that he should select Herring Neck, for he had worked in this vicinity for twenty-one years and knew most of its fishermen personally. ✓ The years from 1908 to 1910 were spent in a ceaseless round of organization during the fall and winter, and in working his farm in the spring.

15. The Evening Advocate, St. John's, Dec. 12, 1917, p. 1.

16. Ibid, Dec. 22, 1917, p. 1.

17. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 4.

and summer. Although the work of organization continued during the following three years, a great deal of time was devoted to commercial activity.<sup>18</sup>

He ran for the three-member district of Bonavista in 1913 and headed the poll. Sir Robert Bond, the Liberal-Union leader, resigned his seat for Twillingate, also a three-member district, and Coaker, wishing to augment the debating power of the Liberal-Union Party, resigned his Bonavista seat, leaving the field open to A. B. Morine, who had returned to Newfoundland from the mainland at that time. Morine had represented Bonavista district in the Assembly for a number of years, and Coaker was very well known in the district of Twillingate. The result of this shuffle was that both men were elected by acclamation. During the years from 1913 to 1917 Coaker was active in the House of Assembly as an opposition member.

A National Government was formed in 1917 and Coaker became a Cabinet Minister without portfolio. Under his leadership, the Liberal-Union Party again went into opposition in May, 1919, when a lack of confidence vote against Dr. Lloyd, the Liberal Premier, who then headed the National Government, was carried.<sup>19</sup>

The Union Party coalesced with the Liberal-Reform Party in September, 1919, under the leadership of R. A. Squires. This coalition was successful in the election of November, 1919, and Coaker accepted the Cabinet Post of Minister of Marine and

18. See below, Ch. V.

19. Journal of the Assembly, Newfoundland, 1919, p. 77.

20  
 Fisheries. It was during this administration that he initiated  
 his famous "Fishery Regulations".<sup>21</sup>

In 1923, he was knighted by the King. During the same year he again brought the Union Party to the side of the Liberal-Reform Party. In this election the Union-Liberal coalition was again successful. However, the Squires administration was forced to resign a few months after the election. The Liberal-Reform party continued to hold office under the leadership of W. R. Warren until it was defeated by a vote of want of confidence in 1924.<sup>22</sup> Coaker did not become a candidate in the general elections of that year. In 1926 he resigned the presidency of the F.P.U.,<sup>23</sup> a position he had held since 1908. He brought the F.P.U. members to the fold of the Liberal Party once more in 1928, and during the four years following represented Bonavista district in the House of Assembly. He retired from active politics in 1932 and after his retirement spent much of his time on a plantation which he had acquired in Jamaica. He died in 1938 at the age of 67 years and was buried at Port Union, a town which remains a monument to his efforts.

The career of W. F. Coaker as can be seen from this brief biography was closely linked with the Fishermen's Protective Union. His successor as F.P.U. President, J. H. Scammell, during the eighteenth Annual Convention of the Supreme Council (1926), said:

The whole fabric of the F.P.U. - its inception and organization, its expansion and its achievements, its

Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 169.

21. See below, Ch. VI, p. 113

22. Coaker, (ed.), Twenty Years of the F.P.U. of Newfoundland, p. 38

23. Ibid, p. 243.



successes, its trials, its renown - has been so closely woven around the dynamic and magnetic personality of Coaker that his name can never be divorced therefrom as long as the F. P. U. endures or is remembered in our land. 24

The task that Coaker set himself in 1908 seemed a hopeless one. The leader was a self-appointed recluse, who had farmed on a lonely northern island for several years. He was without the benefit of a high-school education and had little experience in union organization. His followers were northern fishermen, strongly individualistic and scattered throughout many isolated hamlets and islands. The locale was one in which transportation was difficult at all times, and for a great part of the year, because of ice and weather conditions, well nigh impossible. Coaker was not the type of man one could have expected to be a successful union organizer; neither could his fishermen friends be regarded as ideal union members; nor would one regard the north-east coast of Newfoundland as a suitable cradle for a labour movement.

Coaker was undoubtedly familiar with labour organization, for his native St. John's had various trade unions even before he moved north. He was also familiar with the co-operative movement, which was well established in the Old World at that time and had its infant counterpart here in Newfoundland, Sir Wilfred Grenfell having established several small co-operative societies on the Northern Peninsula. 26

In the fall of 1908, fortified with the knowledge gained from

24. Ibid.

25. Smallwood, J. R., (ed.) The Book of Newfoundland, (Newfoundland Book Publishers Ltd., 2 Vol., 1932), Vol. 2, pp. 100-102.

26. The Evening Advocate, St. John's, Nov. 28, 1917, p. 4.  
See also, Waldo, F. L., With Grenfell on the Labrador, (New York, Fleming H. Revell Co., 1930), p. 78.

experience and study, Coaker emerged from his self-appointed exile determined that he would create an organization among the northern fishermen that would help them to improve their living conditions. With this idea in mind, he held his first public meeting on the evening of polling day, November 2, 1908, in the little fishing village of Herring Neck, Notre Dame Bay.<sup>27</sup> On the following evening another meeting was held in the same settlement. During each meeting, Coaker, in speeches of two hours duration, damned the three traditional enemies of the fishermen - the trader, the fish exporter and the government.<sup>28</sup> At the close of the second meeting, he appealed to those present to remain and become members of a Fishermen's Union, which he proposed to establish.<sup>29</sup> The Orange Hall, where the meeting took place, was filled to capacity (about 250) and of the number present, nineteen remained, who, with their leader, comprised the first Local Council.<sup>30</sup> The constitution, which Coaker had previously prepared, was adopted at this meeting.<sup>31</sup> The majority of the nineteen members<sup>32</sup> were young men who had known their leader for several years. Besides this personal appeal, some saw in Coaker's promise a little hope for the future, for he did not promise to help them but to show them how to help themselves.

The news of the formation of this union spread quickly, and applications were made for copies of the constitution by many nearby

27. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 4.

28. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 1.

29. Ibid.

30. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 4.

31. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 1.

32. See Appendices for list of original members of the first F. P. U. Local.

33 settlements. Meanwhile, Coaker spent the fall and winter of 1908-'09 in preaching his "gospel" throughout the districts of Twillingate and Fogo. From this humble beginning the movement spread unchecked throughout the whole east and north-east coasts of the Island.<sup>34</sup>

The factor which contributed most to the precipitious growth of the F.P.U. was the herculean efforts and demagogic appeal of the founder.<sup>35</sup> However, other factors were at work. It is apparent that a strong "union readiness" existed along the east and north-east coasts which did not exist in other areas of the country. The nature of the fishery on this coast offers an explanation for this phenomenon. Almost all the sealers came from this region. This branch of the fishery brought men together from many settlements in large groups, (some sealing ships carried as many as 250 men) for a month or two each spring; and in larger groups for a period of three or four days in some coastal town before departure and while unloading. It is significant that the history of the seal fishery, prior to 1908, records several strikes and other action of the type which is usually associated with the union movement.<sup>36</sup> The Labrador fishery was limited almost entirely to this same coast, and although the crews were small, many vessels often fished from the same harbour. In addition, the voyage to the Labrador coast and the return journey resulted in a great inter-

33. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 1

34. See Appendices for table showing growth of F.P.U.

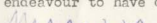
36. The Fishermen's Advocate, December, 19, 1923, (R.G. Winsor traces growth of united action among fishermen). See also Chafe's Sealing Book, p. 38

mingling of fishermen from various parts of the coast. The voyage to St. John's in the spring for supplies, and in the autumn to market their catch, permitted further association to these itinerant fishermen.

The south and west coast fishermen had no corresponding opportunities to associate with their fellow-workers. Those engaged in the inshore fishery met only the fishermen of their immediate locality. The crew members of the off-shore bankers normally came from the same settlement, and while fishing, had no opportunity to associate with other fishermen.

Some estimation of the extent of the "union readiness" existing throughout the east coast can be gained from the following letter written to a daily paper by three fishermen of Bay de Verde (approximately 200 miles from Herring Neck), ten days after the formation of the first Local Council:

The report of the meeting held at Herring Neck to consider the advisability of forming a Fishermen's Union has aroused public sentiment as never before, and the fishermen are unanimous in favour of it. We promise our hearty co-operation to our friends of the North, and thank them sincerely for starting the most desirable movement which must result in great benefits to those engaged in the prosecution of the fishery...Public meetings will shortly be held here and we call on all fishermen all over the Island to unite together in an honest endeavour to have our grievances redressed. 37



This letter is indicative of the welcome held out to union organizers by the fishermen of the east coast. It was not necessary to "sell" the idea of a union for in many cases they were invited by the fishermen themselves to come to their settlement and organize a local branch.

As a further explanation for the precipitous union growth, it should be remembered that the constitution was framed by one, who, for twenty-one years, was very closely associated with the northern fishermen, and included every device calculated to arouse their interest. The regular weekly meetings enhanced their social life and created in them a feeling of accomplishment. /The union button, flag and Guernsey sweater, each bearing the emblem of a codfish,<sup>38</sup> aroused in the fishermen a great pride in their calling. Coaker<sup>h</sup> exhorted them to display these emblems proudly as a proof that they were the country's producers. The constitution also provided for annual parades, but permitted the District Councils to determine when they would be held.<sup>39</sup> This provided entertainment and appealed to the simple nature of the fishermen, who enjoyed the spectacle of flying flags, Guernsey-clad men marching two abreast, gunfire, yapping dogs and cheering women and children. To the more serious members, the union also provided an attraction, for its motto, suum cuique<sup>40</sup> - "to each his own", held out a promise of a bright future.

The structure of the F.P.U., as planned by Coaker, was to some extent determined by the distribution of population. Each settlement had a right to a Local Council, to which all fishermen,<sup>41</sup> coasters, planters, loggers and farmers were eligible for membership.

38. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 2.

39. Ibid, p. 45.

40. The Fishermen's Advocate, Oct. 29, 1910, p. 1.

41. Ibid, Nov. 19, 1910, p. 1.

Meetings were held weekly and the conditions of the country and of the fish trade were discussed. Editorials of The Fishermen's Advocate<sup>42</sup> and circulars sent by the president, were read by the chairman and in turn discussed. These councils dealt principally with local affairs but had the right to send recommendations to the District and Supreme Councils.

The District Council was composed of all the locals in an electoral district, and dealt with the affairs of the district. The Chairman, Deputy-chairman, Secretary and Treasurer of all Local Councils in a district comprised the membership of the District Council.<sup>43</sup> These councils had the power to forward their decisions to the Supreme Council for consideration and often took advantage of this right. Since each council was composed of men from every settlement of the district, it was in an advantageous position to judge the needs and the wishes of the district. In consequence, these District Councils were responsible for many of the petitions and resolutions discussed at the Annual Convention of the Supreme Council. A large number of these were eventually translated into law in the House of Assembly itself. The District Councils also selected the candidate or candidates to represent the Union Party in the district,<sup>44</sup> and paid part of the expense<sup>s</sup> of the election campaign.<sup>45</sup> These councils provided valuable training ground for potential politicians, which helped fill the void created by the

42. Coaker, (ed.) The History of the F.P.U., pp. 32, 49, 68.

43. The Fishermen's Advocate, Nov. 19, 1910, p. 1.

44. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., pp. 29, 52.

45. Ibid, pp. 31, 70. The 1913 campaign cost \$2,000, the Supreme Council paid \$1,200, the District Councils \$800.

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dearth of local government. In fact the Union Party drew many of its members from the various District Councils. The District Councils also discussed problems of a local nature and sent their opinions to the district representatives in the House of Assembly.<sup>47</sup>

At the head of the whole organization was a Supreme Council. This Council was composed of the Chairman of all Local Councils and the officers of all District Councils.<sup>48</sup> Past officers of the Supreme Councils and chairmen of District Councils, who had held office for three consecutive years, also had the right to attend. In addition, all Union representatives in the House of Assembly<sup>49</sup> were regarded as members.

There was no set meeting place until the completion of Port Union in 1918, and the date of meeting varied from early November to late December. The meetings normally lasted for a period of three days.<sup>50</sup>

The first Annual Convention of the Supreme Council had a membership of nine, but the number grew rapidly and reached 200 by 1914.<sup>51</sup> The F.P.U. leader tried to maintain a high level of interest in these Annual Conventions. On one occasion even, he issued a notice to all Local Councils that failure on the part of any local to send a delegate to an Annual Convention would be punished by a fine of ten dollars.<sup>52</sup>

46. See above, Ch. 1, pp. 3 - 4

47. Clouter, "The F.P.U. and its leader", (The History of the F.P.U., pp. 182 - 187.)

48. The Fishermen's Advocate, Nov. 19, 1910, p. 1.

49. Ibid, Jan. 11, 1913, p. 4.

50. See Appendices for place and date of Supreme Council meetings.

51. See Appendices for the membership of the Supreme Council.

52. The Fishermen's Advocate, Nov. 18, 1911.



In general, the procedure of the conventions followed the same pattern. The president - Coaker held this position until his resignation in 1926<sup>53</sup> - opened the convention with a lengthy report on the years work and accomplishments of the F.P.U. and the commercial concerns affiliated with it. He also commented on the action of the government in various fields which were of interest to the fishermen and suggested steps which the F.P.U. should take in each. Following the president's report, committees were appointed from the delegates present to enquire and report on questions or problems suggested in the president's address.

The committee members showed very little initiative and generally arrived at a conclusion or decision compatible with that suggested by the president in his address.<sup>54</sup> A. B. Morine, who, for several years was closely associated with the F.P.U. as its solicitor, and who may have attended Supreme Council meetings, wrote: "Proceedings at these conventions were always commenced by a 'speech from the throne' by the president, and an address in reply presented by the delegates. It is not on record that a reply ever failed to re-iterate subserviently all that was said in the speech".<sup>55</sup> The records of Supreme Council meetings indicate the truth of this statement. The meetings were remarkable in their lack of dissension. The delegates, puppet-like, prefaced their comments or reports with "we endorse your remarks"<sup>56</sup> or "we strongly support

53. When Coaker resigned in 1926, he was made Honorary President for life. He also selected his successor, J. H. Scammell.

54. For Annual Reports of the Supreme Council for the Years from 1908 to 1928, see Coaker, (ed.), Twenty Years of the F.P.U. of Newfoundland.

55. "Second Draft of Morine's History of Newfoundland", Ch. 10, p. 25.

56. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 21.

your remarks", or with some similar phrase indicating their agreement with the president's policy and their faith in his decisions. This lack of dissension was due more to the subservient nature of the fishermen than to the dictatorial spirit of the leader. They were offered the opportunity to express their wishes, but centuries of economic peonage and political subservience made them incapable of taking advantage of the offer.

Nothing is more indicative of the fishermen's faith and dependence on their leader than the readiness with which they paid the union fees, which Coaker thought necessary, without raising a dissenting voice, even though their own purses were affected. It was agreed at the first convention (1909) that each member should pay a fee of twenty-five cents, ten cents of which was to be forwarded to the Supreme Council. In 1910, Coaker suggested the fee be raised to five cents per month per member, twenty-five cents of which would go annually to the Supreme Council, five cents to the District Council and the remainder to the Local Councils. In 1914, an initiation fee of one dollar was introduced and the lower rate of fifty cents to all under eighteen years, the whole amount collected in such fees to go to the Local Council. During the same year, a new section was added to the constitution providing for the expulsion or suspension of members who failed to pay their monthly dues for twelve months. However, the treasurer's report for the year 1914 showed that the financial standing of the union was

57. Ibid., p. 13.

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid., p. 15. See also, The Fishermen's Advocate, April 30, 1910.

60. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 91.

61. Ibid.

sound with a favourable balance of over \$11,000.<sup>62</sup> Accordingly, the President notified all members during the following convention that no fee would be collected that year for the Disaster Fund, as all fully paid up members would be entitled to all benefits which this fund provided.<sup>63</sup> During the following convention (1916), the President recommended that the annual fee be decreased to thirty cents, all of which should go to the Local Councils, "...because the union is now strong enough financially to dispense with the annual assessment of twenty-five cents per member paid to the Supreme Council."<sup>64</sup> These two steps were undoubtedly part of Coaker's plan to prove to the fishermen that he got no financial gain from the F.P.U. or its commercial undertakings. Besides, by 1916, the question of fees that was of great importance during the early years of F.P.U. activity, gave place to other, more important, affairs in the fields of commerce and politics.

The question of incorporation was considered during the first convention and the decision made to grant permission to the President to take steps to have the F.P.U. incorporated. As a result, on November 17, 1910, incorporation took place under the Trade Union Act, passed by the previous session of the Legislature.<sup>#</sup> The F.P.U. was the first Union registered under the new Act.<sup>65</sup>

During the years at Coakerville, when Coaker conceived the idea of a fishermen's union, the work of the various councils, the

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid, p. 98

64. Ibid, p. 107.

# Journal of the Assembly, Newfoundland, 1910, p. 142.

65. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 16.

amount and division of fees and incorporation, were all woven into his plan. However, it is doubtful whether he gave any thought to the extent of his union. Certainly he had a vague vision of uniting all fishermen of the colony but he had made no attempt to delimit a sphere of operation. From available evidence it seems that he had no idea that his efforts would be blessed with such results. However, the success in the districts of Twillingate and Fogo in 1908-'09 showed what great possibilities lay ahead, and immediate plans were made to organize the whole country. To cover the expense of further organization he recommended an assessment of ten cents on each member during the convention of 1909, special attention to be given to the southern and western shores. <sup>66</sup> Thirty locals were established during the fall of 1908 and winter of 1909 in the districts of Fogo and Twillingate. By 1910, the number of locals had increased to 66 and the field of operation had spread to include two other districts, namely Bonavista and Trinity. The number of Union members had increased to 12,500 by 1911, and to <sup>67</sup> 20,000 by 1914. By this time the movement had spread north to include the District of St. Barbe and south to the southern shore of Conception Bay. / There was little expansion after 1914 either in membership or in extent.

The failure of the F.P.U. to expand beyond the east and north-east coasts can be attributed to several factors. 1. The fishermen of this region, because of the peculiar nature of their work, were different from the fishermen of the rest of the island in that

66. Ibid, p. 2.

67. See Appendices for growth of Union membership.

there was a great "union readiness" already existing among them.

2. The F.P.U. became deeply involved in politics after the election of 1913. This left Coaker with little time for organization "The initiative, the energy, the enthusiasm which conducted the attempt through the campaign...were supplied by Coaker..."<sup>69</sup> Thus, when the F.P.U. became a political power it prevented the leader from further organization. 3. As the movement spread southward more and more opposition was experienced from settlements strongly influenced by St. John's, the core of union opposition.<sup>70</sup> 4. In spite of the appeal of the leader, the F.P.U. remained essentially a Protestant movement and consequently, made little or no progress beyond the head of Conception Bay. This was the first region in the path of Union expansion, with a Roman Catholic majority.

5. The depression of the first decade of the century fostered the growth of the F.P.U. The First World War brought prosperity and this deadened the desire for the kind of service the F.P.U. could offer. The younger men, familiar with the prosperous war years but not with the conditions that existed prior to 1908, were particularly apathetic.<sup>70</sup> 6. The F.P.U. by 1914, had undertaken considerable commercial activity, which placed an additional strain on its few capable leaders. In spite of recurrent attempts during the following decade to unionize the remainder of the country, very little was achieved.

68. See above, Ch. 11, p. 27

69. "Second Draft of Morine's History of Newfoundland", Ch. 10, p. 25.

70. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 7.

Coaker planned to enlist the fishermen of all denominations in his union. He clarified his position in this respect during the first convention when he said, "...we desire the co-operation of North and South, of Protestant and Catholic, in this mighty fight for country and fishermen..."<sup>71</sup> When members of the Roman Catholic Church objected to taking the oath which the F.P.U. constitution required, Coaker arranged an agreement with Bishop McNeill of St. George's whereby a declaration of Membership was substituted for the oath.<sup>72</sup> To preserve the non-denominational nature of the F.P.U., Coaker appointed a Roman Catholic, Andrew Broders, as its Vice-president;<sup>73</sup> and chose another Roman Catholic, M. Hawco, as Union Organizer in the District of Harbour Main.<sup>74</sup>

The F.P.U., in spite of these efforts, made little headway among the Roman Catholic population. Isolated Catholic settlements throughout the area where the union was influential had strong Local Councils; for example, Boyd's Cove and Fortune Harbour in Twillingate District, Tilting in Pogo District, and St. Brendan's, Keels and Red Cliffs in Bonavista District.<sup>75</sup> But elsewhere the F.P.U. regardless of the aims of the founder can be considered as almost entirely Protestant.<sup>76</sup> Thus from its birth-place in Notre Dame Bay, the union expanded southward until it reached the Roman Catholic district of Harbour Main, and north and west until it reached the Roman Catholic district of St. George's. Attempts to by-pass these

71. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 1.

72. Ibid.

73. The Evening Telegram, St. John's, Nov. 10, 1913, p. 5.

74. Ibid., Dec. 16, 1913, p. 7. See also, Coaker (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 71.

75. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 44.

76. See Appendices for denominational distribution and distribution of Union membership.

districts and unionize the south coast with its Protestant majority had very little success as other factors<sup>77</sup> prevented any worthwhile growth from occurring.

During the quarter century of union prominence (1908-'32), the F.P.U. aims underwent many changes. However, at this point only the initial aim<sup>6</sup> of the movement, as outlined to the fishermen by the founder, will be considered. What the F.P.U. aimed to accomplish was apparent from its motto, Suum Cuique, "to each his own". Coaker assured the fishermen that everyone in the colony, except the fishermen and other primary producers, got their own and perhaps a little more. In simple, inspiring language, he reminded them that they were robbed both in selling and in buying and that their taxes went to pay government officials who scorned and mistreated them.<sup>78</sup> Since the majority of civil servants were political appointees, and the F.P.U. declared itself the avowed enemy of the government from the beginning, it is natural to expect that the F.P.U. members would be mistreated by many government officials. However, Coaker warned all civil servants that their jobs would be forfeited after 1913 if they were found guilty of failing to give proper treatment to his followers.<sup>79</sup> He also threatened to petition the Government for the dismissal of all public officials who were over-critical of the F.P.U.,<sup>80</sup> a threat which was carried out on several subsequent occasions. In this manner the F.P.U. aimed to make all fishermen proud of their

77. See above, Ch. 11, pp. 26 to 29

78. The Fishermen's Advocate, Oct. 29, 1910, p. 1.

79. Ibid, April 15, 1911, p. 4.

80. Ibid, Jan. 7, 1911, p. 1.



calling and to regard all government officials as their servants.

Another aim of the F.P.U. was "...to uplift and improve the<sup>81</sup> lot of the toilers, to co-operate for mutual advancement..." Coaker saw more and more fishermen losing their economic freedom and becoming the slaves of the merchants, through the evil effects<sup>82</sup> of a vicious "credit or truck system".

The union leader aimed to eliminate this system by introducing co-operative buying and selling and by establishing a chain of cash stores.

"...the F.P.U. seeks to control the government of the colony - that is one of the fundamental principles on which it was founded, one of the great objects of its existence..."<sup>83</sup> Since his boyhood Coaker had an active interest in politics. He was aware of the insidious growth of corruption in every phase of government activity and believed that only a complete upheaval in the basic nature of the government could arrest this growth. (Thus, one of the fundamental aims of the union, which he created, was to re-organize the system of government by political education, through the F. P. U., to fill the void, which was the result of the absence of local government. He also planned to make the government more democratic by sending a number of fishermen's representatives to the House of Assembly. In time he hoped to build up a fishermen's party that would command a majority in the House.)

81. Ibid, Jan. 17, 1914, p. 2.

82. See above, Ch. 1, pp 11 to 13

83. The Fishermen's Advocate, Jan. 17, 1914, p. 4.

"The masses must rule" he claimed, "we will sweep away every  
<sup>84</sup>  
 vestige of autocratic rule..."

The following quotation from the founder's address to the eighth Annual Convention of the Supreme Council (1916) is a clear statement of union aims:

Remember, comrades, that the sole aim of our union is to promote independence, prevent pauperism, help the masses to rise above demoralizing influences that find solace in the acceptance of charity that entail national degeneration and a pauper's grave...we aim also to create confidence and hopefulness for working men, to be a beacon of light to which when hard pressed all may look for guidance and advice.

Our endeavours are also directed to lessen the great inequalities that exist wherever we turn and to diffuse the luxury and comforts of life more evenly and to treat all...as members of one family .... 85.

The F. P. U. was essentially a working-class movement and as such, represented no mean effort on the part of the founder, who was a member of the class which he organized. It compared favourably with similar movements in other parts of the world at the same time. It succeeded in organizing a great majority of the fishermen of the east coast of Newfoundland into a single union under the domination of one man. The F. P. U., as created by Coaker, was capable of having considerable influence on the future of the country.

84. The Weekly Advocate, St. John's, Jan. 5., 1918, p. 4.
85. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 108.

F.P.U. Political Action Previous to 1913 Election

The question might well be asked if Coaker created the F.P.U. to enable him to establish a political party, or whether he created the political party to arouse the interest of more fishermen in the F.P.U. The union and the political party grew side by side and tended to be complementary to each other. As the party became more active it aroused greater interest in the union on the part of the fishermen. On the other hand every F.P.U.<sup>1</sup> member was obligated to support candidates of the Union Party.

There are many indications that, from the beginning, Coaker intended the F.P.U. to be a political as well as a commercial and social organization. He had a strong interest in politics from his boyhood and took an active role in political meetings from his early manhood.<sup>2</sup> In November, 1909, during the first Annual Convention of the Supreme Council, Coaker stated: "...I fear if we wish to have the wishes of the fishermen of the Colony respected, it will be necessary to elect eight or ten Union members for the House of Assembly..."<sup>3</sup> This statement was made at a time when the F.P.U. had but thirty Local Councils and certainly was not taken seriously by contemporary politicians.

1. Coaker, (ed) The History of the F.P.U., p. 45
2. Coaker, W.F. "President Coaker's Triumphant Tour of the North, 1919", (History of the F.P.U., edited by W.F. Coaker), p. 147.
3. Coaker, (ed), The History of the F.P.U., p. 2.

During these early years (1908-1912), there was no thought of creating a third major party. Coaker aimed to send a half-dozen union members to the opposition to act as watchdogs over the Government.<sup>4</sup> Party politics was not considered. In this phase of his union's development, he aimed for one goal, to send union representatives to the House of Assembly. When the time arrived for union members to sit in the House, he planned that they would "act exactly as the Labour Party in England - support the Government that will do the utmost for the Masses".<sup>5</sup> The Union members would comprise a separate independent unit with no allegiance to any major party. In a speech delivered at Joe Batt's Arm, Twillingate District, February 10, 1910, he stated: "The Union candidates must not combine with any other party.. .If a political party in power will treat our recommendations favourably we will make no quarrel with them".<sup>6</sup>

It was essential during the years from 1908 to 1913 for Coaker to pilot the F.P.U. into paths of political neutrality. The districts that he had successfully organized, in the two previous elections had given equal support to the two major parties.<sup>7</sup> Any tendency on Coaker's part to favour either party would bring opposition from the adherents of the other. Coaker, himself, before the formation of the Union Party, was a Liberal as the following

4. The Fishermen's Advocate, July 9, 1910, p. 4

5. Ibid, Oct. 29, 1910, p. 1.

6. Ibid, Nov. 26, 1910, p. 3.

7. The Union Party won 8 seats but five Liberal Candidates were returned through F.P.U. backing. Of these thirteen seats, seven had been won by the People's Party and six by the Liberals in the previous election (1909).

quotations from his own writings will indicate: "I was 16 years old and happened to attend a political meeting and in response to an invitation by one of the Tory candidates I asked a question which brought about the collapse of the meeting which baptized me into the ranks of the Liberal Party." <sup>8</sup> On another occasion he wrote: "Sir Robert Bond has represented Twillingate district from 1897 to 1913, and I had been intimate as an active supporter of his for several years. For years he kept up a regular correspondence with me." <sup>9</sup> If Coaker had not insisted that the F.P.U. would remain neutral, he would have been regarded as a Liberal canvasser, rather than a F.P.U. organizer.

Coaker, on the other hand, might have decided that his followers could have been served best by a neutral policy. P.K. Devine, one of his associates, before the formation of the F.P.U., wrote: "I believe that the union would have been more powerful...if kept between the two parties in politics for a balance of power. In fact, this was Mr. Coaker's original intention..." <sup>10</sup> Whatever his early intention might have been, in 1913 he thought it expedient to bring his followers into a coalition with the Liberal party. <sup>11</sup>

\*The first political action of the F.P.U. took the form of proposals, petitions, resolutions and memorials to the Government concerning current problems and grievances. The Annual Conventions and to a lesser extent the District and Local Councils all played

8. Coaker, W.F., "President Coaker's Triumphant Tour of the North, 1919", (The History of the F.P.U., edited by W.F. Coaker) p. 147.
9. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 29
10. Devine, P.K., "Memories of the F.P.U. in the Early Days of Its Organization." (The History of the F.P.U., edited by W.F. Coaker), p. 142.
11. See below, Ch. 111, p. 52

a part in preparing these demands. As early as March, 1909, the F.P.U. proposed to the Government that a trade agent be appointed for South America.<sup>12</sup> During the first Annual Convention (1909), a memorial to the Government was drafted which recommended changes in every aspect of the salt cod industry. There were other recommendations dealing with education, pensions and conservation of natural resources.<sup>13</sup> The following convention (1910), drafted a memorial to the Premier containing all the recommendations of the previous year, with additional demands for outport hospitals, adult education and many others of lesser importance.<sup>14</sup> Finally, in 1912, the F.P.U. sent a protest to the Governor against the action of Honourable D. Mor/ison, who, while a minister of the Crown, had been implicated in several timber deals.<sup>15</sup> The Governor forwarded the F.P.U. protest to the Secretary of State, who warned Mor/ison that he should not participate, while a minister of the Crown, in such undertakings.<sup>16</sup>

The numerous demands of the F.P.U. during the years from 1908 to 1912 provided constant activity for the Local and District Councils, which in turn created a feeling of accomplishment and greater interest in the union. The Government gave very little attention to these demands, thus proving that Coaker had been right when he had told his followers that their wishes would not be considered until they sent fishermen as representatives to the House

12. Coaker (ed), The History of the F.P.U., p. 10.

13. Ibid, pp. 6-13.

14. Ibid pp. 22-27. See also, The Fishermen's Advocate, Jan. 28, 1911, p. 2.

15. The Fishermen's Advocate, April 6, 1912, p. 1

16. Ibid, July 13, 1912, p. 1.

of Assembly. These demands also provided a nucleus around which<sup>17</sup> a party platform could be framed.

(The first step in the formation of the Union Party was taken during the second Convention of the Supreme Council (1910), when Coaker in his opening address said: "I sincerely recommend you to take steps...to formulate plans for the establishment of a Union Party to take the field in 1913"<sup>18</sup>. The following quotation from Coaker's address to the third Annual Convention, indicates the progress made in 1911 and the plans for the ensuing year:

As this Council at its last Convention decided to form a Union Party, and to place its candidates in every possible district, meetings have been held, of the District Councils concerned, to select Union Candidates to take the field at the General Elections...It is therefore our duty to give full consideration to the preparation and adoption of a Union political platform, erecting it from the planks we have manufactured at our previous Conventions and adding what we consider advisable.<sup>19</sup>

During the same convention, a committee was appointed to consider and draft a Union political platform. The result was the first statement of the aims of the infant party.<sup>20</sup> During the following Convention (1912), this statement was enlarged from twenty-three to thirty-one planks and henceforth known as the<sup>21</sup> "Bonavista Platform".

This platform represented the hopes, frustrations, grievances and fears of the thousands of fishermen which the delegates to this convention represented. There was hope that the future would have greater opportunities for gain and better working conditions;

- 17. Coaker, (ed), The History of the F.P.U., p. 17
- 18. Ibid, p. 17
- 19. Ibid, p. 29
- 20. Ibid, p. 40
- 21. Ibid, p. 50



there was the frustration of half a century of self-government that had failed continuously to improve the lot of the governed; there were grievances against an economic system which had kept them ever at the mercy of their merchants, and fears for their welfare when engaged in work in which human life had far too little value.

Many of the planks of this platform endured as Union policy for two decades; others, more idealistic, were abandoned when political experience showed their impracticability. Its influence went beyond the confines of the F.P.U., as the Liberal Party agreed to accept many of its planks on the occasion of the various Liberal-Union coalitions.

The F.P.U. members through their Local and District Councils and Annual Conventions were thoroughly familiar with every aim of this platform. In fact, it was unique in that it was created "by the electorate rather than for the electorate". It represented the honest efforts of the F.P.U. leaders and members to improve the economic, social, political and cultural conditions of their day. Much that the framers of this platform envisioned has since become common practice, which attests to the progressive aims of its creators.

Eight of the planks of the Bonavista Platform<sup>22</sup> dealt directly or indirectly with various branches of the fishery and attempted to improve through legislation many of the obsolete methods of catching, curing and marketing, with which this industry was plagued. One would expect Coaker to give particular attention to the fisheries, for though primarily a farmer himself, he believed

22. See appendices for "Bonavista Platform".

that the prosperity of the country depended on the proper development of the wealth of the sea. In the main the planks dealing with the fishery were worthwhile and practical and have since been accepted as common government policy.

When we consider that the F.P.U. consisted principally of illiterate fishermen, led by a farmer-fisherman who had but little schooling, it is surprising, to say the least, the emphasis which was placed on the need for education. It is more surprising when we consider that the educational aims of the F.P.U. proved basically sound and are today accepted government policy. In this field the union platform demanded schools for every settlement containing twenty children of school age and free and compulsory education seven months of each year. Both these demands have since been realized. The platform also demanded the establishment of night schools in the outports during the winter months which has been attempted on a small scale. The fourth, which recommended elected school boards, has not been introduced by the Newfoundland government.

A great deal of attention was also given to the need for changes in the structure of government as it then existed. In this respect the following demands were noteworthy: single-member electoral districts for the outports, laws to establish the Referendum and the Recall, the amendment of the Election Act to permit the counting of votes by each Deputy Returning Officer, and the reorganization of the Fishery Department.

The platform also contained several demands that can be regarded as being exceptionally enlightened for its day. In this respect, the following are worthy of consideration: old age pensions for all over seventy years of age; the fixing of a mini-

imum ~~wage~~ for labour, and the conservation of the forest by introducing more equitable methods of land alienation.

A copy of this platform was distributed to every Local Council following the convention of 1912, which resulted in a high level of interest throughout the union districts. <sup>23</sup>

In order to test the union strength at the earliest possible moment the F.P.U. demanded that an election be held in November, <sup>24</sup> 1912. The term of the Morris Government would not expire until June, 1913. A spring election was inconvenient in Newfoundland, and if the election were postponed to the fall of 1913, the colony would be without a legal government for at least four months. However, the demand was ineffective.

During the same convention (1912), plans were made for the forthcoming fight. <sup>25</sup> It was agreed that the District Councils should be responsible for the selection of political candidates and that each candidate would be obliged to take an oath before a magistrate and in the presence of the District Council, that he would be true to the Union Party, that he would take no bribe from any source and that he would resign his seat when called upon to do so by his District Council. <sup>26</sup> Note that "the right of recall" was one of the planks of the "Bonavista Platform", that was drafted during the same convention. These measures were regarded as necessary for they would enable the F.P.U. to maintain control over candidates after they were elected as district representatives. Plans were

23. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 60.

24. Ibid, p. 41.

25. Ibid, p. 39.

26. Ibid.

made, as well, to secure honest, loyal candidates. Coaker emphasized the importance of this in October, 1911, when he wrote:

...Select only true, well reasoned men that money cannot buy...men that will sincerely take the oath which every candidate must subscribe to...that no offer or bribe will be accepted by him from any source...Do your duty, friends, by selecting men that you know will never sell their principles for gain of any sort. 27

An attempt was also made to keep all F.P.U. members in line as supporters of the Union Party candidates, as the following addition to the constitution made in 1912, indicates:

When the Chairman of a Local Council is approached for the Annual Pass for 1913...he shall first administer a test...and the words to be used will be: 'Will you vote at the coming election for the Candidates selected by the District Council'...and if the answer is 'yes' the Pass shall be communicated, but if the answer is not '~~Yes~~' the Pass will be withheld and the member suspended from membership. 28

Every opportunity was taken to create and maintain a high level, of interest in political affairs. In this respect the Union Party had a great advantage as in practice it was not distinguishable from the F.P.U. Each had the same leaders and to a great extent the same supporters. Each used the same channels to disseminate its ideas; namely, The Fishermen's Advocate, and circulars to Local Councils. The Advocate was received by one or more people in every unionized settlement and in many of these northern hamlets there was no other paper. Circulars were sent regularly from F.P.U. headquarters to every local with the explicit instructions that they be read during one or more meetings. <sup>29</sup> Since both provided the material for discussion and debate, the ideas they con-

27. The Fishermen's Advocate, Oct. 21, 1911, p. 1

28. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 45.

29. Ibid, pp. 32, 68.

tained spread also to the illiterate members of the community. Thus in the northern districts, the Union Party, through the F.P.U. exerted considerable control over the ideas of the people.

The fifteen years from 1894 to 1909 was a period in which Newfoundland suffered many financial hardships. This period began with the bank crash of 1894 and terminated with the very low prices paid for cod during the first decade of the twentieth century. The economic difficulties of these years were reflected on its politics which was characterized by abrupt changes in the party alignment of various districts of the country. The Liberals, under Bond, were in power from 1900 to 1908. The election of 1908 resulted in a tie, with the Liberals under Bond and the People's Party under Morris, each returning an equal number of members. Another election was held in the spring of 1909 which resulted in a victory for Morris by a large majority.

The F.P.U. leaders, before the formation of the Union Party, had often expressed their hopes of placing candidates in every district in Newfoundland.<sup>30</sup> However, on the eve of the election in 1913, the movement had not spread beyond the east and north-east coasts.<sup>31</sup> This region sent to the Assembly less than half its total members, therefore the question of coalition with one of the other parties was important, as the Union Party could not hope to win a majority over the two other parties. During the fourth Annual Convention (1912), it had been agreed that negotiations should be opened with both parties for the adherents of the Union Party had been about evenly divided as supporters of the other two parties

30. Ibid, p. 29

31. The Daily News, St. John's, Sept. 30, 1913, p. 5. See also above, Ch. III, p. 3.

in the previous election (1909).<sup>31</sup> During this same convention Coaker had stated: "...the Union controls the election of fourteen members of the House of Assembly, which ought to be sufficient to enable us to secure the reforms we have been working for, should we co-operate with any of the Parties hitherto in charge of public affairs."<sup>32</sup> However, during a secret session of the same convention, a resolution was adopted, empowering the president to negotiate with both parties and to co-operate with the party most sympathetic with F.P.U. political aims.<sup>33</sup>

The wisdom of coalescing with either party at this time has often been questioned. After the election the Union Party would be in a strong bargaining position; particularly if neither party won a majority. The political situation was uncertain. Of a total of thirty-six seats, the Union Party had strong hopes of winning fourteen. If the remaining twenty-two seats were divided in such a way that no party had a majority, then the Union Party would be in a strong bargaining position. There was, however, the possibility that one of the other parties would win a majority, in which case, Coaker, as the leader of a fourteen member party, would be expected to lead the Opposition. Since neither he himself, nor any of his followers, were experienced in parliamentary procedure, this he wished to avoid. In a letter to Captain Yates,<sup>34</sup>

31. The Daily News, St. John's, Sept. 30, 1913, p. 5. See also above, Ch. III, p. 3.

32. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 52

33. Ibid, p. 61. See also, The Fishermen's Advocate, Sept. 27, 1913, p. 8.

34. See below, Ch. III, p. 54

explaining his action in co-operating with the Liberal Party, Coaker wrote: "...If we were able to fight Morris and had the learning to run a government...we would not trouble to make terms with any party..."<sup>35</sup> In a subsequent letter he informed Yates that<sup>36</sup> the only alternative was to remain aloof from both parties which would leave the Union Party in opposition and powerless to carry out the reform it had planned. During the fifth Annual Convention (1913), which met shortly after the election, in a speech to the assembled delegates, Coaker said: "We co-operated with the Liberal Party in the fight, as unless we had don<sup>e</sup> so, the whole responsibility of fighting the Government would have been cast on my shoulders."<sup>37</sup> Thus it was expedient that the Union Party co-operate with one of the other parties, as this would give it a fair chance of being on the winning side and would also enable its members to gain political experience while serving this apprenticeship.

When the decision was made to coalesce with one of the other parties, several factors favoured the Liberals. In the first place, Coaker had been a staunch, if somewhat critical follower of Sir Robert Bond. Morine claimed much later that "Coaker was a Liberal by her<sup>e</sup>dity and a radical by nature..."<sup>38</sup> Coaker certainly regarded himself as a Liberal before he established the F.P.U.<sup>39</sup> Thus in any decision to co-operate with another political party, the Liberals would undoubtedly be favoured. In the second

35. The Daily News, Aug. 21, 1913, p. 7.

36. Ibid, Aug. 30, p. 7

37. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 65.

38. "Second Draft of Morine's History of Newfoundland", Ch. 10, p. 16.

39. See above, Ch. 111, p. 42



place, the People's Party, headed by Sir Edward Morris, during the four years previous to the election had earned the enmity of the F.P.U. members, through its strong criticism of the new movement, and its refusal to consider union demands as expressed in the various petitions. <sup>40</sup> (In the third place, the F.P.U. had functioned as an unofficial opposition since 1909 and it was natural for it to join forces with the official opposition, the Liberal Party, against a common enemy. In the fourth place, the Liberals, with their small minority had great need of union support if they hoped to succeed, and consequently, were willing to make greater concessions to union demands; whereas the People's Party, having won in 1909 with a large majority, hoped to win in 1913 without having to share the honours with a minority group.

In addition to the four factors listed above, there is a strong possibility that Coaker had been influenced by Richard Seddon, the well known labour leader of New Zealand. <sup>41</sup> He had brought the Labour members into the fold of the Liberal Party and during the years from 1893 to 1906 the reforms introduced by his government had aroused world-wide interest. Therefore, the possibility exists that in co-operating with the Liberals in 1913, Coaker was trying to <sup>42</sup> accomplish for Newfoundland what Seddon had done for New Zealand.

The decision to co-operate with the Liberals brought little or no opposition from the union ranks. The only recorded opposition

40. See above, Ch. III, p. 43

41. For Seddon's Role in New Zealand politics see, Knapland, Paul, The British Empire, 1815 - 1939, (New York, Harper and Brothers, 1941) pp. 478-479.

42. Coaker refers to the work of Seddon on several occasions. See Fishermen's Advocate, January 21, 1911, p. 1.

came from Captain Yates, who had been appointed by the Twillingate District Council as Union candidate for that district. However, he was forced to withdraw because of the agreement with the Liberal Party and accused Coaker of betraying union principles.<sup>43</sup> Yates then contested the election in the same district as a candidate of the People's Party but was badly beaten.<sup>44</sup>

After the defeat of his party in 1909, Sir Robert Bond had retired from active politics although he had retained his seat in the House. His decision to lead the Liberal Party again in 1913 was influenced, perhaps, by an appeal published in The Fishermen's Advocate. In this appeal Sir Robert was invited: "...to re-enter the political arena...and to assume the leadership of the Liberal and Union forces in the approaching battle."<sup>45</sup> Since the union membership at this time was approximately 18,000, this appeal probably influenced him to assume Liberal leadership.

A committee of the Liberal Party met with Coaker on several occasions with a view to co-operating in the election.<sup>46</sup> These meetings culminated in a conference between Sir Robert and Coaker at "The Grange" (Sir Robert's country home at Whitbourne), during which the following arrangement was made. Coaker, representing the Union party, agreed to withdraw two candidates in the three-member district of Twillingate and one each in Trinity (three-member district), Bay de Verde (two-member district) and St. Barbe

<sup>43.</sup> The Fishermen's Advocate, Sept. 27, 1913, p. 8.

<sup>44.</sup> Yates received 698 votes. Twillingate was a three-member district and he was beaten by all the other candidates.

<sup>45.</sup> The Fishermen's Advocate, Aug. 16, 1913, p. 1.

<sup>46.</sup> Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 29.

<sup>47</sup>  
 (one-member district). Consequently, only nine Union members were nominated instead of the fourteen which the party had originally planned to place in the field.

Early in October, Sir Robert issued a manifesto stating the aims of "The Liberal-Union Party"<sup>48</sup>. In this manifesto he made considerable concessions to the F.P.U. by including in it twelve of the planks of the "Bonavista Platform". Coaker also issued a manifesto in which he explained his stand in uniting with the Liberal Party. He informed his followers that no union aim as set forth in the "Bonavista Platform" would be set aside although several planks were not specifically mentioned in Bond's manifesto. Coaker also included the thirty-one planks of the "Bonavista Platform" and gave an explanation ~~for~~ of each. However, this manifesto was primarily an appeal to all F.P.U. members to give their support to the Liberal-<sup>49</sup> Union candidates.

The Liberal-Union manifesto as issued in 1913 by Sir Robert Bond, sprang from two complementary sources. It contained the wishes of thousands of unschooled fishermen and their inexperienced leaders, conscious of their needs and for the first time emboldened to make their demands heard. It was also molded by a practical, experienced politician, who on previous occasions had proved his devotion to his country. In framing this manifesto, Bond used the "Bonavista

<sup>47</sup>. Ibid, p. 29. See also, The Fishermen's Advocate, Aug. 23 1913, p. 1.

<sup>48</sup>. The Evening Telegram, October 4, 1913, pp. 6-7.

<sup>49</sup>. The Fishermen's Advocate, October 6, 1913, p. 4.

Platform" to determine the people's fears, grievances and wishes. To this foundation he applied his practical knowledge of government and his broad understanding of the country. What was undesirable, harmful or impractical in the "Bonavista Platform" he omitted and to the remainder he added other worthwhile measures of his own choosing. The result was a practical programme which, if applied, could bring many essential improvements to the life and work of the people.

50

The Liberal-Union Party adopted the slogan "Bond Can't Lose".

However, in spite of union strength and Bond's prestige, the People's Party succeeded in gaining a majority of six seats, having returned twenty-one out of a total of thirty-six members. The F.P.U. returned eight of its nine candidates, having lost the ninth by a margin of ten votes. <sup>51</sup> Seven of their Liberal allies were elected, including Bond himself. Five of the seven came from districts in which the F.P.U. was very strong.

\*In spite of the discrepancy in seats, the Liberal-Union Party gained a majority of 3,421 votes over its opponents. <sup>52</sup> This majority of votes failed to result in a majority of seats because practically all successful Liberal-Union candidates had received very large majorities. In addition, the distribution of seats was arranged in a manner that satisfied the demand for proportional denominational representation. The result was that district

50. The Fishermen's Advocate, Oct. 16, 1913, p. 4.

51. Coaker, (ed), The History of the F.P.U., p. 65. See appendices for the actual result of the election.

52. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1914, p. 161.

27  
representation was not proportional to population. The District of Ferryland, for example, had two representatives, whereas Fogo, with a larger population, had but one.<sup>53</sup>

It is convenient to analyse the 1913 election results according to the following geographical divisions. 1. The east and north-east coasts which included the districts of St. Barbe, Twillingate, Fogo, Bonavista and Trinity. These districts returned Liberal-Union candidates with overwhelming majorities. The area was predominately Protestant and was also the stronghold of the F.P.U. 2. The Roman Catholic districts of the Avalon Peninsula which returned candidates of the People's Party by very large majorities. 3. The Conception Bay districts, St. John's and the south and west coasts, which returned mainly candidates of the People's Party, but by small majorities. The F.P. U. won six seats that had returned candidates of the People's Party in 1909, but in general the election of 1913 brought no great change in party alignment.

Sectarianism, which had always played a major role in Newfoundland politics, was particularly noticeable during the 1913<sup>54</sup> election campaign. The F.P.U., with its positive and somewhat radical platform, was branded as a socialist organization, and its attempts to improve the educational standard caused it to be<sup>55</sup> accused of favouring "Godless Schools". Following the election Coaker wrote:

There cannot now be any doubt, but that the Morris Party was returned by base appeals to Catholic voters. They

53. The Evening Telegram, Nov. 12, 1913, p. 4

54. See above Ch. 1, p. 6

55. The Daily News, St. John's, Oct. 30, 1913, p. 5.

were told that if they voted for the Liberal-Union candidates they would vote against the Catholic religion, for godless schools and for that socialism which is so strongly condemned by the Roman Catholic Church. 56

The solidarity of the Catholic vote gave some grounds to the validity of Coaker's claim.

Encouraged by their political success, the Union leaders hoped to continue the process of organization throughout the Avalon Peninsula and the south and west coasts. Thus it was essential that the allegations made by union opponents during the election campaign be disproved. With this aim in mind, the Union leaders, by means of the press and in the House of Assembly, attempted to clarify the union position in respect to the school question, socialism and sectarianism. In one of his first speeches in the House, Coaker said:

...there is no such thing as sectarianism connected with us. We want to unite the people and we have done it. In our councils we have Catholic and Protestant members sitting side by side. No such thing as religious differences is ever witnessed...our whole aim has been to unite all denominations in our councils and nothing has ever done more to banish sectarianism from the colony and to bring all our people together...57

There is some truth in this claim, but it should be remembered that the success to which Coaker referred was limited to Catholic settlements in districts with a great Protestant majority. In regions that were predominantly Catholic no gain had been made and the old denominational divisions continued to exist. Nevertheless, the F.P.U. must be given credit for attempting to destroy sec-

56. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 65.

57. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1914, p. 34.

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tarianism, even though it achieved but a limited and transient success. However, the election and the accompanying campaign created a sectarian barrier that the F.P.U. was powerless to overcome and no further gain was made among the Catholic population.

In the Northern districts, the political success of the Union candidates created greater prestige and popularity for the F.P.U. The interest in the political affairs of the country did not die with the election, and although their eight representatives were entering the House of Assembly as members of the opposition, their performance in the House was awaited with feverish expectation.



Political Activity of the F.P.U. (1913-1917)

The election of 1913 ushered in a new phase in the life of the F.P.U. During the years from 1908 to 1913, a growing interest in the political affairs of the country developed. (This period was characterized by agitation against the Government and by the effort to create a party platform.<sup>1</sup>) In the election of 1913, the Union Party proved its political strength but a greater fight lay ahead. The eight Union members had to prove themselves worthy representatives of the House of Assembly. They had to show that they were efficient guardians of the country's natural and human resources and capable of creating the legislation which the "Bonavista Platform" had promised. Thus the twenty-third General Assembly was awaited with anticipation by the twenty thousand F.P.U. members who expected that their wishes would be made known in the House by their eight representatives. The opponents of Unionism also awaited the day when these usurpers from the fishing boats would have an opportunity to show their ignorance as members of the Assembly.

The Liberal-Union Party succeeded in returning 15 members, eight of whom were Union. However, the Union Party had withdrawn five other candidates,<sup>2</sup> as a concession to the Liberals, in districts where the F.P.U. was strong and where its candidates could have been easily elected. This brought the number of seats which the Union controlled to 13. The Liberal Party returned two members in St. John's East, which was entirely outside the Union sphere

1. See above, Ch. 3, pp. 46, 47.

2. Ibid.

of influence. The other five Liberal seats were, St. Barbe, one; Twillingate, two; Trinity, one; and Bay de Verde, one.<sup>3</sup> Each of these districts was a stronghold of the F.P.U., being the same five seats where Union candidates were withdrawn in accordance with the agreement made with Bond before the election.<sup>4</sup> However, there was no great change in party alignment. The Liberal-Union Party won six seats that had returned Morris candidates in both 1908 and 1909, and regained two that had supported Liberal members in 1908 but returned Morris candidates in 1909. The People's Party gained three seats that had returned Liberal members in both previous elections.

The co-operation of the Liberal and Union parties was carried out with the understanding that Sir Robert Bond would be the joint leader. At the time of the agreement, the popularity of the Liberal-Union Party seemed strong and opposition to the Government formidable. But the election resulted in two great surprises - the Government was returned by a small majority and the opposition consisted of a majority of Union members. Undoubtedly, Sir Robert had considered the possibility of being defeated when he accepted the Liberal-Union leadership, but it is doubtful whether he expected to be the leader of only a minority in the opposition.

Although the Liberal strength was disappointing, the Union Party had phenomenal success. There were nine seats contested and in eight the Union candidates were successful. The ninth seat

3. See appendices for 1913 election results.

4. See above, Ch. 3, p. 54

(H. Barrett, Bay de Verde) was lost by a margin of 10 votes. Thus the election resulted in embarrassment for Bond and increased prestige for Coaker. Sir Robert, who had been a prominent politician for thirty years, found himself in the unenviable position of leader of an opposition of which he controlled only a minority. His position was made more embarrassing<sup>at</sup> when Coaker, while addressing the Supreme Council on December 5, 1913, at St. John's, stated:

The result of the elections has proved without doubt the power and influence of our Union, and indicates the necessity of establishing the Fishermen's Protective Union all over the Colony and fighting at the next election when it comes, as a Union Party aided by outside patriots anxious to co-operate with us... 6

This was tantamount to declaring that the Union Party had co-operated with the Liberals only because they were not yet strong enough to succeed alone, and that by the next election they hoped to be able to win without co-operating with any other party. Under these circumstances Bond saw no other alternative but to resign. In a letter to J. A. Clift (Liberal M.P. for Twillingate), notifying him of his resignation, he wrote:

A man in the position of leader of a party has no possible chance of succeeding unless he receives loyalty and co-operation from the party inside and outside parliament. It is entirely evident that I cannot expect such loyalty and support from the opposition party as at present constituted, and I have retained my position almost beyond the conditions of dignity and respect. 7

5. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 65.

6. Ibid,

7. The Evening Telegram, Jan. 10, 1914, p. 10.

Coaker refuted Bond's statement by claiming that he had promised Bond support only in the election of 1913, and during the term following this election, and that he had never disguised the fact that the F.P.U. was seeking to control the government of the colony.<sup>8</sup> "That is one of the fundamental principles on which it was founded, one of the great objects of its existence."<sup>9</sup>

There are two possible explanations for Bond's resignation.

1. He realized that he owed even his seat in the House to Coaker and the F.P.U., and, because of this, his position would be subordinate to that of the Union leader.<sup>10</sup> Twenty years later Coaker claimed that during the election campaign Bond was often upset by Union men demanding cheers for their leader.<sup>11</sup> 2. He had entered the political arena only because of the strong chance of defeating Morris, and when he failed to do this, having no desire to lead the opposition for four years, he resigned, and used the alleged disloyalty of the Union leader as his excuse. Morine supported the first of these explanations as attested by the following extract from his writings: "Displeased with the dominance of Coaker in the coalition opposition, Bond resigned the leadership in 1914..."<sup>12</sup>

Bond certainly showed none of his early skill as a party leader in this campaign. Coaker accused him of spending the three weeks

8. Ibid, Jan. 12, 1914, p. 5. See also, The Fishermen's Advocate, Jan. 15, 1914, p. 4.

9. The Fishermen's Advocate, Jan. 15, 1914, p. 4.

10. Coaker, "F.P.U. Progress, 1909 to 1919", (The History of the F. P. U., edited by W. F. Coaker) p. 190.

11. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 29.

12. "Second Draft of Morine's History of Newfoundland", Ch. 10, p. 16.

previous to the election in his own district of Twillingate,<sup>13</sup> which was strongly Liberal in both the previous elections and was also one of the strongholds of the F.P.U. Had he spent these three weeks touring the districts of the south coast and Conception Bay, he might have succeeded in winning some of the seats in these regions which had returned Morris candidates by small majorities.

Bond's resignation left Twillingate with only two representatives, whereupon Coaker resigned his seat for the district of Bonavista and was declared the Twillingate representative by acclamation.<sup>14</sup> The debating ability of the Liberal-Union team had suffered greatly through Bond's resignation and it was hoped that this deficiency could be filled by an experienced, able speaker. The choice was A. B. Morine who had represented Bonavista for twenty years before his return to his homeland (Ontario), in

<sup>15</sup> 1906. In respect to the choice of Morine for the Bonavista seat, Coaker wrote:

One of the reasons why I resigned my seat for Bonavista was to strengthen the opposition party in the House of Assembly by the addition of the able debater and brilliant orator, Mr. Morine, whose long public experience will be of utmost importance and assistance in opposing the Government's recklessness and extravagance for although he will stand for Bonavista as an independent candidate, he is opposed to the Government. 16.

Coaker's choice of A. B. Morine as the representative for Bonavista

13. The Fishermen's Advocate, Jan. 17, 1914, p. 1

14. The Mail and Advocate, Oct. 24, 1914, p. 5.

15. Ibid, Nov. 7, 1914, p. 5.

16. Ibid, Oct. 24, 1914, p. 5.

indicates the difficulty of finding suitable representatives among his followers, and also his perturbation when faced with the possibility of opposing his political opponents in the House backed only by his seven untried followers and four Liberal allies. In spite of this ill beginning the members of the Liberal-Union Party worked in harmony during the years from 1914 to 1917 under the leadership of James M. Kent (Liberal, St. John's East), and during the fifth session (1917), under that of Dr. W. F. Lloyd (Liberal, Trinity)<sup>17</sup>. This harmony existed in the sense that each party opposed the Government and not because of any unity of purpose. Coaker regarded his position in the House as leader of the Union section of the opposition. On one occasion during this period he said: "...occupying as I do the important position of the leader of a party in this House..."<sup>18</sup> Further proof that the Union Party had remained a separate body can be found in the equal distribution of Cabinet posts between the two parties which had previously made up the Opposition, when a National Government was formed in 1917.<sup>19</sup>

It can be argued that the people of the northern districts of Newfoundland had won self-government for the first time in the election of 1913, for the Union members were in reality, as well as in name, representatives of the fishermen, who were, by far, the majority of the voters in these districts. During the half century of Responsible Government preceding the 1913 election,

17. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 119.

18. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1917, p. 42.

19. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., 119.

the northern fishermen had been represented by either local merchants who were interested only in maintaining the old conditions of economic dependence which made thousands of fishermen their slaves, or professional politicians from St. John's, who had no further interest in their districts after they were elected.

The election of 1913 brought the following changes. 1. The Union members, with few exceptions, were selected from the "toiling class". 2. They were selected by the District Councils of the F.P.U., which represented the whole district. 3. The District Councils could keep the representatives informed about the conditions and needs of the district. 4. The representatives were obliged to take an oath to resign if called upon to do so by the District Council.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the F.P.U. succeeded in creating a greater measure of democracy in the northern districts, and in this respect it was regrettable that the movement did not spread throughout the whole country. The following quotation from Coaker's maiden speech in the Assembly indicated the change which the F.P.U. had accomplished:

...Our presence here indicates something unusual. It is not by accident that we have come here. A revolution, though a peaceful one, has been brought about in Newfoundland. The fisherman, the common man, the toiler of Newfoundland, has made up his mind that he is going to be represented upon the floors of the House to a larger extent than he ever was before; and the day will come, Mr. Speaker, when the fishermen of Newfoundland will have the controlling power in the House...The common man all over the world...has made up his mind that the future is going to be a different thing from what the past has been...They are going to be represented and to have a voice in the making of the laws of their country. 21

20. See above, Ch. 3, p. 47.

21. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1914,  
p. 37.



During the same session, John Abbott, Union member for Bonavista, made the following observation: "It is only by Union that the masses can hope for proper treatment, and by placing the F. P. U. on the floors of this Assembly they are taking the proper steps to have their voice heard in legislation and to make our politics honest and clean."<sup>22</sup> This was not only the opinion of the Union members in the House of Assembly but the sentiment of the northern districts, that were afire with the determination to create a government over which they themselves exercised some control. Truly, the F.P.U. had become more than a union or a co-operative for it was not only responsible for creating a new political party, but also a new attitude towards government among its thousands of followers.

The seven men who accompanied Coaker to the House as F.P.U. members were 1. R. G. Winsor, fisherman, manager of F.P.U. store, Newtown, Chairman of Bonavista District Council, Member for Bonavista. 2. John Abbott, fisherman, manager of the F.P.U. store, Bonavista, and the third member for the Bonavista District. 3. John Stone, boat-builder, manager of the F.P.U. store, Catalina, Member for Trinity. 4. Archibald Targett, tinsmith, second Union member for Trinity. 5. William Halfyard, Principal of the Methodist school at Catalina for 15 years, Cashier of F.P.U. Trading Company, Union member for Fogo. 6. Walter Jennings, fisherman, Union member for Twillingate, 7. George Grimes, clerk (St. John's), manager of the dry goods department of the Union

22. Ibid, p. 339.

Trading Company Store at Port Union, Union member for Port de  
 23  
 Grave.

A. B. Morine, who was closely associated with the F.P.U. as  
 legal advisor, Union-backed <sup>member</sup> for Bonavista (1913-1919); and the  
 greatest opponent of the F.P.U. and its leader after 1919, de-  
 scribed the Union Party as follows:

The elected unionists and their successors from time to  
 time, were, upon the whole, good types of the class, but  
 not qualified to be legislators. They had one-track minds,  
 through lack of liberal education and political experience,  
 and after their first deliverances subsided into abject  
 dependence upon Coaker, whose erratic leadership they  
 blindly followed through morasses of governmental extra-  
 vagance and corruption. 24

They were certainly, for the greater part, uneducated, all were  
 without political experience and there was a great deal of de-  
 pendence placed on their leader. However, had Morine been fair  
 in his criticism, he would have noted also the accomplishments  
 of this group; for in spite of their disadvantages, they did  
 accomplish much during the years from 1914 to 1917.

Their first concerted action was to clarify their position in  
 the House; that is, why they were there and what they aimed to  
 do. They made it clear that they were sent there by the fishermen  
 of the northern districts as their representatives to see that  
 their welfare was given every consideration. They would give their  
 support to the Government concerning any measure worthy of support  
 but would oppose strenuously any bill which was, in their opinion,  
 to the detriment of the country and the fishermen whom they

23. The Mail and Advocate, Dec. 24, 1914, p. 20.

24. "Second Draft of Morine's History of Newfoundland."  
 Ch. 10, p. 14.

represented.<sup>25</sup> They would use their power as members and would call on the 20,000 F.P.U. fishermen to oppose any measure that did not meet with their approval. They did not attempt to disguise their lack of education. They were plain fishermen and claimed to be nothing more. "We are here for the most part as fishermen, and not used to public speaking".<sup>26</sup> Statements of this kind were not made in the form of an apology. Coaker had convinced his followers that their calling was a noble one and that representation in the House was theirs by right. His fellow members admitted their lack of education on many occasions but never their inability to do what they were sent there to do. As fishermen they had an incontrovertable right to be there as representatives of their clan, and it was to protect the interests of their fellow toilers that they were there. But for one or two exceptions they spoke the dialects of their nothern districts which did not prevent them from voicing their opinions on any issue under discussion. They wore the rough clothing of the fishermen but each was conscious of his work and gave no attention to the ridicule of his opponents. X

After each member had made his maiden speech, a campaign to investigate every phase of Government activity during the previous term began. No stone was left unturned in an attempt to discover any dishonest practice of the preceding administration. They not only demanded information from the various Government

25. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1915, p. 262.

26. Ibid. 1914, p. 339. (R. G. Winsor.)

27  
 departments but insisted that it be released. On one occasion, Coaker threatened to move an Address to the Governor asking to have certain information produced which he had asked for, if it were not tabled immediately.<sup>28</sup>

( They not only investigated all Government expenditure but also all appointments and dismissals, discrepancies in salaries for similar work, increases in salaries where no particular reason was evident, and appointments to responsible positions of inefficient and unqualified workers. What the Opposition brought to light, the press carried to the people, and in this way thousands of "questionable actions" were made known. The same untiring energy which they were wont to apply to their own work as fishermen they now applied to their task of opposing the Government.

They did not oppose for the sake of opposition but with the honest desire to improve. Coaker emphasized this policy when he said:

It is true that we have criticized the Government, but we have done so fairly, and we have not made any personal attacks whatever. The Government must expect to be attacked because what else are we here for...There are matters of importance that the people want to know about, and for that reason I have asked for information concerning them. 29

Mr. W. Halfyard, in a similar attempt to explain the constant demand of the Union Party for information said "Our constituents are constantly asking us to inquire into various public matters. They want everything ventilated, and it is our duty to get them the information they want."<sup>30</sup>

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., 1915, pp. 309, 310.

29. Ibid., 1914, p. 309.

30. Ibid., p. 311.

Coaker proved to be the most hot-tempered of the Union team and on several occasions he became involved in heated arguments with Sir Michael Cashin, who was at that time Minister of Finance. Occasionally they were forced to apologize by the Speaker for their respective insults.<sup>31</sup> Even this experience, Coaker tried to turn to his own advantage by claiming that it was inexcusable on the part of the Minister of Finance, with his long parliamentary experience, but should be excused in his own case on the grounds of ignorance.<sup>32</sup>

Coaker, as the leader and founder of the Union Party, bore the brunt of the struggle, but his seven associates were also active opposition members. He showed the same boundless energy in the House as he had shown when engaged in the herculean task of organizing the F.P.U. To participate in such a manner necessitated a great amount of work on the part of the Union members. Nevertheless, the little group continued to exert itself and in no way relaxed until the formation of the National Government in 1917.<sup>33</sup>

The Union members took pains to inform the country that their stand on any question was in accordance with instructions from their districts. Their decision to back a bill, oppose it or recommend amendments could, on almost every occasion, be backed up by some decision of an Annual Convention, or petition from a District

31. Ibid, 1916, pp. 441-445.

32. Ibid, p. 445

33. See below, Ch. 4, p. 29

or Local Council. In this way their stand on any issue assumed an importance disproportionate to their numbers; for they were ever ready to show that their party demands were those of their district by the simple expedient of asking their constituents, a great number of whom were F.P.U. members, to forward petitions to the Government or the Governor.

In spite of the days of deadlock, the Morris Government of 1913-1917 accomplished much useful and desirable legislation, a great deal of which was the result of the patient efforts of the Union members. Several measures adopted by the Government had their origin in persistent Union demands. [The Government, with its majority of 21 to 15, could kill any bill originating in the Opposition, but in sponsoring such bills the Opposition showed itself the champion of the working people and the Government could oppose such measures only at the risk of losing its appeal.]

During their first session in the House of Assembly (1914), the Union members attempted to carry out their campaign promises concerning new legislation to govern the operation of the logging and the sealing industries. The Logging Bill, which was introduced by Coaker, attempted to prevent the exploitation of the loggers by improving their wages and living conditions.<sup>34</sup> The Premier took exception to the clause respecting minimum wages but after some slight amendments, it passed through the House without a dissenting vote.<sup>35</sup> However, it was turned down by the Legislative Council.

34. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1914,  
pp. 561-564.

35. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 80.

During the following session, (1915), it passed both branches of the Legislature and received the assent of the Governor on June 5, 1915.<sup>36</sup> Before attempting to draft this bill Coaker visited the logging camps (winter of 1914). He examined every aspect of the logger's life and work. The sleeping arrangements, food, medical care, the wage level and provisions for proper sanitation all met his critical eye and all were considered in the bill which he drafted.<sup>37</sup>

The F.P.U., from its beginning, showed itself interested in living conditions aboard the sealing ships and in the apparent dwindling of the seal herd. In the spring of 1912, Coaker addressed a mass meeting of sealers at St. John's<sup>38</sup> and during the same spring, acting on behalf of the F.P.U. members, made an agreement with the St. John's sealing firms whereby better food and accommodations<sup>m</sup> would be provided for the sealers, and measures taken for the protection of the old seals.<sup>39</sup> Many of the sealing firms<sup>40</sup> lived up to their promises. A bill embodying the terms of the 1912 agreement was introduced to the House in February, 1914, but<sup>41</sup> was considerably amended by the Legislative Council. During the

36. Journal of the Assembly, Newfoundland, 1915, p. 156.

37. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1914 pp. 561-564.

38. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 67

39. The Fishermen's Advocate, Jan. 20, 1912, p. 1.

40. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 68.

41. Ibid, p. 81.



following spring, Coaker decided to improve his knowledge of the industry by joining the S.S. Nasconie,<sup>42</sup> one of the ships of the sealing fleet, for the spring's voyage. During this same spring two great disasters occurred which together took the lives of 251<sup>43</sup> men. Coaker called these disasters "The price of negligence and indifference".<sup>44</sup> Some of the clauses of the 1914 bill were designed to prevent accidents of this nature from occurring. During the sixth Annual Convention (Nov. 1914), Coaker stated: "These amendments in some cases, greatly interfere with the successful operation of the measure, and I would like to review the whole Act and draft Amendments in view of making the new law more effective and workable, as well as to propose additions to the Act, calculated to reduce the possibilities of loss of life...in future."<sup>45</sup> When the House opened in 1915, Coaker had a much greater knowledge of the industry. His sealing voyage plus the great attention which he gave to the matter after the 1914 disasters made him a formidable champion of the sealers' cause in the House during this session. The tragic experience of the previous year made the Government more reluctant to oppose his suggestions.

A commission was appointed in the spring of 1914 to enquire into the disasters.<sup>46</sup> The recommendations of this commission, in the form of a bill, were introduced to the House by the Premier, Sir Edward

42. The Daily Mail, St. John's, April 11, 1914, p. 4.  
See Also, Coaker (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 84.
43. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 84
44. The Daily Mail, April 11, 1914, p. 4.
45. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 81.
46. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1915, p. 27.

47

Morris. In introducing this bill the Premier suggested that it might contain other matters relevant to the seal fishery if the House so desired.<sup>48</sup> The eight Union members of the Assembly and their northern followers thought that it should contain much more.

The 1915 session, while the disasters with all their unpleasant details were fresh in the minds of the people, was an opportune time to force the Government, and through it, the sealing firms, to concede every possible step that would be an advantage to the sealers. Consequently, Coaker, his followers and Liberal allies, carried out a continuous struggle during the 1915 session. However, "...Both bills [The Sealing Bill and a bill to regulate the price of Labrador fish] were so altered by the Legislative Council as to make them unacceptable and they were therefore killed."<sup>49</sup> During the following session (1916), the Sealing Bill passed both branches of the Legislature and on May 4, 1916, received the official sanction<sup>50</sup> of the Governor.

The agitation of the Liberal-Union Party in the House of Assembly and the demands of the F.P.U. Councils resulted in other legislation equal in importance to that already described. The list of bills presented for the Governor's signature during the years from 1914<sup>51</sup> to 1916 have a striking similarity to the "Bonavista platform", for much of the legislation which the Union Party promised was added to the Statute Book during these three years. The Liberal-Union Party must be given a great deal of credit for these laws for

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid.

49. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 97

50. Journal of the Assembly, Newfoundland, 1916, p. 108.

51. Ibid., 1914, pp. 133-135; 1915, pp. 154-155; 1916, pp. 106-108.

it brought their necessity to the attention of the Government and the people. The following bills passed during these three years were a tribute to the efforts of the Opposition: 1. An Act to amend the law relating to the representation in the House of Assembly; 2. An Act to provide for the investigation of combines and monopolies; 3. Local Affairs Act; 4. Act to encourage ship-building; 5. An Act to reorganize the Department of Marine and Fisheries. Undoubtedly, the Government drafted or amended these bills as they wished and they were further altered by the Legislative Council. Yet they were still capable of fulfilling the purpose for which they were originally planned.

The year 1917, the final session of Liberal-Union opposition, brought a struggle of a different kind. In the fall of 1916, Premier Morris, with other Commonwealth Premiers, ~~was~~ called to London for an Imperial Conference and his late return delayed the opening of the House until May 30.<sup>52</sup> The Government was now faced with a serious problem. According to constitutional procedure an election was required in the fall of 1917, but many of the other self-governing Dominions declined to hold an election during the war as it would tend to prevent a united effort. Morris was inclined to avoid the election if possible and on his return attempted to create a coalition with the Opposition leader, Dr. W. Lloyd.<sup>53</sup> Morris also realized that his Government had failed to solve many pressing problems brought about by the war, which only

52. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1917, p. 3.

53. Ibid, pp. 23, 315.

a National Government could ever hope to solve. No party government would attempt to introduce conscription and yet it had apparently become a necessity as it was impossible to keep up the strength of the Newfoundland Regiment by recruiting.<sup>54</sup> Thus, at a time when unity was imperative, the country was divided into two camps - the Liberal-Union Party and its norther<sup>n</sup> supporters who wanted a fall election (1917); the People's Party and its southern supporters who wanted the election postponed till the end of the war. The Liberal-Union Party and its supporters should not be considered unpatriotic for they had ample grounds for their opinions. Shortly after the outbreak of war, the Opposition offered to form a coalition with the Government and kept the offer open until the end of December, 1916.<sup>55</sup> When the Government signified its wish for a coalition in May, 1917, the Opposition believed that the sole purpose of this offer was to avoid an election. The Liberal-Union Party made it clear to the House that now it was their turn to refuse the coalition which the People's Party had refused to consider since the beginning of the war. On June 14, Coaker stated in the House: "I regret that we have not been able to accept the Government's invitation to form a coalition Government...if the Government had come to us in the earlier stages of the war we would have done all that lay in our power to assist them in such a crisis, but three years have gone by...in which we have not been considered at all."<sup>56</sup> On June 22, Dr. Lloyd, the leader of the

54. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 118. See also, The Weekly Advocate, June 29, 1918, p. 5.

55. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1917, p. 315.

56. Ibid, p. 171.

Opposition, made the following statement:

...we left the door open until December last because we had hoped that the Government was ready to deal fairly with us, and not drive [delay] the formation of a National Government until the term of the Assembly was almost over.. We were willing to risk unpopularity, if the Government was willing to join at any reasonable time in the term of the Assembly.. 57

Thus the Liberal-Union Party felt justified in declining the last minute offer of their political opponents to form a National Government, and claimed that the sole purpose of this offer was to avoid an appeal to the electorate.

When the House met in April, 1917, the Government had a choice of adopting one of three steps. It could unite with the Opposition to form a National Government; it could use its majority in the House to bring in a bill for an extension of parliament; or it could make the necessary preparations for an election during the following fall. As already noted, the Morris Government decided to attempt to form a National Government and was immediately turned down by the Opposition. Having refused to coalesce the Opposition, before taking any further action, decided to await the passing of the Estimates which would inform them whether any provision had been made for an autumn election.

When the Estimates were brought before the House with no provision for an election,<sup>58</sup> the Opposition informed the House of its decision to fight the Government to the full extent of its power. On June 14, 1917, Dr. Lloyd informed the House of this decision

57. Ibid, p. 316.

58. Ibid, pp. 148-149.

in the following words:

...but we are not prepared to let the Estimates go through and then find ourselves in the position of having an extension bill forced through because of your majority..We are going to make a stand now... if you make up your mind to have an election, we will aid you in putting them through as early as possible. But if you intend to bring in a Bill to put off an election, we will fight you. 59

During the same day Coaker stated: "If you attempt to prolong the life of this Government, you will have the people rise up against you; you will turn the country upside down.." <sup>60</sup> Coaker threatened that he would bring the 20,000 F.P.U. members into the fight.

Thus the result of the refusal of the Government to signify its intention regarding the impending election, was a filibuster which began on June 14 and continued to July 16. At this time the Premier announced that a National Government had been formed. <sup>61</sup> The new Government was created on the basis of equality, with an equal number of Cabinet members selected from the People's Party and from the Liberal-Union Opposition. <sup>62</sup> The Cabinet was increased from nine members to twelve members and consisted of the following men: Hon. E. Morris, Hon. M.P. Cashin, Hon. J.R. Bennett, Hon. R. A.

Squires, Hon. J. C. Crosbie, Hon. M.P. Gibbs, Hon. W.F. Lloyd, Hon. J.A. Clift, Hon. W. F. Coaker, Hon. A. E. Hickman, Hon. W.W. Halfyard, Hon. W. J. Ellis. <sup>63</sup> In addition, John G. Stone (Liberal-

59. Ibid, p. 175.

60. Ibid, p. 176.

61. Ibid, p. 468.

62. Ibid, p. 470. See also, Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., P. 118.

63. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1917, p. 469. See also, The Evening Advocate, Dec. 22, 1917, p. 4, for Cabinet Ministers and Their Positions. See also, Year Book of Newfoundland, 1918, (St. John's, Newfoundland, J. W. Withers, King's Printer, 1918), p. 17. The first six were members of the People's Party, the last six, Liberal-Union Party.

-Union Member for Trinity) and William Woodford (People's Party member for Harbour Main) were made heads of departments but not members of the Executive Council.<sup>64</sup>

The Opposition undoubtedly held out for an election until the terms offered by the Government were liberal enough to cause a change in policy. Coaker explained the necessity for such a step to the F.P.U. Convention in 1917, in the following words:

A condition of affairs had presented itself in the House of Assembly that demanded strong action by the Government. The Country desired...protection for the people against profiteering, the possible expenditure of a large amount to purchase steamers to export fish, the importation of food and coal...the keeping of the Regiment intact, the raising of a large loan for war expenditure,...the necessity of securing financial support for the treasury by placing a tax on surplus war profits...and after much consideration the Opposition Party unanimously decided to consent to the formation of a National Government... 65

Sir Edward Morris was destined to lead this Government for a very short period for he resigned on December 31, 1917.<sup>66</sup> During his last four months in office, Dr. Lloyd was Acting Premier. Morris, having spent this period in London, had ceased to lead the National Government almost immediately after its formation. He was officially succeeded by Dr. Lloyd on January 5, 1918.<sup>67</sup>

A. B. Morine explained Sir Edward's resignation in the following manner: "In the 1917 session of the Legislature a Conscription Act was passed which could not have been enacted without the support of Coaker, who perhaps made the change from Morris to Lloyd

64. Year Book of Newfoundland, 1918, p. 17.

65. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 118.

66. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 30

67. The Weekly Advocate, Jan. 5., 1918, p. 4.



the price of his support!"<sup>68</sup> Whatever the cause, Sir Edward's resignation left the Liberal-Union Party with one of its members as Premier and with a majority of seats in the Cabinet. In Coaker's own words: "The formation of the National Government ended the Morris administration and ushered in the first Fishermen's Govern-<sup>69</sup>ment the Colony ever possessed."

The years from 1914 to 1918 can be considered as the apex of F.P.U. political importance. During this period, the union members, though few in number, made up an active, virile party which maintained its individuality in spite of its coalition with the Liberals. In no other period did it achieve so much in the form of legislation or was it so popular with the northern fishermen.

68. "Second draft of Morine's History of Newfoundland", Ch. 10, p. 24-25.

69. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 120.

## Chapter 5

The Commercial Activity of the F. P. U.

The union that Coaker planned to establish, he claimed during his first address to a group of fishermen, would aim to protect them from traders, fish-exporters and the government.<sup>1</sup> The union, from its first Annual Convention (1909), began to play an important and ever growing political role.<sup>2</sup> Its achievements in the commercial field, initially planned to free the fishermen from the merchant and the exporter, though less spectacular, were also important.

In examining the commercial activity of the F.P.U. it is important to remember that there was no fixed or pre-conceived plan but each endeavour was the result of Coaker's attempt to provide for some immediate demand of the organization he had created. It is also important to remember that, at the beginning, the F.P.U. had neither funds, nor experienced business leaders, nor premises of any kind and its business activity was limited until funds could be raised, leaders trained and suitable headquarters acquired. In addition to these difficulties, it was inevitable that the existing commercial class would oppose the F.P.U. commercial efforts in every way.

F.P.U. activity was, at first, along co-operative lines. Consumer goods needed by the fishermen were supplied to them through the Local Councils of their union. The President of the F.P.U. took orders from the various Local Councils and supplied their

1. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 1

2. See above, Chapters III and IV.

needs at cost price. There was no necessity for profit, as this work was one of the duties of the F.P.U. President. During the Convention of 1909 plans were finalized whereby goods were bought wholesale at St. John's to supply orders from the Local Councils.<sup>3</sup> To make this type of service effective, an office was required in St. John's and Coaker requested and received this authority from the delegates of the first Annual Convention, (1909).<sup>4</sup> In his address to the second Annual Convention (1910), Coaker said: "The office at St. John's has conferred very material benefits upon members...by causing the price of codfish and oil to advance and [by] cutting down the price of provisions where branches are working."<sup>5</sup> This system proved inconvenient, as in practice it was difficult to supply Local Councils except on an annual basis and<sup>6</sup> even then only a limited number of commodities could be supplied.

The need for a more practical system was voiced by Coaker during the Annual Convention of 1910 in these words: "I strongly recommend the establishment of cash stores to accommodate the business of members at settlements [where] branches contain at least two hundred members."<sup>7</sup> A committee appointed to consider this recommendation empowered the President to organize such stores and also assured him that the Supreme Council would assume responsibility<sup>8</sup> for his action in all matters concerning these stores.

3. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 3.

4. Ibid, p. 15.

5. Ibid, p. 15.

6. Ibid, p. 16

7. Ibid,

8. Ibid, p. 26.

During the following year (1911), four branch stores were established. Three of the four were located in the Notre Dame Bay settlements of Botwood, Change Islands and Doting Cove, and the fourth at King's Cove, Bonavista Bay. The number of cash stores continued to increase during the following years and reached a peak of 40 in 1917. The table below shows the numerical growth of Union cash stores over the period from 1911 to 1918, as well as the dividends paid by the Union Trading Company over the same period.

Year	Number of Cash Stores Established	Total Number in Operation	Dividends Paid Union Trading Co. Per Cent
1911	4	4	-
1912	10	14	10
1913	12	24	10
1914	2	20	8
1915	6	26	10
1916	7	33	10
1917	7	40	10
1918	-	40	10

Note that the growth was steady from 1911 to 1917, except for 1914 when only two stores were opened and six previously established were closed down. Coaker gave the following explanation:

"Owing to conditions created by the war, which affected the demand for goods, we closed a few small stores...." <sup>11</sup> The real cause for the

9. Ibid, p. 29.

10. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., Annual Convention reports from 1911 to 1918.

11. Ibid, p. 82.

closing of these stores may be attributed to the poor choice of location. The union leaders had to learn through experience the nature of the settlements that would be a suitable centre for a store. When certain stores established during the previous three years did not pay, and had no hope of paying in the immediate future, they were abandoned. In an attempt to avoid the opposition of the union members in these six settlements, Coaker laid the blame for closing the stores on conditions created by the war.<sup>12</sup> Another difficult task which confronted the union leader was the problem of finding suitable men to manage these stores. There were few available men with managerial ability and the supply was further limited by the F.P.U. desire to place its own members in these positions whenever possible.<sup>13</sup>

Coaker created the outport cash stores<sup>14</sup> to make the fishermen independent of the local merchants. There is some possibility that he formulated the plan for the system himself, but it is more likely that he had applied what he learned of similar institutions in other countries to his particular problem in northern Newfoundland. It is evident that he attempted to gain knowledge of similar institutions from the following quotation: "I have had some correspondence with a Fishermen's Association in Scotland, which will show us what those fishermen are doing regarding the advancement of their affairs."<sup>15</sup>

12. See above, Ch. 5, p. 84

13. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 26

14. See appendices for settlements where cash stores existed.

15. Coaker, (ed), The History of the F.P.U., p. 3.

When the first cash stores were established in 1911, they were supplied by the F.P.U. office at St. John's, which was established in 1909. The supplies were bought wholesale from St. John's firms and forwarded to the various stores. Thus the Union cash stores, and through them, the fishermen, were still dependent on the St. John's merchants. Under these conditions it was apparent that a central wholesale business concern, that would supply the branch stores, was a necessity. This need was supplied by the Union Trading Company, which was incorporated in the fall of 1911, and started business on the first of May, 1912. Its purpose was to import merchandise to sell to union members and to supply Union stores.<sup>16</sup> In his address to the Annual Convention of 1912, Coaker said: "Without such a Company Union Stores could not exist. Without it the Union would always be at the mercy of the merchants, who deal in supplies here."<sup>17</sup>

The infant company found it difficult to acquire capital. Shares were sold only to F.P.U. members. These fishermen to whom Coaker appealed had suffered for centuries from a pernicious "credit system" and besides were reluctant to invest their earnings in any manner since the bank crash of 1894. Perhaps Coaker's greatest accomplishment was his success in persuading his fishermen followers to buy shares in F.P.U. sponsored companies. He appealed to them as their friend, their benefactor and their fellow-toiler. He continually reminded them that he had nothing to gain, that he desired only to help them, that he had no desire to retain the

16. Ibid, p. 46

17. Ibid.

position of manager of the Union Trading Company. "My ambition," he told his followers in November, 1911, "is to remain as I am, a poor man."<sup>18</sup>

Coaker adopted two other policies which he hoped would increase the sale of shares. In the first place, he made it necessary for any union settlement that wished a cash store to purchase a definite number of shares, and at the same time he tried to persuade the members of settlements that had cash stores to increase their share holdings, "...in order to provide capital to meet the increasing demands for larger stocks and increased sales."<sup>19</sup> In the second place, he attempted to prove to the fishermen that investment in the Union Trading Company would be profitable by declaring a dividend of 10 per cent during the first year of its operation and a total of 68 per cent during the seven years from 1912 to 1918.<sup>20</sup>

Capital was urgently needed, not only to procure stock, but to purchase or build suitable premises in the outports where business was carried on. When convenient, the Union Trading Company bought stores and enlarged and improved them where necessary. When suitable premises could not be bought, a portion of the waterfront was acquired, and wharves and buildings were constructed. Each branch when completed consisted of a retail store, fish store, salt shed and a pier capable of accom<sup>m</sup>odating trading schooners. Many of these branches are still in operation with little alteration since they

18. Ibid, p. 31.

19. Ibid, p. 46.

20. Ibid, p. 127.



were constructed almost half a century ago.

In building, enlarging or repairing the outport cash stores, the F.P.U. members of the settlements concerned often gave free labour. In other instances they were paid in Union Trading Co. stock. Some of the councils which possessed stores erected them without cost to the Union Trading Company.<sup>21</sup>

Coaker's campaign to raise funds by encouraging his followers to invest in Union Trading Company shares proved to be successful. During the year the company was incorporated, 1912, 600 fishermen purchased shares to the value of \$31,000, an average of approximately \$50 each. During the same year the company transacted over a quarter of a million dollars worth of trade.<sup>22</sup> By 1916, the value of the shares held by the fishermen had risen to \$300,000, the number of shareholders to 3,000 and the value of the trade to over one and one half million dollars.<sup>23</sup>

Through the cash stores and the Union Trading Company, the F.P.U. adopted methods common to co-operatives all over the world. The capital with which the stores operated was supplied by the F.P.U. members and the annual profits distributed among the fishermen shareholders. During the Annual Convention of 1918, Coaker called the Union Trading Company "...a co-operative concern owned entirely by working people."<sup>24</sup> However, the Union Trading Company failed to be truly co-operative in that only a small percentage of F.P.U. members were shareholders. All F.P.U. members could trade at Union

21. The Weekly Advocate, Jan. 5, 1918, p. 1

22. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 54.

23. Ibid, p. 107.

24. Ibid, p. 128.

stores but only those who were shareholders had reason to be concerned with the success of these stores. This seems to have been the weakest link in the commercial undertakings planned by Coaker for the F.P.U. All union fishermen were invited to trade at union cash stores; but since relatively few of these fishermen were shareholders, the undertaking failed to be co-operative and could be classed with the other mercantile establishments which Coaker had taught his followers to hate. The only real difference was that the profits from the Union Trading Company were divided among greater numbers.

In failing to organize the Union Trading Company along co-operative lines, Coaker was responsible for creating an organization in which the majority of his fishermen followers had no interest, which contributed greatly to the difficulties with which this organization was later faced.

The next step in his plan to make the fishermen independent of the merchants was the creation of a company to export the products of the Union fishermen to the world's markets. In April, 1915,<sup>25</sup> the Union Export Co. was organized to carry out this role. During the sixth Annual Convention of the Supreme Council, Coaker stated that the attempts of the merchant opponents of the F.P.U. to kill the Union Trading Company made the formation of an export company necessary. During the same convention he stated that he had planned this company "...to make sure that the independent fishermen's interest will not be sacrificed by big fish buyers and Government

25. Ibid, p. 97. See also, The Mail and Advocate, Dec. 5, 1914.

26

intolerance and indifference."

The Union Export Company was managed by a board of directors, and the F.P.U. leader became its president.<sup>27</sup> The sale of shares was not limited to Union members as with the Union Trading Company.<sup>28</sup> However, Coaker offered fishermen a bonus on all fish sold to this company in the hope that this incentive would encourage them to buy its shares.<sup>29</sup>

Although the Export Company was planned in 1914 and organized in 1915, it did not function as an exporter of fishery products until 1917, because of the necessity of planning and building suitable premises at a location chosen for this purpose at Catalina, on the north shore of Trinity Bay.<sup>30</sup>

As soon as Coaker's plan for an export company was sanctioned by the Annual Convention of 1914, he began the search for suitable premises that could be used for the handling, packing and shipping of fish. It was impossible to acquire a suitable location at St. John's, with the limited funds at the disposal of the F.P.U. Besides, the opposition to the F.P.U. was such that no St. John's property owner would consider selling to it.<sup>31</sup> Even before the establishment of the Export Company, Coaker thought it would be an advantage to operate from some outpost because "The taxes and charges in St. John's are enormous..."<sup>32</sup>

There were hundreds of suitable harbours throughout the Union districts but the presence of ice along the coast during the winter and spring made it necessary to limit the choice to a port south

26. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 83.

27. The Mail and Advocate, Dec. 5, 1914.

28. See above, Ch. 5, p. 86

29. The Mail and Advocate, Dec. 5, 1914.

30. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 81.

31. Ibid.

32. Coaker, (ed.) The History of the F.P.U., p. 46.

of Cape Bonavista. Coaker attempted to make the location for the union enterprise as central as the geography of the country would permit. Therefore the north shore of Trinity Bay was the natural selection. The two possible ports in this area were Trinity and Catalina. Both had good natural harbours and access to the Bonavista branch of the Newfoundland Railway. There is evidence that Coaker favoured Trinity as his choice for union development but the merchant opposition in that town had proved too strong.<sup>33</sup>

During the Convention of 1912, two years before the planning of the Export Company, Coaker referred to Catalina as a suitable out-port base for union commercial establishments.<sup>34</sup> He was familiar with this port as the convention of 1910 was held there.<sup>35</sup> The harbour was a commodious one and the site chosen was acquired for the sum of \$500. One hundred years before, a Scottish firm, operated by a man called Thomson, was located in the same spot.<sup>36</sup>

No further move in the development of Catalina took place until the Seventh Annual Convention (1915), when plans were made to begin the actual building of a Union town.<sup>37</sup> During the winter of 1916 \$5,000 worth of timber was secured and in May of the same year the building of the F.P.U. premises began.<sup>38</sup> The greatest obstacle to the completion of this undertaking was the difficulty of obtaining funds. Coaker was obliged to appeal to the fishermen to buy more and more shares. The Eighth Annual Convention (1916), carried the following record of his appeal to the assembled F.P.U. delegates:

33. Bailey, Aaron, private interview, Port Union, July, 1958.

34. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 46.

35. See Appendices for time and place of Annual Conventions.

36. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 81.

37. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 97.

38. Ibid, p. 105. See also, Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 81.

"...I rely upon every man who can to aid the work by purchasing what shares their [his] means will afford. I expect Catalina members to respond nobly to their promise to take up a large slice of shares in return for free labour."<sup>39</sup>

During the early stage of the building of the F.P.U. headquarters at Catalina, no reference was made to it under the name "Port Union". The earliest recorded use of this name was in 1917,<sup>40</sup> when it was used during the annual convention of that year.

An idea of the extent of the Port Union premises can be estimated from the following description written by Coaker himself in 1932:

Hand in hand grew the Hydro Electric Plant, the Ship-building plant and the erection of dwelling houses and a church...an equipped Woodworking Factory and Store extension and a Sealoil Plant...

All the buildings are equipped with elevators and [other] labour saving appliances. The Fish Stores are the most modern and conveniently arranged in the country. Adjoining the Fish Stores...is the Drier capable of covering 150 quintals, and equipped with Electric Blowers, Fans and Heaters...At the other end of the Fish Store is situated the Salt Store and a Cooperage equipped with machinery that provides all the fish packages used on the plant...The Provision Stores, Machine Shop, a modern equipped Forge, Garages, Stables, Boiler House...are all constructed along the waterfront.

The Hall known as 'Congress Hall' was built by the F.P.U. ...The Trading Company owns 50 tenement houses...<sup>41</sup>

This accomplishment can be attributed to the foresight of the F.P.U. founder and to the unbounded faith which a great number of northern fishermen had in their leader. It could not have succeeded without the business acumen and daring spirit of the leader; not

39. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 106.

40. Ibid, p. 117.

41. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 83.

or without the faith of the fishermen which resulted in the investment of their meagre savings in the enterprise. The risk of such a venture and the difficulties of the founder were multiplied by the opposition of the merchant class. Fifteen years after its founding Coaker wrote: "Port Union is a compact, convenient, safe and self-contained commercial venture established by the northern fishermen in the face of bitter opposition of large commercial and financial interests. The obstacles it had to overcome were many and severe, and the whole history of its trials and perplexities will never be generally known."<sup>42</sup> In February, 1918, the F.P.U. moved its headquarters from St. John's to Port Union. However, the Union Publishing Company continued to operate from St. John's until 1924.<sup>43</sup>

The building of Port Union represented the high-water mark of Union accomplishment. It was the climax of the movement that had its humble beginning nine years before with a single local council of 20 members. It was a concrete sign of the strength and power that unity had brought to the northern fishermen. It was also a monument to Coaker who had planned and dared to establish both the union and the town.

Coaker planned to make Port Union a modern town which required some source of electric power to provide lights and to supply power for the electric elevators, etc. This power could only be acquired if the F.P.U. itself took measures to produce it. Coaker

<sup>42</sup>. Ibid, P. 83.

<sup>43</sup>. Coaker, (ed.), the History of the F.P.U., p. 127.



decided to harness the stream which ran through the town, and thereby produce power enough to supply not only the needs of the Union town, but of some of the nearby settlements as well. During the Seventh Annual Convention of the Supreme Council, Coaker informed the assembled delegates that it would be necessary to build a power plant at Catalina.<sup>44</sup> It was decided that the production of electric power would be entrusted to a company established for this purpose, called the Union Electric Light and Power Company. On May 4, 1916, the Governor gave his assent to an act which provided for the incorporation of this company.<sup>45</sup> The power plant at Port Union cost \$70,000,<sup>46</sup> but when we consider that it provided the comfort of electricity to thousands of fishermen's homes, throughout the Bonavista Peninsula for the last fifty years, and that this has been one of the few rural areas of the province that has been electrified until quite recently, we must agree that the money was well spent.

The introduction of steam to the sealing fleet, and the tendency to replace all sailing vessels by iron ships propelled by steam, deprived Newfoundland of a very important industry. Not only had the ship building yard employed many workers but it had also provided winter employment for many fishermen in cutting timber. It was indirectly responsible for creating additional labour, for all ships built had to be fitted with sails, rigged and manned. Coaker decided that this industry should be recreated, and under-

44. Ibid, p. 98.

45. Journal of the Assembly, Newfoundland, 1916, p. 107.

46. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.N., p. 134.



took two measures to achieve this aim. The primary part of his plan involved the establishment of a ship-building company with headquarters and building facilities at Port Union.<sup>47</sup> In addition, through the efforts of the Union Party, an act was passed by the Legislature which aimed to encourage ship-building.<sup>48</sup> This encouragement took the form of a guaranteed dividend of seven per cent on all capital invested in ship-building up to the amount of \$30,000. In addition, this Act increased the bounty from eight to sixteen dollars per ton, and permitted all shipbuilding material to enter the country free of duty.<sup>49</sup>

During the two years from 1918 to 1919, five vessels were built at Port Union with a total tonnage of 1,087.<sup>50</sup> In 1921, two vessels were built; in 1922, five. By 1925 a total of twenty-five had been completed and by 1928 the number was increased to thirty.<sup>51</sup> To improve his knowledge of the ship-building industry, Coaker visited the ship-building yards of Canada and the United States, particularly those of Shelbourne, Nova Scotia and took with him Captain Jones, who later became the chief builder at Port Union.<sup>52</sup>

The most important commercial venture of the F.P.U., in terms of the overall effects on the people of its time, was the Union Publishing Company. This company, by means of its weekly and daily papers, not only influenced the political life of its day but the commercial activity as well, for without its aid in appealing to

47. Ibid, p. 105.

48. Journal of the Assembly, Newfoundland, 1916, p. 106.

49. Proceedings of the Legislative Council, Newfoundland, 1916, pp. 77, 96.

50. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., pp. 127, 174.

51. Coaker, (ed.), Twenty Years of the F.P.U., pp. 203, 209, 237 and 387.

52. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1916, p. 47.

the people for funds, etc., the other commercial undertakings already described, in all probability would not have succeeded.

There was little hesitation on Coaker's part in respect to the power exerted by the press, and the possibilities that a fishermen's paper would give the person or persons who controlled it. During the first Annual Convention (1909), he urged the delegates present to set up a committee to study the matter. This committee recommended that a Union paper should be established without delay, that a circular be sent to all Local Councils soliciting subscriptions, that the subscription rate should not exceed fifty cents annually, and that the F.P.U. President be empowered to manage such a paper and arrange for its publication.

The first Fishermen's Advocate, February 12, 1910, was issued from Coakerville and was published by The Sun Printing Company, Twillingate, Notre Dame Bay. It consisted of two sheets, six by ten inches, and contained reports of the House of Assembly, Minutes of F.P.U. meetings, and copies of F.P.U. memorials to the Government. On March 5, 1910, a new enlarged edition was issued and on March 26 of the same year, it was again enlarged and its printing entrusted to Barnes and Company, 421 Water Street, St. John's. The issue of July 23, 1910 was the first to carry advertisements. After September 3, 1910, it was no longer issued from Coakerville, but from St. John's. It was printed by the Union Publishing Company as soon as that company was established

53. Ibid., p. 5.

54. Ibid.

55. The complete files of the Advocate, daily and weekly, exist at Port Union, Fishermen's Trading Co. premises.

56. The Island in Notre Dame Bay where Coaker had his farm, see Chapter 2, p. 20

in August, 1911. By 1912, it had grown to eight sheets of regulation size and had a circulation of 6,000 copies. In January, 1914, The Fishermen's Advocate was renamed The Mail and Advocate, which had both a daily and a weekly edition. In 1917, the Union Publishing Company acquired a building on Duckworth Street and installed Linotype Machines and other modern equipment, and, in addition to publishing a daily and weekly paper, did job printing as well.<sup>57</sup> When the Union Publishing Company was established in 1911, Coaker took measures to keep The Fishermen's Advocate under the control of the F.P.U. by permitting only fishermen to purchase shares in the company.<sup>58</sup>

The Fishermen's Advocate and its successor The Mail and Advocate proved to be very popular among the fishermen. Its influence was much greater than the circulation might indicate because in the first place, it reached practically every settlement on the east and north-east coasts, and in the second place, the custom of Local Councils of reading and discussing its editorials disseminated its opinions among the whole population. During the Fourth Convention of the Supreme Council, Coaker said:

The Advocate has become the most popular paper in the Colony...The Advocate has exposed transactions that has made the Government totter..it cares neither for Governor Williams or Donald Morrison...and before the present editor will shirk his duty in exposing the action of such men, he will resign the editorship. 59

As editor of the paper, Coaker was quite outspoken and as a result,

57. All information contained above in respect to The Fishermen's Advocate acquired from that paper found in the files at Port Union.

58. The Fishermen's Advocate, October 11, 1911, p. 2.

59. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 46.

60

it was often involved in libel suits. But because he dared to criticize the F.P.U. enemies, he and The Advocate became more and more popular with the fishermen. On one occasion (1912), he asked the Local Councils to contribute \$250 to pay the award granted to the claimant in a libel suit against The Advocate, and the resulting contributions amounted to over \$800.<sup>61</sup> During the Fourth Annual Convention of the Supreme Council, a committee appointed to reply to the President's address stated:

...we are more endeared then ever to our paper, and appreciate the help it has rendered our union and the cause of right and pure Government for the Colony.... we could not do without that paper, and we wish it every success...it is the greatest paper in the Colony today.. It has filled a longfelt want, and every toiler is delighted with it... 62

This committee, in respect to The Advocate, expressed the general opinion of the northern fishermen.

Coaker attempted to make his followers feel that since they had financed the Union Publishing Company, The Advocate belonged to them, and that they should be proud of their paper. During the fifth Annual Convention of the Supreme Council he said: "...the fishermen have been plucky enough to establish and maintain a paper of their own..."<sup>63</sup> During the same address he stated: "Let it be your proud boast, and the fishermen's glory that you do at least possess a paper which reaches all parts of the country, and is feared by every agency of evil that abounds in the Colony."<sup>64</sup>

60. The Government took 18 libel actions against The Advocate (see Fishermen's Advocate, January 27, 1912, p. 1.)

61. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 46.

62. Ibid, p. 54.

63. Ibid, p. 67.

64. Ibid.

Coaker claimed that no other Newfoundland paper could express a free opinion because each depended on the mercantile class for advertising, without which it could not exist. The Advocate was different, he asserted, in that although it solicited advertisements, it did not depend on this source of revenue. In fact, The Advocate, after it had built up a large circulation, had no shortage of advertising. However, its advertisements were not limited to those of a few large commercial establishments but included that of numerous retailers who took advantage of the extensive and widespread circulation and had no desire to control the paper's opinion on any issue. During the eighth Annual Convention of the Supreme Council (1910), Coaker stated:

The daily press has become a hireling press - controlled entirely by business and political interests - and the public cannot rely upon its utterances or trust its statements intended for the protection of the rights of the masses...Your paper is fearless and unpurchaseable and will defend right only and severely condemn wrong no matter by whom committed. Your paper is, therefore, the only guardian of the Public Conscience in the Colony. 65

The Advocate certainly proved itself the guardian of the fishermen's rights during the years when the Union Party was a part of the Opposition. When the formation of the National Government in 1917 made the Liberal-Union Party a part of the Government, The Advocate was wont to praise rather than condemn, to gloss over questionable Government action, that during the years from 1910 to 1917, it would have subjected to a searching criticism. In fact, it became a "hireling press" rather than a "guardian of the public conscience".

The four enterprises described above, namely, The Union Trading Company, The Union Export Company, The Union Shipbuilding Company and The Union Electric Light and Power Company, comprised the bulk of the F.P.U. commercial activity. The prosperity of the war years (1914-18), brought a measure of success to each, but the difficulties of disposing of salt cod and the general trade stagnation of the early twenties resulted in many difficulties. However, two of the Union sponsored companies, The Union Trading Company and The Union Light and Power Company, still operate (1959).

It is easy to praise and just as easy to condemn the F.P.U. ventures in the commercial field. Certainly they were praised enough by the F.P.U. and its sympathizers and condemned just as heartily by its commercial and political enemies. J. R. Smallwood, in an appreciation of Coaker's efforts, wrote: "There is not in Newfoundland a business man of keener judgment, greater ability or more decided success." <sup>66</sup> Even A.B. Morine after he had become one of Coaker's greatest critics admitted that "...his work was remarkable". <sup>67</sup>

The following are some of the beneficial results which sprang from the commercial efforts of the F.P.U.: 1. It brought at least a transient relief from the strangle hold which the merchants had over the country. 2. It introduced into the fisheries new methods of cure and attempted to control marketing. 3. It taught the fishermen the value of co-operative buying and selling. 4. It

66. (Smallwood, J.R.), A Sincere Appreciation of Newfoundland's Greatest Son, by "An Admirer", St. John's, Union Publishing Co., (before 1927) (Pamph.)

67. "Second Draft of Morine's History of Newfoundland", Ch. 10, p. 6.



succeeded in bringing electricity to a number of rural homes in many settlements of the Bonavista Peninsula. 5. It attempted with some success to re-create the local shipbuilding industry.

6. Through The Advocate, it made the fishermen cognisant of the affairs of their country and made them aware of the commercial and political power which was theirs<sup>s</sup> through union.

There were other effects that had stagnating and undesirable results on the country, of which the following are perhaps the most obvious: 1. After 1920, it helped to perpetuate the "credit system" which it had, during its early years, sworn to destroy. 2. The F.P.U. had declared itself the enemy of all combines during the early years of the movement but in 1917 its commercial activity had grown to such an extent that it could be and often was, regarded as being most guilty in this respect. 3. Through The Advocate the four commercial concerns described above exerted a greater control over the fishermen than any merchant politician had ever exerted during the pre-union days. 4. The dependence of the fishermen, F.P.U. personnel, and Union members on one man fostered the growth of the "demagogic" appeal of the Newfoundland politician.

Before criticizing the F.P.U. commercial endeavour too strongly perhaps it would be wise to note the words of the founder, written twenty years after the F. P. U. was established.

...I may have failed in some respects, but I can honestly assert that I have sincerely endeavoured to do a man's part towards the Country and towards those who trusted me, commercially and politically....

It will be someone's duty in coming years to write a history of our time, and when that is accomplished it will, if impartial, bestow a meed of praise on the good work of the F.P.U. 68



The Political Role of the F.P.U. after 1917.

The Union Party during the years from 1914 to 1917 proved itself a very active opponent of the Government and was also responsible for the introduction of several measures that improved the welfare of the fishermen. The period of Union opposition came to an end with the formation of the National Government in July, 1917. Dr. Lloyd, the Liberal-Union leader, became Premier on January 5, 1918, and from this time the National Government was dominated by the party of which he was leader. The primary motive for the foundation of this government was the need for certain war measures which the preceding administration failed to undertake. Consequently, it made no attempt to introduce any reform legislation, but restricted itself to the primary problems created by the war. The necessity of a conscription act was one of the principal reasons for the creation of this government.

Coaker was a strong patriot and deeply conscious of the need for Empire unity. When war broke out in 1914. he opposed the formation of a Newfoundland Regiment and favoured instead the sending of naval recruits to serve in the Royal Navy. He believed that any Newfoundlanders who preferred to serve in the army could join a Canadian regiment.<sup>1</sup> However, after The Newfoundland Regiment was formed, he supported all recruiting programmes. During the years from 1916 to 1917, he took part in forty five patriotic meetings.<sup>2</sup> In an address to the Annual Convention

1. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1918, p. 168

2. Ibid.

of 1916, he exhorted the assembled delegates to go to their respective settlements and encourage the young F.P.U. members to volunteer for service in the Newfoundland Regiment.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps his greatest contribution to the war effort was an appeal for fifty young Union men to volunteer to go overseas as "Coaker Recruits", and he threatened to resign as President of the F.P.U., and go himself if this number did not respond,<sup>4</sup> (1916). As an additional incentive, he promised each recruit who survived the war a job with the F.P.U., or with the civil service. As a result of this appeal, 130 young men came forward of whom 78 were accepted.<sup>5</sup> In spite of this contribution to the war effort both the F.P.U. and its leader were branded as unpatriotic and anti-British by some city newspapers during the early winter of 1918. The reason for this slander was Coaker's delay in giving his support to the Conscription Act.

Probably the greatest gamble made by Coaker during his twenty years as a politician was his decision to support conscription. He realized that this act would be unpopular among many of his followers and that it would not pass without his consent. During the 1919 session of the Assembly, he stated: "I was flooded with hundreds of messages from F.P.U. councils and members asking me to oppose conscription and not to consent to it."<sup>6</sup> Though in practice, he always made all F.P.U. decisions, in theory he had acted according to the wishes of his followers. The decision to support conscription was his, and his alone. He knew that in supporting

3. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 109.

4. Ibid, pp. 109, 190.

5. Ibid, p. 118.

6. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1919, p. 5.

this act he was risking his ten years work as a commercial and political leader. His enemies, he realized, would delight in declaring him, the man who made conscription possible. Yet the country and the Empire were in great need of men. The recruiting system was not providing men enough to keep the Newfoundland Regiment at full strength. The only possible solution was selective conscription and Coaker decided to risk all and support an act making this possible.

The real reason for Coaker's decision may never be known. A. B. Morine, writing much later, claimed that Coaker's decision to support conscription was payment for Sir Edward's resignation as Premier in favour of Dr. Lloyd. (December 31, 1917). Coaker, however, gave the following explanation in the Assembly: "I took the stand, after mature consideration, that conscription was the only thing for us." A few months later, in addressing the tenth Annual Convention of the Supreme Council, he stated:

I did not decide to support conscription without giving it the fullest consideration and counting the cost. I expected to be misunderstood by some friends and misrepresented by my enemies, and I made up my mind to face what I considered was a most critical period of my public career. 10

In all probability there was some truth in each opinion, for Coaker could, by supporting conscription, further his political ambitions, as Morine asserted, and at the same time fulfill what he considered his duty to the Empire. He also might have had a personal reason, for his record in this respect was certainly important later when he was being considered as a candidate for knighthood.

7. Ibid, 1918, p. 20.

8. "Second Draft of Morine's History of Newfoundland" Ch.10, p. 25.

9. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1918, p. 169.

10. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.F.N., p. 126.

After giving his support to the Conscription Bill (1918), Coaker sent out a circular to all Local Councils of the F.P.U., explaining how conscription would be enforced and generally minimising the effect this act would have on his followers. His opponents claimed that he opposed the enforcement of conscription. Coaker, on the other hand, asserted that the purpose of his circular was to facilitate the enforcement of conscription, and to prevent armed resistance.<sup>11</sup> Actually, the circular was an attempt on Coaker's part to forestall his political opponents by explaining to his followers the urgency for this bill and by giving his reasons for supporting it. Coaker certainly lost some of his popularity because he had chosen to support conscription but the effect of this action was transient and soon forgotten. He stated during the tenth Annual Convention (1918), that he had asked his Twillingate constituents to avail themselves of their right to recall him as the constitution provided,<sup>12</sup> and "not one council or one of my constituents had fault to find."<sup>13</sup>

The war ended on November 11, 1918, too late to make it possible to hold an election during the fall. The House met on April 2, 1919. An act was passed on April 15, to extend the term of the existing legislature<sup>14</sup> and provision was made for an election during the following November.<sup>15</sup> However, the National Government that the war had made necessary was destined to break up before the election could be held.

11. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, 1918, p. 169.

12. For the "Right of Recall" see Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 39.

13. Ibid., p. 123.

14. Journal of the Assembly, Newfoundland, 1919, p. 4.

15. Ibid., p. 104.

The National Government was dominated by the Liberal-Union  
 16  
 Party although the majority of the members of the Assembly belonged  
 17  
 to the People's Party. The bond of unity erected by the war no  
 longer existed. Because there was no opposition many members did  
 not have enough interest to attend the Assembly and on two occasions,  
 18  
 April 30, and May 19, the House was without a quorum. The unanimity  
 which had existed since this Government was established in 1917 was  
 noticeably absent in the 1919 session and stronger opposition de-  
 veloped as the days passed. A. B. Morine, Independent Member for  
 Bonavista, who had been elected in 1914 through F.P.U. support,  
 became a strong opponent of the Government during this session. In  
 1916, Morine had notified the Assembly that he had decided to re-  
 19  
 sign his seat at the close of the session. However, he did not re-  
 20  
 sign and on his return to Newfoundland in 1918 he again adopted an  
 active political role but this time as a personal opponent of the  
 F.P.U. leader.

The end of the National Government came on Tuesday, May 20, 1919,  
 when Sir Michael Cashin, Minister of Finance and Customs and suc-  
 cessor of E. P. Morris as leader of the People's Party, presented a  
 motion that the House adjourn until the following Friday. In ad-  
 21  
 dition, he moved "that the House place on record its opinion that

16. See above, Ch. 4, p. 81

17. See above, Ch. 3, p. 56

18. Journal of the Assembly, Newfoundland, 1919.

19. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1916, p. 297

20. Morine claimed that he had spent the two previous years in  
 Toronto on a contract for legal work. See, Proceedings of the  
 House of Assembly, 1918, p. 176. He also claimed that Coaker  
 had persuaded him not to resign his seat. See The Evening  
 Herald, May 30, 1919, p. 4.

21. Journal of the Assembly, Newfoundland, 1919, p. 77.

"the Government as at present constituted does not possess the confidence of the House."<sup>22</sup> The motion was seconded by the Premier, Dr. Lloyd, and passed without a division.<sup>23</sup>

The new Government under the leadership of Sir Michael Cashin met for the first time on Friday, May 23, and the F.P.U. members found themselves once more in the ranks of the Opposition. John Stone, Union member for the three-member district of Trinity, and Minister of Marine and Fisheries in the National Government, joined the Cashin Government as head of the same department.<sup>24</sup> A. B. Morine accepted a Cabinet seat as Minister of Justice.<sup>25</sup>

In the spring of 1919, the Government made provisions for an election to be held during the following November. The period preceding the election brought problems for the F.P.U. leader similar to those he had faced before the 1913 election.<sup>26</sup> The F.P.U. had not expanded to any extent since 1913 and the Union Party was no stronger in 1919 than it had been in 1913. It is true that Coaker was no longer perturbed about leading the Opposition; but he and his followers had reaped the advantages of being a part of the Government from July, 1917 to May 1919, and probably preferred this role to the thankless labours of the opposition years (1913-'17).

The fourth Annual Convention of the Supreme Council (1912), had empowered Coaker to decide at his own discretion what the future

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 171.

25. "Second Draft of Morine's History of Newfoundland", Ch. 10, p. 26.

26. See above, Ch. 11, p. 36



policy of the Union Party should be. Consequently, the decision to coalesce with the Liberal Party in 1913 was made by Coaker himself. During the tenth Annual Convention (1919), he asked his followers for similar authority. On this occasion he stated:

...let me ask you to trust me fully and empower me to act on your behalf, as discretion shall direct...or replace me by someone to whom you will confer this power...

In the delicate matters that present themselves for arrangement and adjustment in forming our forces for the next election, I ask you to give me full power to act on your behalf, and the strict assurance that whatever I do you will abide by. This is asking you for a greater power, but it is the only way I know to meet the circumstances. I will know the inside movements of all concerned, and will be in the best position to act for your best interests and that of the country. 28

Though Coaker made this statement almost a year before the election, he was aware, it seems, even at that time that necessity might force him into an alliance with one or more of his previous opponents. He realized that the Union Party had to unite with some other group, if it hoped to leave the ranks of the Opposition, and had asked his followers to empower him to make the decisions himself as he had done in 1913 and for their backing in whatever plan he should adopt.

When Sir William Lloyd resigned as Premier in May, 1919, and accepted the position of Registrar of the Supreme Court, the Liberal Party was left without a leader. To fill this vacancy there came forward a young but experienced politician, R. A. Squires. He had been elected in 1909 as a candidate of the People's Party in

27. See above, Ch. 3, p. 51

28. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 133.

29. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 30



the three-member district of Trintiy but had suffered defeat in 1913, when this district had returned three Liberal-Union members.<sup>30</sup> Following this defeat, he was made a member of the Legislative Council and given the Cabinet Post of Minister of Justice.<sup>31</sup>

Coaker and Squires had begun their respective careers as public men at approximately the same time; Squires as a member of the Assembly and Coaker as the founder of a popular union. They had had a bitter hatred for each other since the beginning of their careers as public men. Each controlled a newspaper, Coaker, The Advocate and Squires, The Star, and each of these papers carried frequent references to the political misdeeds of the proprietor of the rival paper. In addition, they fired frequent broadsides at each other from the respective Houses of the Legislature (1914-19). Coaker, after his retirement from politics, wrote the following character sketch of Squires:

He was an able, alert and energetic leader. He was a politician rather than a statesman. In my opinion the cleverest politician the country has produced. His energy was astounding. He could get through as much work in a day as would take ordinary men a week to transact. Hard work and tongue ability [ability as an orator] made him what he became. He was not an easy man to work with. He lacked sincerity and took no one into his full confidence. Had conscience been his guide he could have taken a foremost place among the great public men of Newfoundland. 32

This character analysis was made at a time when Coaker had no apparent reason for not writing what he sincerely believed. However, what he wrote could very well be a self-portrait, for some of the characteristics he attributed to Squires were the hall-marks of his own character.

30. The Evening Telegram, Nov. 4, 1919, p. 7.

31. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 80.

32. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 20.

Early in September, 1919, Squires held a public meeting in St. John's, during which he claimed that he had been chosen by a group of Liberal supporters as the leader of "The Liberal-Reform Party"<sup>33</sup> Later, he claimed that he had interviewed Sir Robert Bond, who had assured him that he had retired from politics. After this interview Squires "proclaimed himself the successor of the late Liberal chieftain."<sup>34</sup>

A few days after the formation of this party Coaker and Squires, following a short period of negotiations, announced that a coalition between the Union and the Liberal-Reform parties had been formed, under the name of "Liberal-Reform Party".<sup>35</sup>

Some of the same factors which precipitated the Liberal-Union coalition of 1913 contributed to the similar development of 1919.<sup>36</sup> However, there was one additional factor. During the two previous elections (1909 and 1913), the Roman Catholic districts voted solidly for candidates of the People's Party. Coaker, who had always been aware of the sectarian barrier, regarded Squires as a natural Protestant leader. He was not only a Protestant, but the Grand Master of the Loyal Orange Lodge, and in addition had a considerable Roman Catholic following, because of his many years association with Sir Edward Morris. (The fact that he was elected in St. John's West a district with a Roman Catholic majority,<sup>37</sup> indicates the strength of his Catholic following).

33. The Evening Telegram, Sept. 9, 1919, p. 4.

34. Ibid, September 17, p. 6

35. Ibid, September 23, 1919, p. 4.

36. See above, Ch. III, pp. 52 - 53

37. See, Census of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1921, (St. John's, Newfoundland, 1923), p. 502.

The "Tories" (known as the People's Party since 1908), seemed greatly perturbed by this coalition under its two dynamic leaders, Squires and Coaker; and on the day following the announcement of this coalition held a public meeting in St. John's and adopted the name of "Liberal-Progressive Party"<sup>38</sup>.

A Labour Party was also organized in St. John's and a manifesto issued. However, only three candidates were entered, all for St. John's West, and all three were badly beaten in the election which followed.<sup>39</sup>

In the 1919 election the Liberal-Reform Party won <sup>40</sup>24 of the 36 seats. The F.P.U. had entered twelve candidates and all but one were successful. The loser was George Grimes, who was defeated in Port de Grave District by Sir John Crosbie.<sup>41</sup> The election was fought on a strict denominational basis.<sup>42</sup> The policy of the party, and the ability of the candidates were completely ignored. The Liberal-Reform Party was supported by the Protestants and it succeeded in winning by large majorities in all non-Catholic districts. The Tory (Liberal-Progressive) Party returned only two Protestant members, one of whom, Mr. Bennett, represented the Roman Catholic District of St. John's West. The Roman Catholic voters were just as strongly Tory as they had been in 1913.<sup>42</sup> The great difference was that the Protestant voters had united solidly under the leadership of Squires and Coaker. The only Tory candidate to succeed in a district with a Protestant majority was Sir John Crosbie in Port de Grave.<sup>43</sup>

38. The Evening Telegram, Sept. 24, 1919, p. 4.

39. Ibid, Dec. 31, 1919, p. 8.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid, Nov. 21, 1919, p. 14.

42. See above, Ch. 111, p. 58

43. The Evening Telegram, Nov. 21, 1919, p. 14.

When the Twenty-fourth General Assembly met in 1920, many of its members expressed their regret that the election had resulted in such a denominational division. Mr. Bennett, Liberal-Progressive <sup>Member</sup> for St. John's West made the following statement: "The whole question before the country was hidden altogether. I claim that the last election was not fought on any policy. It was not fought on the issue at stake...A man was not judged according to his ability but he was judged by the altar he worshipped at." However, the altar of the political candidate did not play as great a role as the denominational association of the leadership of the respective parties. The issue was clear cut. On the one hand was the Protestant Liberal-Reform Party. Its leaders, Squires and Coaker, were two well known members of the Loyal Orange Association and adherents of the two principal Protestant denominations. On the other hand, was the Roman Catholic Liberal-Progressive Party. Its core consisted of the old Tory Party, that had succeeded in 1909 and 1913 under the name of "The People's Party" by the solid support of the Roman Catholic voters. Its leader, Sir Michael Cashin, was the successor of Sir Edward Morris, the well-known Catholic leader of the People's Party. Thus the Liberal-Reform victory of 1919 was the result of solid Protestant support which, in turn, was the inevitable consequence of the Roman Catholic solidarity during the elections of 1909 and 1913.

From Coaker's point of view, the coalition of 1919 was a marriage de convenance. His followers had given him permission to determine

44. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1920, p. 90.

45. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 136.

the political policy of the Union Party. He chose to coalesce with his greatest opponent. The choice was expedient. He made no effort to justify his decision, neither did he attempt to whitewash his chosen ally in any way, whom he previously<sup>had</sup> criticized so severely.

Coaker had great plans for the future of Newfoundland, which could only be brought about if he were in a position to determine Government policy. To achieve this position he was willing to unite with his greatest enemy. His plans for the betterment of the country were along two broad lines. In the first place, he had planned involved and drastic legislation to reform the curing and marketing of fish, and in the second place, he hoped in a small way to make a beginning in the field of industrialization. A. B. Morine, in explaining the Squires-Coaker union, at a much later date, wrote: "A desire to have legislation enacted for the standardization of the cure of fish, and its controlled marketing, was one reason for the support given by Coaker and his colleagues in 1920-24."<sup>46</sup>

Coaker felt that the end of the war would bring a slump in the fish trade and sincerely believed that the Government should be prepared<sup>47</sup> to take steps to regulate the sale of this staple product.

The celebrated and much abused Fish Regulations (1920), introduced by Coaker while Minister of Marine and Fisheries (1919-'23), had many aims. In the first place, an attempt was made to modernize the fishery by introducing new methods of catching and curing.<sup>48</sup>

45. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 136.

46. "Second Draft of Morine's History of Newfoundland", Ch. 10, p. 21.

47. Smallwood, Coaker of Newfoundland, p. 66.

48. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1920, p. 311.

Secondly, legislation was introduced providing for the standardization of cull both in <sup>49</sup>bying from the producer and in grading for market. <sup>50</sup>Thirdly, provisions were made for the appointment of trade agents to the various countries that purchased Newfoundland salt cod. <sup>51</sup>Fourthly, the Department of Marine and Fisheries was re-organized and provisions made for an information bureau to provide fishermen with relevant information, <sup>52</sup>and a scientific research department. <sup>53</sup>Fifthly, an attempt was made to establish controlled marketing by forcing all exporters to procure a government license before fish could be exported. <sup>54</sup>Associated with these regulations was an attempt to fix the price of salt cod in the foreign markets.

The various regulations introduced by Coaker during this period were to a great extent necessary and if successfully applied would have had a beneficial effect on the life of the country. However, the attempt to fix the price of fish in foreign markets was certainly unwise. In fact, the marketing of cod was a highly competitive business and Newfoundland certainly did not monopolize the supply to the extent that would make such a policy feasible.

Though there was a great necessity for the "Regulations" as planned by Coaker, there were several factors at work which ultimately resulted in the destruction of the whole plan. The primary factor was the knowledge that Coaker himself, as President of The

49. Ibid., pp. 140, 150, 312, 313.

50. Ibid., p. 7.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid., p. 426.

53. Ibid., pp. 312 - 313.

54. Ibid., p. 138. For a detailed account of the "Fishery Regulations" see, Smallwood, Coaker of Newfoundland, pp. 69-85. See also, The Fishermen's Advocate, Jan. 12, 1920, p. 4.



Union Export Company, was a fish exporter and his actions were naturally viewed with suspicion by his political and commercial rivals. This feeling was particularly strong on the south and west coasts, where the merchants and non-union fishermen believed that the "Regulations" were formed for the benefit of the F.P.U. fishermen of the east coast who produced principally "shore" and "Labrador" cure. They suspected that Coaker as F.P.U. leader would favour the east coast product over the "bank" cure of the south and west coasts.

A second factor which contributed to the failure of the "Regulations" <sup>"</sup> was the precipitous manner in which Coaker attempted to force this measure on the country. He was warned by his opponents in the Assembly to proceed with caution; <sup>55</sup> but in principle the members of the House, including the Opposition, were in favour of the plan. Many of the principal fish exporters also gave their support to the "Regulations". Coaker attempted to force every exporter to conform immediately, but the marketing customs of centuries could not be changed overnight. Had he attempted to educate the merchants to the necessity of such a move and introduced the "Regulations" a step at a time, the result might well have been different.

<sup>3</sup> A third factor which contributed to the failure of the "Regulations" was the general trade recession which hit the European fish-buying countries shortly after the plan was initiated. The exchange difficulties which accompanied this recession made it



virtually impossible to maintain the "price fixing" which the "Regulations" recommended. The fourth factor which contributed to this failure was one that had wrecked every previous attempt to improve the fishery; namely, the tendency of the party in opposition to make a political issue out of any reform legislation planned for this purpose.

It was unfortunate that Coaker failed in this attempt to reorganize and modernize the Newfoundland fisheries, for when the "Regulations" were finally repealed in 1921, almost two decades were allowed to pass before any further attempt to reorganize was made, during which time the destructive methods and practices of the past were continued. The period of stagnation ended when the Commission Government (1935-49), attempted reforms very much on the lines of these which had brought so much adverse criticism to Coaker in 1921-23.<sup>56</sup>

The failure of the "Regulations" was undoubtedly a serious blow to the country. But more serious still was its effects on the F.P.U. leader. For eight years he had carried out a ceaseless round of reform. His efforts had resulted in measures which had brought material benefits to the whole country and in particular, the fishermen. The "Regulations" was his master plan, a panacea for all the ills with which the country was afflicted. It contained several ideas that had been prominent in F.P.U. demands since 1908, and other measures which had resulted from Coaker's extensive travels to the fish buying countries. In order to be in a position to put this plan into practice, he had co-operated with a man who for a decade

56. For the extend of this criticism see, The Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1921-1922.

had been his greatest enemy and the self-declared opponent of all F.P.U. activity.<sup>57</sup> But instead of bringing prosperity to the country, and glory to its creator, it brought chaos and ruin in the fish trade, and to Coaker, the unpleasant task of being forced to defend his plan to the Assembly and the country and explain its failure to thousands who blamed him for their economic ruin. The result was the dampening of that active spirit of reform which had characterized his behaviour since the formation of the F.P.U., and from this time until his retirement in 1932, he was just another pathetic politician caring and doing little about the welfare of the country. The one exception worth mentioning to this inactive political life, was the active support he gave his leader, Squires, in negotiating the deal which resulted in the founding of the paper mill at Corner Brook.<sup>58</sup>

The period beginning with the founding of the National Government (1917), and terminating in 1923, with the end of the first Coaker-Squires administration, from the point of view of the F.P.U., was exceedingly important. During this period the ultimate political fate of the Union Party was decided. In 1913, Coaker had brought the F.P.U. into the fold of the Liberal Party, but as a partner, not as a subordinate. The coalition was known as the "Liberal-Union Party" and during the years from 1913 to 1917, the Union members were regarded as being distinct from their Liberal allies. In 1919, the coalition between Squires and Coaker took the name "Liberal-

57. See above, Ch. 6, p. 109

58. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 26.

Reform Party", and in the ensuing Government the Liberal and Union members were indistinguishable.

In losing their identity in the Liberal Party, the Union members, including their leader, lost sight of the great aims which had been theirs during their years in opposition. During this period they were in a favourable position to abolish the "corruption" of which they had accused the Government while in opposition, but also failed in this respect. Although there is every indication that many of the Union members remained honest, yet the Government of which they were a part was in no way different from its predecessors.

The Union Party from 1919 to 1932 ceased to be the powerful force for good that it had been from 1913 to 1919. It continued to send members to parliament, but the militant spirit of the earlier years had disappeared. In spite of the early promise it had held out to the thousands of F.P.U. members, its efforts for reform gradually subsided until it became as apathetic as the members it had condemned and replaced.

It is to be added that his work was not without results.

One of the most apparent and outstanding characteristics of Sir William was his great physical strength and extraordinary capacity for work. He drove himself continuously, regardless of the type of work, whether physical or mental. While at Cambridge after a hard day's toil in the woods or on the field, he often went about to Carving Hook, a distance of six miles, attended a dinner.

1. "Second Part of William's History of the 'Islands', Ch. 20, p. 5.

## Chapter 7

Coaker of Newfoundland

The previous chapters have been an examination of the work of Coaker as a member of what he, himself, described as the "toilers", as the organizer of the F.P.U., as the creator of a political party, member of Parliament and Cabinet Minister, and as a commercial leader who had established several prosperous business concerns. In each of these three fields, union organizer, politician and business man, he became one of the most prominent figures of his day. He had lived the obscure life of a fisherman-farmer until his thirty-sixth year and yet possessed the ability to achieve such success in each of these three fields. He was certainly a controversial figure, but regarding his ability, there seems to have been perfect agreement. Even his enemies, who had considered him an upstart and ridiculed his every action, conceded to his ability. Morine, who after 1919 was one of his greatest detractors, at a much later date wrote, "...considering the conditions he had to grapple [grapple] with, and the results he achieved, it is to be admitted that his work was remarkable.<sup>1</sup>

One of the most apparent and outstanding characteristics of Sir William was his great physical strength and extraordinary capacity for work. He drove himself continuously, regardless of the type of work, whether physical or mental. While at Coakerville after a hard day's toil in the woods or on the farm, he often snow-showd to Herring Neck, a distance of six miles, attended a Lodge

1. "Second draft of Morine's History of Newfoundland", Ch. 10, p. 5.

meeting till midnight, and returned home in the same manner. While<sup>2</sup> organizing the F.P.U., his efforts were phenomenal as the following extract from The Fishermen's Advocate will indicate: "The President arrived at Coakerville on Monday...after travelling 60 miles with [on] snowshoes and addressing four Local Councils, a district meeting and a mass meeting during six days."<sup>3</sup> During the years from 1908 to 1913 all the labours of organization had to be carried out in the fall, winter and early spring, when travelling conditions were most difficult, for during the summer season he<sup>4</sup> had to work on his farm. He applied the same untiring energy and capacity for work to his political and commercial duties. His unhappy life after his separation from his wife and child undoubtedly drove him to further effort but from his early manhood he had always derived an unusual pleasure from work. His capacity in this respect is well illustrated by the following quotation: "...I met the future president of the F.P.U. running a Post Office<sup>5</sup> and a Telegraph Office but chafing for want of something to do.." In 1924, Coaker himself wrote, "...there is no pleasure for me<sup>6</sup> in anything but work." He betrayed the same spirit when he resigned from the post of Fishery Warden because he thought it was<sup>7</sup> a waste of time.

In spite of his physical fitness, the pace which he set and

2. Watkins, Hubert, (One of the original members of the first Local Council of the F.P.U.), personal interview, Herring Neck, Aug. 4, 1958.
3. The Fishermen's Advocate, March 12, 1910, p. 1.
4. [Clouter], T., "The F.P.U. and its Leader" (History of the F.P.U., edited by W. Coaker), p. 153.
5. Devine, P.K., "Memories of the F.P.U.", (History of the F.P.U., p. 141).
6. Coaker, W. F., Sir William Coaker Reviews Recent visits Abroad, Port Union, Union Publishing Co. Ltd., 1924, p. 44.
7. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1915, p. 594.

maintained undoubtedly contributed to the breakdown of his health. He was aware of what would happen, it seems, for he wrote in 1911, "...I am willing to continue my hard task until my successor can be found, although I am convinced that such work as I must perform, will shorten my life very materially." <sup>8</sup> Closely linked with his capacity for work and physical endurance was his great appeal to the fishermen. In this respect he has seldom been equalled. He not only won them as members of his union and as political supporters, but also succeeded in persuading many to trust him with their savings. Many who had hoarded their savings in preference to trusting a bank invested all in union-sponsored commercial undertakings. This success can be explained in two ways. In the first place, Coaker was a hard worker and the untiring energy he displayed as a farmer and when organizing the F.P.U., created a kinship between him and the northern fishermen. He proved himself a doer and the unlettered fishermen with a culture which particularly permitted the appreciation of physical exploits found him an admirable candidate for idolization. Secondly, he possessed a great understanding of the fishermen. He had lived among them for more than twenty years and during that time he had made it his business to study them. He knew their way of life, how and what they thought, their likes and dislikes, and above all he knew that poverty, dependence on merchants, and mistreatment by public servants had destroyed their confidence in themselves. His every action was calculated to restore their economic freedom and make them proud that they were fishermen. By his fearless behavior from the be-



ginning, he proved that he was man enough to champion their cause against the merchant and the St. John's politicians. Every means calculated to appeal to the fishermen's desire for economic and political freedom was attempted and publicized by means of Local Councils. The Trading Company would eliminate their dependence on merchants, the Union Party would champion their cause in the House. He warned them against buying from peddlers. He advised them to watch weights because merchants were robbing them. Because of his knowledge of foreign markets and commercial practices he knew the price the merchants could afford to pay and used this knowledge to set a price for fish, (always higher than that which the merchants offered), and advised his followers to hold their fish until this price was reached. The fishermen had unlimited faith in their leader and held their catch until the price reached this level. Fortunately for Coaker, the period from 1908 to 1918 was one of rising prices and his fishermen followers gave him full credit for the steady improvement in their economic position. He knew a great number of his followers personally and in turn was regarded by all as a personal friend. Thus, Coaker, to the fishermen, was not only a leader, but a time-tested member of their toiling fraternity.

In spite of his verbosity, Coaker was a man of action. When there was work to be done he did it himself rather than trust to a subordinate. He wasted no time in lamenting the lack of necessary equipment but used whatever was at hand. During the formative years of the F.P.U. when it was necessary for him to

9. The Fishermen's Advocate, June 11, 1910, p. 1.

10. Ibid, Aug. 1, 1912, p. 1. A part of h's policy of "Eternal Vigilance" was a glaring headline in Advocate as follows: "Test your scales [the merchant's scales] before selling your fish" (The inference was that the merchants were de-liberately cheating fishermen.)



travel extensively, he allowed nothing to delay or deter him. If he could ride, he did so, but he often walked long distances over the ice or through the northern wilderness. However, on many occasions he was overhasty in putting his ideas into practice. This was in keeping with his own philosophy. On one occasion he wrote: "Give me a man who will do things even if he makes mistakes rather than be damned with the impotency of those who stand still, who know nothing of the joys of success or the worries of failure."<sup>11</sup>

The ability to face any problem or situation and make a decision in a relatively short time enabled him to accomplish an extraordinary amount of work during his career, but it also led to mistakes that could have been easily avoided and on several occasions resulted in wearisome libel suits.<sup>12</sup> Fortunately, he also possessed the ability to admit his mistakes and to take measures to remedy them.

Hand in hand with his decisive action went a fearlessness seldom witnessed in a politician. He allowed nothing or no one to prevent him from doing what he thought should be done. He condemned everyone, regardless of position, who opposed his plans - the Governor, Premier, the Upper House, (to which he gave the suggestive title of "Dumping Chamber") or anyone else. He criticized and threatened them all in turn. He showed the same independence of his own friends and supporters. For example, in 1918, he gave

11. Coaker, W.F., Notes of a Journey to the West Indies, Union Publishing Co. Ltd., 1922, p. 43.
12. The Fishermen's Advocate, Jan. 27, 1912, p. 1. (The Government took 18 libel suits against The Fishermen's Advocate before the date of this issue).
13. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 19.
14. The Mail and Advocate, Oct. 12, 1914, p. 6.
15. Ibid, Dec. 12, 1914, p. 7.

~~he gave~~ all his support to the Military Service Bill<sup>16</sup> although he had received numerous telegrams from Local Councils asking him to use his influence to defeat this Bill.<sup>17</sup> Again, in his New Year's message of 1930, at a time when he himself was a member of the Cabinet, he stated that the class of men in the Government, to a certain extent, ~~was~~<sup>18</sup> not a desirable type.

The accomplishments of the F.P.U. leader show that he was not only extremely capable himself but also possessed the ability to select efficient subordinates. Several commercial ventures were undertaken simultaneously, which left him no time to train people for responsible positions. Consequently, they had to be enticed from other business concerns. Even under these conditions he succeeded in acquiring able and efficient workers. A greater task<sup>19</sup> was the finding of managers for the many Union cash stores. But formidable as this task was, he succeeded in a surprising number of cases in finding honest, loyal and efficient workers.

Although the Union members of the Assembly, with whom he associated, were in theory selected by the District Councils, he was responsible, to a great extent for their selection. Here again, although the field of his choice was limited, he chose well. In general, the men he selected, although unschooled, were men of principle, honest, hard working and took their work in the Assembly in the nature of a crusade. They also had absolute faith in their leader. In spite of enticements from merchants and political op-

16. Journal of the Assembly, Newfoundland, 1918, p

17. The Weekly Advocate, Jan. 29, 1918, p. 5. See also, Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 125.

18. The Evening Telegram, Jan. 17, 1930.

19. See above, ch. 5, p. 84 for growth of cash stores.

ponents, only one (John Stone, a member for the three member District of Trinity, 1913-1919). of the many Union members deserted for an enemy camp.<sup>20</sup>

In the field of finance, Coaker's greatest battle was acquiring the necessary funds. The fishermen were proverbially tight-fisted<sup>21</sup> and, since the bank crash of 1894, even more reluctant to entrust their savings to any financial institution. Besides, a great number of his fishermen followers had nothing to invest. The first move in his campaign to raise funds was to make arrangements for fishermen to buy supplies through Local Councils.<sup>22</sup> The councils were supplied with certain staple articles of diet at wholesale prices which were considerably lower than those of the local merchants. In this manner, the value of co-operative buying was made obvious. The next move was to inform the fishermen that in order to supply a branch store, the Trading Company must have funds, and only those settlements that bought sufficient shares would be supplied with such a branch. Coaker tried to encourage the fishermen to buy shares by permitting only members to buy at Union cash stores,<sup>23</sup> by selling shares in Union sponsored companies<sup>24</sup> only to fishermen, and by paying a bonus on all fish sold to the Union Export Company by fishermen shareholders. These measures were

20. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 171.

21. Smallwood, J.R., Coaker of Newfoundland, p. 32.

22. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 15. See also, The Fishermen's Advocate, Oct. 19, 1912, p. 6.

23. The Fishermen's Advocate, Oct. 19, 1912, p. 6.

24. Ibid, Oct. 11, 1911, p. 2.

expected to make the fishermen feel that the various commercial interests of the F.P.U. were created solely for their benefit.

Regarding the purpose to which these funds were put, it can be said without fear of overstatement that during the years from 1911 to 1919, the F.P.U. under the leadership of Coaker, undertook a programme of commercial and industrial development that involved almost every field of economic endeavour capable of being carried out in the country. In most cases funds were used wisely and well. When it is considered that the principal commercial undertakings survived the depression and are still in operation today, we have evidence of the soundness of the structure which the F.P.U. leader built. Detailed attention <sup>25</sup> to this development can be found in an earlier chapter.

In all commercial undertakings, Coaker showed that he possessed one of the necessary characteristics of the progressive businessman, the ability to introduce new ideas. The building of Port Union, Trinity North, in itself was a new idea. There was no precedent for such a centre. He originated the idea, selected the location and planned the town. The dry fish premises were not a duplication of some St. John's firm but original and contained several innovations. He also introduced changes in the fishing industry in the form of an artificial drier and a boneless fish plant. <sup>26</sup> In the inspection, <sup>27</sup> culling and marketing of fish, he proved to be two decades ahead of his time when he attempted to introduce in the early twenties,

25. See Ch. 5.

26. The Mail and Advocate, Aug. 5, 1916, p. 5.

27. Smallwood, Coaker of Newfoundland, p. 41. See also above Ch. 6. P114

many of the measures accepted by the Commission Government in the late thirties.

Another outstanding quality very much apparent in the Union leader was his ability to get to the roots of the problems with which he dealt. Consider his action previous to drafting the Logger's Bill or the equally important Sealer's Bill. He was not satisfied with information from participants but covered the ground himself. He visited the lumber camps, examined the sleeping quarters and the meals served and questioned the men to find out their complaints and demands. He went to the seal fishery in the spring of 1914<sup>29</sup> and during the trip had ample opportunity to study the working and living conditions of the crews. This background study actually served two purposes, for it not only permitted him to make these acts effective but left him better informed than anyone else in the House when they were debated. In the same manner he travelled extensively throughout European fish-buying countries before introducing the Fishery Regulations of 1920.

Many people are still living (1958), who have heard Coaker make a political speech and much that was written about his oratory still exists. All who heard him were impressed and even his enemies grudgingly gave praise to his eloquence. Morine, who was probably one of his greatest critics wrote: "He talked brightly in the presence of men whose intelligence he respected..."<sup>30</sup>

28. Smallwood, J. R., Coaker of Newfoundland, p. 41.

29. The Daily Mail, St. John's, April 11, 1914, p. 4.

30. "Second Draft of Morine's History of Newfoundland", Ch. 10, p. 28.

The Fishermen's Advocate of 1910, carried the following tribute to his oratory:

The words and sentences came from him like water from a fountain...his tongue gave utterances to a flow of language that spellbound his audience. He speaks fast, distinct and his words are simple...He makes it plain; he knows his hearers; he understands what they require ...His voice is clear,...he becomes earnest and his voice grows higher and full of fire and spirit... every word went home to the hearts of his hearers. 31

It is significant that the writer says "hearts" of his hearers rather than "heads", for although he quoted facts and figures and appealed to their reason, his primary appeal was to their emotion.

The following description of Coaker's oratory as made by J. R. Smallwood, who had heard him speak on many occasions, will indicate the respect paid him as a speaker by his associates:

Coaker is a powerfully built man of great physical strength, and every ounce of his physical strength went into his speech. You could hear his voice booming before you got to the chamber. There was no finesse, no polish, in his speaking. He spoke the same there as when addressing the fishermen around the bays. It was hammer, hit, pound. The aroused indignation and discontent of thousands of fishermen poured from his lips, and he spoke by the hour. 32

In respect to Coaker's oratory, <sup>Mr.</sup> Smallwood, in the same book, said: "It was a thing of elemental passion and rough eloquence. It stirred those plegmatic<sup>3</sup> fishermen as they had never been before, even at revival meetings.<sup>33</sup>"

In spite of the lack of "finesse and polish", his speech was flavored with Newfoundland's own peculiar idioms, rich in figures

31. The Fishermen's Advocate, Dec. 17, 1912, p. 1.
32. Smallwood, Coaker of Newfoundland, p. 37.
33. Ibid, p. 30. See appendices for song which indicates Coaker's appeal to the fishermen.



of speech, and particularly rich in words and phrases which he coined to suit some particular situation. The following indicate his ability in this respect; his reference to the Upper House as "The Dumping Chamber"<sup>34</sup> the merchants and politicians as "The Long-coated Chaps"<sup>35</sup>, to his fishermen followers as the "Sons of Toil"<sup>36</sup>, to the Board of Trade as the "Merchant's Union"<sup>37</sup>, and to the non-union members of the Assembly as "Arm-chair Producers"<sup>38</sup>, and as "Grab-alls"<sup>39</sup>. He called the Upper House "...that useless ornament of the Legislature"<sup>40</sup> and referred to the Union Party as "...in the cold shades of the opposition"<sup>41</sup>.

Sir William was an ardent Anglican. As a young man he took great interest in his church<sup>42</sup> and continued to have such interest until his death. However, he did cross swords frequently with ministers of various denominations. He claimed that opposition of clergymen was one of the reasons for diminishing interest in the F.P.U.<sup>43</sup> In describing his years at Herring Neck, he claimed that he was continually in hot water with merchants, politicians and parsons.<sup>44</sup> Again, in 1932 he severely criticized Rev. Godfrey,

34. See above, Ch. 7, p.123.

35. The Fishermen's Advocate, May 14, 1910, p. 1.

36. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., pp. 49,50.

37. Ibid, p. 4.

38. Mail and Advocate, Weekly edition, Feb. 6, 1915, p. 5.

39. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., pp. 51,65,71.

40. Ibid, p. 80.

41. The Evening Advocate, Jan. 18, 1917, p. 5.

42. (Clouter), "The F.P.U. and its Leader", (The History of the F.P.U., W. F. Coaker, ed.), p. 182.

43. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 7.

44. The Evening Advocate, Dec. 22, 1917, p. 1. p.123



an Anglican minister, for his role in the "Majestic Meeting" (a public meeting held in the Majestic Theatre, which preceded the riots of 1932.). He wrote, "Had I been Minister of Justice....I would have arrested Mr. Godfrey for making such utterances, which were capable of creating civil commotion..."<sup>45</sup> In his dealings with other denominations, he proved that he had none of the prejudice common to his time, but criticized or praised as circumstances warranted. In fact, he endeavoured, through the F.P.U., to cut out sectarianism and to bring the "toilers" of all denominations together. He showed his interest in religion in a practical manner in his plan for Port Union. The Union town, when completed, contained an Anglican Church, "The Church of the Holy Martyrs", dedicated to the Coaker recruits, who gave their lives in World War I.<sup>46</sup>

In early manhood, he became a member of the Loyal Orange Lodge.<sup>47</sup> He was responsible for introducing this society to Herring Neck and is reputed to have cut the sills for the Herring Neck Orange Hall<sup>48</sup> from his farm and to have towed them to Herring Neck in a rowboat. He enjoyed these lodge meetings and they were probably responsible for providing him with the inspiration to establish the F.P.U. His association with the Orange Lodge proved a great advantage to him

45. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 43.

46. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 171. See also, Coaker, W. F., "F.P.U. Progress, 1909 to 1919" (The History of the F.P.U., ed., W. F. Coaker) p. 192.

47. Walkins, H., Personal interview, Aug. 4, 1958, Herring Neck, Notre Dame Bay.

48. Ibid.

during the formative years of his union, for he was given the use of the Orange Hall in every community which had one. He also could claim the kinship of brother members in almost every northern community. On the other hand, his association with the Orange Lodge partly explains his failure to unionize Roman Catholic regions.

He was a life-long abstainer from all alcoholic beverages and lost no opportunity to campaign against the drink habit.<sup>49</sup> Several years before the Government attempted to introduce prohibition, he wrote: "Intemperance is an awful evil, and the men who are labouring for temperance reforms are a blessing to their country."<sup>50</sup> He campaigned actively for the Prohibition Bill of 1916 and brought the weight of union membership into effect when a plebiscite was taken on this question. After the advent of prohibition, he continued his fight against intemperance by warning his followers against the dangers of drinking "moonshine".<sup>51</sup> There was no hypocrisy associated with his abhorrence of strong drink. He saw it as a destroyer of men's working efficiency. In this light, he abstained himself and tried to encourage his followers to do the same.

There is every indication that Coaker had strong sentiments about the Empire. In 1900, while on a visit to Montreal, he attempted to enlist in the Canadian Army which at that time was about to participate in the Boer War.<sup>52</sup> During World War I, when he was persuaded

49. The Mail and Advocate, weekly edition, Sept. 25, 1915, p. 8.

50. Coaker, "F.P.U. Progress, 1909 to 1919", (The History of the F.P.U., ed. by F.W. Coaker), p. 196.

51. The Fishermen's Advocate, April 9, 1910, p. 1.

52. Bailey, A., (present manager of the Union Light and Power Co.), personal interview, Port Union, July 7, 1958.

by his union followers to remain at his post, he asked for fifty<sup>53</sup> young union men to enlist in his place. Seventy-eight responded and of this number, twelve paid the supreme sacrifice, one of whom was his nephew, William Coaker Christian.<sup>54</sup> Though the company, which he headed, lost large sums thereby, he supported the Surplus Profits Bill of 1917<sup>55</sup> and later supported the Conscription Bill, in spite of the opposition of many of his followers.<sup>56</sup> Before the introduction of conscription he called on his followers to volunteer so that this measure would be unnecessary,<sup>57</sup> and he and other members of the Union Party undertook to speed up recruiting in union districts.

In his capacity as leader of the F.P.U. and as a member of the House of Assembly, he proved to be a strong advocate of conservation. He waged a ceaseless battle to preserve the forests, in particular the "three-mile limit" reserved for the use of fishermen.<sup>58</sup> He also tried to prevent the practice of rinding.<sup>59</sup> He saw that the seal herds were in danger of extermination and attempted to conserve this valuable resource by legislation.<sup>60</sup> On other occasions he attempted to prevent the destruction of the lobsters in the in-shore waters<sup>61</sup> by a closed season, and also urged the protection of the Bay seals

53. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 109.
54. Coaker, "F.P.U. Progress, 1909 to 1919", (The History of the F.P.U., (ed.) by W. F. Coaker), p. 190.
55. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 127.
56. Ibid, p. 125.
57. Ibid, p. 118.
58. Ibid, p. 52.
59. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1915, p. 58.
60. The Fishermen's Advocate, Feb. 27, 1914., p. 7.
61. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1914, pp. 168 - 170.

which were becoming more and more scarce. Finally, in every possible manner he endeavoured to conserve the human resources of the country. Before his day the loss of a man engaged in the cod fishery or the seal fishery was taken too lightly. Accidents resulting in serious loss of life were regarded as "acts of God" when in reality they were the results of human carelessness. Spurred on by the serious loss of life in the spring of 1914, when more than 250 men perished while engaged in the seal fishery, he endeavoured with the backing of his followers, to bring about through legislation, 1. compensation for loss of life at the seal fishery and, 2. safety measures that would prevent a recurrence of the disasters of 1914.

In following the political career of Coaker from 1913 to 1932, one cannot but note the ease with which he changed his ideas towards other politicians with whom he associated. His opinion of Sir Robert Bond changed appreciably from the pre-election period (in 1913) to Bond's resignation in 1914. In 1917, he joined ranks with his opponents to form a National Government. His associates were the very people he had vilified since 1913. In 1914, he supported A. B. Morine as a candidate for Bonavista; in 1919, he cursed the same man as a traitor and the word "Morineism" was coined to designate anyone corrupt or unfaithful. Before 1919, R. A. Squires was

62. Ibid, 1916, p. 35.

63. The Fishermen's Advocate, May, 27, 1913.

64. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 51.

65. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1915, pp. 339, 342.

66. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F. P. U., pp. 170, 195.

branded as the arch-enemy of the F.P.U. movement; during the 1919 election, Coaker and the Union Party backed Squires as leader of the Liberal-Reform Party.

Coaker has reaped much criticism through this propensity for changing his mind concerning his associates. There are two possible explanations. In the first place, he did what was expedient at any particular time and if later events made it necessary to adopt a different plan he did so without fear of criticism. The following extract from the writings of Morine, his one-time friend, and later his bitter enemy, helps to explain this tendency. In comparing Coaker to Bond he wrote, "Coaker was the abler man, more vital, more daring and more reckless" In the second place, Coaker won the backing of the fishermen because he proved that he was a fighter and feared neither merchant nor politician. He realized that to maintain the same support he had to be constantly at war with someone or something, and he chose whoever and whatever was conveniently at hand. His character was such that there were always "enemies" to fill this role, and if political expediency made it necessary to join forces with a previous "enemy" he then was just as lavish with his praise as he had previously been with his sneering criticism.

During the quarter century (1908-32), in which Coaker played a prominent role in the commercial and political life of the country, it is to be expected that not only would his exertions effect changes in the life of the country but that these same changes would exert a profound change in him. In the first place, age and success

67. Ibid, pp. 126, 135.

68. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 14.

69. "Second Draft of Morine's History of Newfoundland", Ch. 10, p.

made him much more conservative than he was earlier in his career. In the second place, he could not keep up the tremendous pace of the early years of the movement and avoided difficulties and side-stepped issues that in the early years would have delighted him. In the third place, the practices of the business and political world, coupled with his betrayal by some of his friends and associates, left him sadly disillusioned. In 1932, he wrote:

Party politics are no worse here than elsewhere, but they are so bad here that a self-respecting man who enters the game cannot continue in it long, before he is ashamed to look at himself in a mirror. Not five per cent of those seeking the support of the electorate are animated by patriotic intentions two years after they enter the race. Their first intention is to be the saviors of their country, but soon they see where easy money might be procured, where unearned fees and commissions can be obtained, and when obtained by others so easily they are soon intent on travelling in the same footsteps. It is a cursed game ...Politics is not a clean game... 70

This account of the effects of party politics on the representative of the people, can probably be regarded as auto-biographical.

The activity of the F.P.U. leader in the commercial field also left its mark. The extent of this change is apparent in his attitude towards the credit system. In 1911 he wrote: "The Union cash stores will sell for cash, and it won't be many years before the credit system will disappear..."<sup>71</sup> In 1927, a circular letter to the managers of cash stores, sent by Coaker, contained the following instructions: "...never take it [codfish] if you have to pay cash for it..."<sup>72</sup> In a similar letter in 1930, he wrote:

70. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, pp. 45-46.

71. Coaker, (ed), The History of the F.P.U., p. 33.

72. Circular Letter Number 2 to Stores, Port Union, March 30, 1927



"take no codfish except to pay accounts or in full trade...you are now strictly instructed not to buy fish..."<sup>73</sup> In fact, by the mid-twenties, Coaker had become just another merchant-politician and his utopian dreams of earlier years had disappeared. Instead of destroying the credit system, he and the company he managed became its greatest supporter. He, who in his younger days painted verbally such vivid pictures of fishermen standing before merchants with their caps in their hands begging for supplies, in 1927 issued the following instruction to his clerks: "Say 'no' and don't hesitate when 'no' should be said."<sup>74</sup> But it must be remembered that he was caught between two fires. He was obliged to protect the fishermen's investments which could not be done if every down-and-out credit seeker were supplied. In 1926 there was a loss of \$19,000 on outport stores alone.<sup>75</sup> It was annual losses of this nature which prevented the payment of dividends after 1919 on shares held by the fishermen.<sup>76</sup>

Thus Coaker had become the victim of his own skill and hard work, which made him a successful merchant. In this field, success forced him to compete with other merchants and, in spite of his aims, he was forced to adopt their methods. The name which he gave to the Union stores is suggestive, "Cash stores", which signified his wish to avoid the credit system. But this system was grounded too

- 73. Circular Letter Number 2, Port Union, June 17, 1930.
- 74. Circular Letter Number 2, to Stores, Port Union, Mar. 30, 1927.
- 75. Circular Letter to Clerks, Port Union, Feb. 11, 1929.
- 76. Coaker, (ed.), Twenty Years of the F.P.U., p. 387. See also, Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 8, where Coaker claimed that dividends were paid until 1921.



deep to be uprooted and in a short while the F.P.U. ceased to fight what it could not destroy. The conditions of the late twenties were the inevitable results - there was nothing that Coaker could have done to change the outcome in any way. Morine expressed the same feeling in these words: "...the supplying system had the same effect upon the F.P.U. that it had on the merchants..."<sup>77</sup>

This account of the man whom J. R. Smallwood called "Newfoundland's Greatest Son"<sup>78</sup> is an attempt to give an accurate picture of probably the most controversial figure of the country's history. His most outstanding characteristic was certainly his versatility, for he achieved great success in three separate fields - union organization, business and politics. He achieved this multiple success simultaneously, which attests to his phenomenal labours. There was nothing passive about him; what he began, he backed to the hilt. He behaved in a similar manner in respect to his associates. He either praised lavishly or condemned entirely. Everyone was either his friend or his enemy. He was inherently honest and motivated by sincere aims, but probably not sufficiently strong in character to overcome the many temptations that his political and business associates brought his way. His constant appeal for all followers and leaders who were strong in character<sup>79</sup>

77. "Second draft of Morine's History of Newfoundland", Ch. 10, p. 1.

78. [Smallwood], A Sincere Appreciation of Newfoundland's Greatest Son.

79. Coaker, Past Present and Future, p. 46.

was probably the effect of his realization of his own weakness. In conclusion, it can be said without fear of overstatement that he was the most dynamic figure of his age and that no other man during the quarter century from 1908 to 1932 left so great a mark on the commercial, political and social life of this period.

extent filled the role of a municipal government. Shortly after its formation it began to take on the work of a consumer co-operative (1910), and later, with the formation of the Union Export Company (1917), branched out into a producer co-operative. It also played an important role in politics, having sponsored the Union Party in the elections of 1913, 1918, 1923, 1927 and 1932.

Probably it is least known as a union though this was one of its initial purposes. In the period from 1908 to 1919 it aimed to benefit the fisherman economically by establishing a central market for cod and advising its members to hold their cod until the price was reached. On several occasions it used the vote as a threat to persuade the owners of sailing ships to pay a higher price for cod.<sup>1</sup> The F.F.U. also attempted to help its members in times of ill-fortune by establishing a disaster fund to which all members contributed.<sup>2</sup> These were the only activities of the F.F.U. which

1. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.F.U., pp. 15, 30, 42, 53. See also, Bellwood, Coaker of Newfoundland, p. 58.
2. The Evening Advocate, March 29, 1917, p. 4.
3. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.F.U., p. 90.

## Conclusion

Though the Fishermen's Protective Union had some of the characteristics of a labour union, it also adopted during its quarter century of prominence several other functions as well. It had many of the distinct marks of a fraternal society and to some extent filled the role of a municipal government. Shortly after its formation it began to take on the work of a consumer's co-operative (1910), and later, with the formation of the Union Export Company (1917), branched out into a producer's co-operative. It also played an important role in politics, having sponsored the Union Party in the elections of 1913, 1919, 1923, 1924 and 1928.

Probably it is least known as a union though this was its initial purpose. In the period from 1908 to 1919 it aimed to benefit the fishermen economically by establishing<sup>a</sup> a certain price for cod and advising its members to hold their catch until this price was reached.<sup>1</sup> On several occasions it used the same method to persuade the owners of sealing ships to pay a higher price for seals.<sup>2</sup> The F.P.U. also attempted to help its members in time of ill-fortune by establishing a disaster fund to which all members contributed.<sup>3</sup> These were the only activities of the F.P.U. which

1. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., pp. 15, 30, 47, 83.  
See also, Smallwood, Coaker of Newfoundland, p. 48.
2. The Evening Advocate, March 29, 1917, p. 4.
3. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 98.

can be regarded as typical of a union. However, it was conceived and organized as a union and its structure continued to be that of a union in spite of its varied activity.

Coaker endeavoured to make the F.P.U. an organization that would appeal to the fishermen by giving it many of the characteristics of a fraternal society. Meetings were held in secret, pass-words were used and buttons and special articles of clothing were worn. However, the local council meetings were somewhat different from those of fraternal societies in that their principal aim was to uplift the members themselves, their class and their country. They discussed and debated pertinent topics of their day and in this respect functioned as a study group whose principal aim was self-education. The importance of this activity was further enhanced by the complete absence of local government throughout the union districts.

*no* The F.P.U. during the years immediately following its creation also functioned as a co-operative society. It supplied each Local Council and through it the fishermen members with certain staple consumer goods. The head office of the F.P.U. in St. John's bought the goods at wholesale prices and supplied each local on demand. The formation of the Union Trading Co. and its many dependent cash stores made this method unnecessary. However, since this company had only a limited number of shareholders, its activity was less

4. See above, Ch. 11, p. 29

5. See above, Ch. 1, p. 3

6. See above, Ch. V., p. 83

co-operative. The shareholders of this company were fishermen but the dividends which they were paid represented profit made on goods sold to many who were not shareholders. In this sense it was a corporation with a limited number of fishermen shareholders and not a co-operative.

Thus the F.P.U. was intended by its founder to function as a co-operative as well as a labour union. J. R. Smallwood, who had close associations with the movement as a young man wrote: "Sir William Coaker...launched a great organized movement...which was co-operative in intention, even if it was never so in technique or method."<sup>7</sup> Margaret Digby, who was sent by the Horace Plunkett Foundation to investigate and report upon the possibilities of the co-operative movement in Newfoundland(1934), wrote: "It [the F.P.U.] attracted as members a large number of fishermen of the east and north-east coasts and combined some of the functions of a trade union with co-operative supply and the marketing of fish."<sup>9</sup> In the same report she stipulated that the F.P.U. functioned as a co-operative for only a short period.<sup>10</sup> This seems to be a valid observation. (At first, when the fishermen were supplied direct through their locals on a non-profit basis, with all local members benefiting, the F.P.U. functioned as a co-operative. The formation of the Union Trading Co., which gave benefits only to

7. Smallwood, The Book of Newfoundland.

8. MacKay, Newfoundland, Economic, Diplomatic and Strategic Studies, p. 185.

9. Digby, Margaret, Report on the Opportunities for Co-operative Organization in Newfoundland and Labrador, (London, P.S. King and Son, Ltd., 1934), p. 19.

10. Ibid, p. 3.

its shareholders made the F.P.U. less co-operative. The founding of the Union Export Co. (1917) with its non-fishermen shareholders ended any earlier tendency the F.P.U. had towards co-operative activity.

It is not known whether Coaker was familiar with the principles of co-operation that had been adopted by the "Rochdale Pioneers", but it is significant that many of the initial aims of the F.P.U. were in accord with "Rochdale Principles". The attempts to carry on all business in cash, to be neutral in religion and politics, to pay out surplus savings in dividends, to permit all workmen to become members, to introduce democratic control, to permit any members to examine books of the companies associated with the F.P.U., and to use a portion of the earnings for educational purposes (that is in spreading the co-operative idea), were all in keeping with the Rochdale plan. The F.P.U. failed to follow these initial policies. Five years after it was established it adopted an active role in politics (1913), and in the following election (1919) it coalesced with the predominately Protestant Liberal-Reform Party, which opposed the predominately Roman Catholic Liberal-Progressive Party. About 1920, the companies sponsored by the F.P.U. ceased to pay dividends, and during the following decade it operated one of the largest credit concerns in the

11. Dunfield, B.E., Co-operation in England, Radio address delivered by Mr. Brian Dunfield...over station VONF... on April 16, 1937, St. John's. Co-operative Division, Dept. of Rural Reconstruction, 1937, pamph.

12. See above, Ch. 3.

13. See above, Ch. 6, p. 109.



country. After 1914<sup>14</sup>, no serious effort was made to carry on further organization. Thus the F.P.U. failed as a co-operative mainly because of its failure to follow its initial aims.

Labour Unions spread rapidly during the first decade of the twentieth century. The success of the Dockers' Strike in London in 1899 gave a great impetus to the movement throughout the whole British Isles<sup>15</sup>. In the United States union membership increased threefold from 1900 to 1914<sup>16</sup>. The F.P.U. members were mainly self-employed fishermen, but all "toilers" were eligible for membership. Coaker intended that his union should include "fishermen and workingmen"<sup>17</sup>. In this sense the F.P.U. was a labour union and as such was a part of the movement that was spreading rapidly throughout Europe and America at the same time.

Co-operative development is usually dated from the establishment of the Rochdale Pioneers Equitable Society (1844). During the following half century, the movement spread throughout the whole of Europe and broadened to embrace almost every field of human endeavour. Co-operatives among fishermen existed as early as 1886 in England<sup>18</sup>. Iceland and the countries of Scandinavia, by the beginning of the century had strong co-operatives designed to handle the curing and marketing as well as the catching of fish.<sup>20</sup>

14. See above, Ch. 7, pp. 135, 136.

15. See above, Ch. 2, p. 35.

16. Ferlman, S., "Trade Unions", Encyclopaedia Britannica, Edited by W. Yust. (Chicago, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1957), P. 375-376., Vol. 22.

17. Ibid, p. 378.

18. Coaker, "F.P.U. Progress, 1909 to 1919", The History of the F.P.U., edited by W.F. Coaker, p. 189.

19. Jones, B., Co-operative Production, (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1844), p. 717.

20. Cole, G.D.H., "Co-operation", Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol 6, p. 397.



In Canada the only co-operative endeavour similar to that undertaken by the F.P.U. was among the farmers of the prairies. In this region, particularly in Alberta, the Society of Equity and the Partisan League, which had originated south of the border, developed Canadian offshoots.<sup>21</sup> In 1909, the Canadian Society of Equity amalgamated with the Alberta Farmers Association under the name, United Farmers of Alberta (U.F.A.).<sup>22</sup> Under the leadership of Henry Wise Wood, this organization did much to improve the economic position of the Alberta farmers through co-operation. The prairie movement had much in common with the F.P.U. Each advocated direct legislation, prohibition and trust-busting.<sup>23</sup> Each disseminated its propaganda by means of a paper: the F.P.U. through The Fishermen's Advocate, the U.F.A. through The Grain Grower's Guide. In addition, both organizations initially adopted a neutral policy in politics. However, the F.P.U. failed to live up to this policy. The only co-operative movement among Canadian fishermen similar to the F.P.U. took place in the 1920's, as a result of the efforts of the University of St. Francis Xavier, Antigonish, Nova Scotia.<sup>24</sup>

One of the principles laid down by the Rochdale Pioneers was that co-operatives should adopt neutrality in politics.<sup>25</sup> In

21. Rolph, W.K., Henry Wise Wood of Alberta, (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1950), p. 40.
22. Ibid, p. 32.
23. See Rolph, Henry Wise Wood of Alberta, for U.F.A. policy and Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 50 for F.P.U. policy.
24. Richardson, G., Co-operation in Nova Scotia, (St. John's, 1937). Pamph.
25. See above, Ch. 8, p. 143

practice, however, until the last decade of the nineteenth century the co-operative leaders were well known Liberals. In England, the Labour Representation Committee succeeded in electing two of its candidates in the election of 1900.<sup>26</sup> In 1906 it accounted for 30 seats and adopted the name "Labour Party".<sup>27</sup> The British Labour Party appealed to the proletariat and in this respect the F.P.U. was somewhat different, for its members were principally self-employed fishermen. The F.P.U. also differed from the British Labour Party in being strongly imperialistic. In 1910, Coaker wrote: "The Union Party will act exactly as the Labour Party in England...except that while the Labour Party in England is not of an imperialistic tone, the Union Party in this colony will be strongly imperialistic. We stand not only for country, but for Empire as well".<sup>28</sup> Though the F.P.U. changed its policy in many ways during the quarter century from 1908 to 1932, it continued to show its strong Empire ties. This was particularly noticeable during the war years.

In Australia, the development of a distinct Labour Party preceded the corresponding movement in England. The parliament of New South Wales had thirty-six labour representatives out of a total of one hundred and twenty in 1891.<sup>29</sup> In Victoria, the Labour Party elected 36 representatives out of 90.<sup>30</sup> Labour returned 16

26. McKenzie, R.T., British Political Parties, (London, William Heinemann, Ltd., 1955), p. 386.
27. Cole, G.D.H., British Working Class Politics 1832-1914, (London, Routledge & Keegan Paul Ltd., 1950) p. 179.
28. The Fishermen's Advocate, Oct. 29, 1910, p. 1.
29. Cadwell, A.A., The Australian Political Party System, (London, Angus and Robertson, 1954) p. 57.
30. Ibid.

representatives and 8 senators to the first Federal Parliament<sup>31</sup> (1901), and by 1910, the Labour Party had control of both the Senate and the House of Representatives.<sup>32</sup> In New Zealand, the trade unionists elected Labour Candidates within the Liberal Party but a break with the Liberals came in 1906 after the death of Seddon.<sup>33</sup> During the first decade of the century no similar development occurred in Canada. Unions were weak and the farm movement of the prairies failed to evolve into a distinct Labour Party.<sup>34</sup>

The F.P.U. of Newfoundland had much in common with the large unions of unskilled workers which was the trend of union development in England in the late eighties. Coaker's action in creating a political party was also typical of the labour development going on at the same time or shortly before in England and other parts of the Empire, particularly in Australia and New Zealand. There are some indications that Coaker molded the Union Party on the Labour Party of Australia. Certainly his method of selecting candidates and exercising control over them after they were elected was almost identical with that of the Australian Labour Party.<sup>35</sup>

From the comparison above, it is noticeable that the F.P.U. activity in Newfoundland was similar in many respects to con-

31. Crisp, L.F., The Australian Federal Labour Party 1901-1951, (London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1955), p. 111.
32. Cadwell, The Australian Political Party System, p. 57.
33. Heaton, H., "Labour Parties in the British Dominions", Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Vol 8, p. 703.
34. Ibid. See also, Rolph, Henry Wise Wood of Alberta, Ch. 1V.
35. Heaton, H., "Labour Parties in the British Dominions", Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Vol 8, p. 704.

temporary development in other parts of the world. The difference in background undoubtedly brought about some few changes, but in general, the F.P.U., in each of the three fields of its endeavour—unionism, co-operation and politics—had much in common with similar development in other countries at the same time.

The F.P.U. failed to accomplish its initial aims. As a union, its strength gradually dwindled during the twenties and was dealt the final blow by the depression of the early thirties. As a co-operative it suffered the fate of many similar attempts in other parts of the world at the same time, and as a political party it was gradually absorbed in the Liberal fold.

There are many reasons for the F.P.U. failure. Coaker after he retired in 1932, wrote:

As the years passed petty jealousies crept into the Councils. A selfishness developed amongst some sections. Leading members sometimes became disgruntled because they were not selected as Candidates for the House of Assembly. Others imagined the clerks in stores favoured some members as against others...

The interest in the Fishermen's Protective Union began to slacken as soon as the promoters grew old or passed away.. Enthusiasm such as existed during the first ten years, when it was possible for the President to visit many Councils and Stores each year, meet members, adjust little troubles and disputes, was no longer observable... 36

It is significant that Coaker referred to the enthusiasm of the first ten years, for during this period the F.P.U. functioned as a part of the Opposition. Its political activity had a retarding effect only after it became a part of the Government in 1917.

36. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, pp. 7-8.

Its subsequent failure to live up to its initial aims, and its tendency to adopt some of the "questionable" practices of its predecessors, resulted in a gradual loss of popularity. The F.P.U. failed to expand beyond the east and north-east coasts.<sup>37</sup> Certainly its political activity contributed to this failure. Other factors which tended to restrict its development to this area, in time might have been overcome had it remained politically neutral. Once the decision to undertake an active political programme was made, it destroyed the F.P.U. possibilities of expanding to embrace other areas. Coaker planned to unite fishermen of all denominations, and in this respect had some success before the election of 1913. The oppositon to the People's Party during this election which was strongly supported by the Roman Catholic people brought the early success to an untimely end. In additon the F.P.U., until the formation of the National Government in 1917, was an active, militant agitator.<sup>38</sup> Its constant activity kept all members active. Petitions demands and criticisms all gave a purpose to its existence and a zest to the lives of its members. Once the Union Party became a part of the Government, all this activity ceased and F.P.U. popularity dwindled. x

The F.P.U. was planned and created by Coaker. Though in theory it was under democratic control, in practice he himself made all worthwhile decisions. He decided to establish the various union

37. See above, Ch. 11, p. 37.

38. See above, Ch. VI, p. 102.

commercial concerns and directed their policies after their creation. He decided to establish the Union Party. He selected the various candidates for that party and directed their action after they entered the House of Assembly. He made the decision to coalesce with the Liberal Party during the various elections from 1913 to 1928. Thus the F.P.U. in each of its three fields of endeavour was completely dependent upon Coaker for leadership. Undoubtedly, he selected able subordinates but they were followers, not leaders. During the early years, before the F.P.U. activities became extensive and diversified, Coaker could by superhuman effort supervise all work and make all important decisions himself. The organization he built up depended upon his leadership. His official duties after 1919 when he became Minister of Marine and Fisheries, in particular his tremendous effort in connection with the "Fishery Regulations", placed a further strain upon him. By 1922 he was forced to slacken the pace and leave more work to his subordinates, who were trained to follow, not to lead. Coaker's inability to share authority with his subordinates can perhaps be regarded as one of the principal reasons for the F.P.U. failure.

One of the principal factors which contributed to the F.P.U. popularity during the first decade of its existence was the economic benefits which it brought its members. In the first place Coaker, in the opinion of the fishermen, was directly responsible for causing the price of fish and seals to increase in several consecutive years. This benefited all fishermen, union and non-union. In the second place, several thousand of his most ardent



followers had invested their savings in union-sponsored companies. Their shares paid high dividends until about 1920. When the Union Export Co. began operation, Coaker as the president of this Company, no longer had any interest in causing the price of fish to rise and consequently, there was no longer any economic reason for the fishermen to support the F.P.U. The three thousand shareholders of the union-sponsored companies became bitter critics of the F.P.U. leader when their shares no longer brought dividends. Some of these same shareholders are the greatest detractors of Coaker today. Thus, Coaker, by creating the Union Export Company, placed himself in a position where he could no longer command the allegiance of the fishermen by bringing them economic benefits, and one of the principal reasons for his early popularity vanished. In addition, his early success in persuading his fishermen followers to invest their savings in union sponsored companies contributed to the F.P.U. downfall, for when these companies no longer paid dividends many of the most dedicated members became its greatest enemies. X

It can be noted that the causes of the F.P.U. failure cannot be found in its initial plan. Each cause is centered around some point where Coaker diverged from the original plan and purpose laid down in the constitution before the movement began.

It is to be expected that a movement of this nature, that embraced three major fields of endeavour, playing an important role in each for a period of nearly a quarter of a century, would have a number of detrimental as well as beneficial effects. The F.P.U. exerted considerable influence on the behaviour of the fishermen.



They had always been loath to invest their savings in any way and the disillusionment caused by the loss of their investment in the various F.P.U. companies made them all the more loath to participate in future investment. Indeed, the whole commercial venture of the F.P.U. may be regarded as a retarding factor, for in the long run instead of destroying the "credit system" as was its initial plan, it was guilty of encouraging it. In addition, its abortive attempt to introduce co-operatives among the fishermen can be blamed, to some extent, for the failure of the more recent attempt to introduce the co-operative movement to the east and north-east coasts. (Margaret Digby, who studied the co-operative possibilities of Newfoundland and Labrador in 1934, wrote: "the whole episode has left painful memories and will probably make the organization of a satisfactory form of co-operation difficult in the more heavily implicated district."<sup>39</sup>) Certainly, there is very little co-operative activity in Newfoundland today, and the few societies that have been established, are in areas that the F.P.U. failed to organize.

The decade from 1908 to 1918 was a time when the F.P.U. held out great hopes to the people of northern Newfoundland. It had honestly tried to improve the working conditions of the fishermen, sealers, and loggers, and had achieved some success in its efforts. It had declared itself the enemy of political corruption, waste and inefficiency, and had sincerely attempted to destroy the

39. Digby, Report on the Opportunities for Co-operative Organization in Newfoundland and Labrador, p. 19.

sectarianism which had plagued the colony since the inception of Responsible Government. It was unfortunate, however, for the movement and for the country that these early ideas were soon forgotten after the Union Party became a part of the Government in 1917.. From this time forward, the administration of which the Union members were a part, helped to perpetuate the same type of "corruption" and waste it had so vociferously condemned during the previous years. In addition the Union members as allies of the Liberal-Reform Party contested the various districts during the election of 1919 on strict denominational lines, thus abetting the sectarianism it had earlier attempted to destroy. The F.P.U. leader and his political associates were probably sincere in their attempt to oust "corruption", but not sufficiently strong to avoid the many temptations that came their way. In addressing the fourteenth Annual Convention of the Supreme Council, Coaker stated: "The country knows very little of the methods practiced by unprincipled men to lead clean men into pitfalls and political corruption".<sup>40</sup> Whatever the cause might have been there is little doubt that the Union Party failed to live up to its early aims.

The absence of municipal institutions caused a tendency on the part of the Newfoundland electorate to place a strong faith in their political leaders. (Coaker, in establishing the F.P.U., created a situation whereby this same appeal could be spread over several districts, and thus instead of destroying the ill effects of the lack of local government, the F.P.U. accentuated it.) In

40. Coaker, (ed.), Twenty Years of the F.P.U. of Newfoundland, p. 210.

this respect, it can probably be blamed for creating the great dependence which the northern fishermen place on their political leaders today.

—The F.P.U., in addition to the ill-effects described above, also left permanent marks on the life of the country. Perhaps the most obvious was the spirit of unity it developed among the northern fishermen. It was also directly responsible for creating an era of reform that did much to improve the working conditions in the country's major industries.

From the commercial point of view, although many of the F.P.U. efforts were transient, it did succeed in bringing electricity to the greater part of the Bonavista Peninsula. Although its attempts to recreate the ship building industry were doomed to eventual failure, it did create a great deal of employment for over a decade.

The efforts of the F.P.U. in the field of politics also left permanent effects on the life of the country. As a Union Party its existence was short, but, by coalescing with the Liberal Party, it revitalized it to such an extent that it became the major political force in Newfoundland and remained so for the period from 1919 to 1932. The Liberal Party of today is certainly the direct descendant of that of the twenties and its policy has to some extent been a continuation of the Liberal policy of the period from 1919 to 1932. J. R. Smallwood, the present Liberal Premier of Newfoundland, in a pamphlet which he wrote anonymously in the early twenties in reference to Coaker, stated:

He stands firm and secure on his great platform of two planks: 1. Reform the whole fish business. 2. Bring in an era of industrial development. I make bold to say that not only now, but never in the history of the country did any statesman offer such a great and beneficial platform... These two planks prove W. F. Coaker to be the greatest real statesman the country ever saw. 41

Mr.

Probably Smallwood's reference to Coaker's efforts to which he refers may have influenced him to attempt the substantial industrial programme for which his administration has been so well known.

November 2, 1958, ended the first half-century since the F.P.U. organizer founded the first Local Council, and although this organization has practically ceased to exist for at least half that period, yet the ripples of the many commotions which it made in the life of the country are still being felt on its shores..

41. Smallwood, A sincere appreciation of Newfoundland's Greatest Son, p. 12, (pamph.)

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For Union membership see, Connor, (ed.), The History of the F.F.W., p. 62.

## APPENDIX A

## DENOMINATIONAL DISTRIBUTIONS IN UNION DISTRICTS

District	Pop- ulation	Union Mem- bership	Denomination:		Union Member- ship % of total Population
			Roman Cath.	Protes- tant	
Twillingate	22,705	4,000	2,424	20,281	18
Fogo	8,257	1,700	1,184	7,109	21
Bonavista	22,894	4,000	3,201	19,698	18
Trinity	21,788	3,600	1,525	20,263	16
Bay de Verde	10,213	1,600	2,294	7,919	16
Port de Grave	6,986	800	1,794	5,192	11
St. Barbe	10,481	1,000	2,411	8,070	9
Harbour Grace	11,925	700	2,544	9,381	6
Other Districts		300			

<sup>1</sup>See, Census of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1911, (St. John's, J.W. Withers, 1914), Vol.1, pp. IX, XVII.  
For Union membership see, Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p.64.

<sup>1</sup>See, Coaker (ed.), The History of the F.P.U. Annual Conventions for the years 1909 to 1919.

APPENDIX BAnnual Conventions of F.P.U. - place, time and number of delegates.<sup>1</sup>

<u>Year</u>	<u>Time of Convention</u>	<u>Place of Convention</u>	<u>No. of Delegates</u>
1909	Nov. 1, 3, 3	Change Island, Notre Dame Bay	9
1910	Dec. 12, 13, 14	Catalina, Trinity Bay	38
1911	Nov. 27, 28, 30, (sic)	Greenspond, Bonavista Bay	60
1912	Dec. 12, 13, 14, 16	Bonavista, Bonavista Bay	160
1913	Dec. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	St. John's	180
1914	Nov. 16, 17, 18, 19	Catalina, Trinity Bay	200
1915	Nov. 25, 26, 27	St. John's	over 200
1916	Dec. 4	Catalina, Trinity Bay	over 200
1917	Nov. 13	Catalina, Trinity Bay	over 200
1918	Dec. 10	Port Union, Trinity Bay	200

W. F. Coaker

Samuel Miles

John H. H. H.

Samuel Miles

James Kendrick

Charles H. H.

<sup>1</sup> See, Coaker (ed.), The History of the F.P.U. Annual Conventions for the years 1909 to 1919.

Edward Richards

Henry Terraville

Solomon H. H.

Patrick Atkinson

Dorcas Terraville

Adrian H. H.

Thomas Miles

Robert Watkins

John H. H.

Joseph Kearley

John Gillingham

<sup>1</sup> See, St. John's Advocate, April 12, 1913. See also Coaker, Prayer and Praise, p. 4.

APPENDIX CGROWTH OF THE F.P.U. from 1909 to 1914<sup>1</sup>

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. of Locals</u>	<u>No. of Members</u>	<u>No. of District Councils</u>	<u>Councils with District Councils</u>
1909	30		None	
1910	66		2	Fogo, Twillingate
1911	116	12,500	4	Bonavista Bay Trinity Bay
1912	153	15,000	6	Bay de Verde Port de Grave
1913	190	17,700	7	Harbour Grace
1914	206	20,000	7	

<sup>1</sup> See, Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., Annual Conventions for the years 1909 to 1914. No great change occurred after 1914 in either number of members, Locals or District Councils. However, in 1915 the constitution was amended so that the districts of Conception Bay had one District Council (Conception Bay District Council), instead of three.

APPENDIX D

The twenty original members of the first Local Council of the F.P.U. established at Herring Neck, November 3rd. 1908<sup>1</sup>

W.F. Coaker	Kenneth Warren	John Hussey
Samuel Miles	Jesse Reddick	Garfield Woodford
Archibald Miles	Benjamin Torraville	William Kearley
Edward Richards	Henry Torraville	Solomon Reddick
Patrick Atkinson	Dorman Torraville	Edwin Kearley
Thomas Miles	Hubert Watkins	John Kearley
Joseph Kearley	John Gillingham	

<sup>1</sup> See, Fishermen's Advocate, April 12, 1913. See also Coaker Past, Present and Future, p.4.

# APPENDIX E

## The 1913 Elections<sup>1</sup>

<u>District</u>	<u>Member</u>	<u>Party</u>	<u>Approximate ratio of R. Catholic to Protestant</u>	<u>No. of Votes Polled by Successful Candidates</u>	<u>No. of Votes Polled by Unsuccessful Candidates</u>
St.Barbe	W.M. Clapp	Liberal	1 to 4	1253	871
Twillingate	Sir R. Bond	Liberal	1 to 10	3481	887
	J.A. Clift	Liberal			
	W. Jennings	Union	1 to 10	3399	698
Fogo	W.F. Halfyard	Union	1 to 6	1377	594
Bonavista	W.F. Coaker	Union	1 to 6	3473	1624
	R.G. Winsor	Union	1 to 6	3313	1515
	J. Abbott	Union	1 to 6	3308	1427
Trinity	J. Stone	Union	1 to 14	2685	1678
	A. Targett	Union	1 to 14	2608	1510
	W. Lloyd	Liberal	1 to 14	2592	1462
Bay de Verde	A. Hickman	Liberal	1 to 3	1168	1140
	J. Crosbie	People's	1 to 3	1150	1078
Carbonear	J. Goodison	People's	2 to 9	1444	1200

<sup>1</sup>For election results see Year Book of Newfoundland, (St. John's, J.W. Withers, King's Printers, 1914), pp.18-19.  
For denominational distribution see Census of Newfoundland and Labrador 1911, (St. John's, J.W. Withers, 1914).



# Appendix E - Cont'd

<u>District</u>	<u>Member</u>	<u>Party</u>	<u>Approximate ratio of R. Catholic to Protestant</u>	<u>No. of Votes Polled by Successful Candidates</u>	<u>No. of Votes Polled by Unsuccessful Candidates</u>
Harbour Grace	A. Piccott	People's	2 to 9	1444	1200
	E. Parsons	People's	2 to 9	1374	1187
	M. Young	People's	2 to 9	1342	1169
Port de Grave	G. Grimes	Union	1 to 3	871	697
Harbour Main	W. Woodford	People's	3 to 1	1178	904
	G. Kennedy	People's	3 to 1	1116	776
St. John's E.	J. M. Kent	Liberal	10 to 9	2835	2533
	W. Higgins	People's	10 to 9	2660	2443
	J. Dwyer	Liberal	10 to 9	2609	2306
St. John's W.	Sir E. Morris	People's	Slight R.C. Majority	2749	1738
	J. Bennett	People's	Slight R.C. Majority	2643	1719
	M. Kennedy	People's	Slight R.C. Majority	2545	1545
Ferryland	Sir M. Cashin	People's	37 to 1	1095	303
	P. F. Moore	People's	37 to 1	918	267
Placentia	R. Devereaux	People's	4 to 1	2023	1544
St. Mary's	F. Morris	People's	4 to 1	1953	1300
	W. Walsh	People's	4 to 1	1758	1254

<u>District</u>	<u>Member</u>	<u>Party</u>	<u>Approximate ratio of R. Catholic to Protestant</u>	<u>No. of Votes Polled by Successful Candidates</u>	<u>No. of Votes Polled by Unsuccessful Candidates</u>
Burib	J.S. Currie	People's	4 to 7	1200	786
	T. LeFeuvre	People's	4 to 7	1174	741
Fortune Bay	C. Emerson	People's	2 to 7	1000	865
Burgeo & LaPoile	R. Moulton	People's	1 to 50	760	728
St. George's	J.F. Downey	People's	7 to 4	1187	770

#### APPENDIX F

#### List of Branch Stores of the Fishermen's Trading Co. May 1917<sup>1</sup>

Kelligrews,	Conception Bay	Joe Batt's Arm,	Notre Dame Bay,
Port de Grave,	" "	Doting Cove,	" " "
Bay Roberts,	" "	Ladle Cove,	" " "
Salmon Cove,	" "	Carmanville,	" " "
Bay de Verde,	" "	Seldom,	" " "
Winterton,	Trinity Bay	Tilting,	" " "
Hant's Harbour	" "	North End Change Islands,	" " "
Port Rexton,	" "	Main Tickle,	" " "
Bonaventure,	" "	Herring Neck,	" " "
Ireland's Eye,	" "	Twillingate,	" " "
Champney's,	" "	Fogo,	" " "
Catalina,	" "	Moreton's Harbour,	" " "
Port Union	" "	Exploits,	" " "
Salvage,	Bonavista Bay	Botwood,	" " "
Bonavista,	" "	Lewisporte,	" " "

<sup>1</sup>The Evening Advocate, May 28, 1917, p.7

Appendix F - Cont'd.

Keels,  
King's Cove,  
Greenspond,  
Valleyfield,  
Newtown,  
Cat Harbour, (Lumsden),

Bonavista Bay

" " "  
" " "  
" " "  
" " "

Pilley's Island,  
Nipper's Harbour,  
LaScie,  
St. Anthony,

Notre Dame Bay

" " "  
White Bay  
" "

## APPENDIX G

"The Bonavista Platform"<sup>1</sup>

1. Standardization of fish; a new system of culling fish; the inspection of fishery produce; and the establishment of a permanent commission to operate the laws to standardize fish, the culling of it and the fixing of the price of fish shipped direct from the Labrador Coast.
2. The appointment of Trade Agents abroad.
3. Weekly reports of prices of fishery produce in the foreign markets.
4. The establishment of night-school system in the out-ports during winter months.
5. Schools for every settlement containing 20 schoolable children from the age of 7 to 14.
6. Free and compulsory education seven months of the year.
7. Reduction of duties upon certain articles used by the masses, such as ready-made clothes, oil clothes, boots, tobacco, guernseys, sugar, tea, etc.
8. Old Age Pensions for all over 70 starting with \$50.00 and increasing to \$100.00 as the Colony's finances permit.
9. Erection of Bait Depots as outlined by the F.F.U.

<sup>1</sup>The Fishermen's Advocate, October 6, 1913, p.4. See also Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., Page 50.

Appendix G - Cont'd.

10. No further pensions to civil servants, over what is paid worn out toilers.
11. A long distance telephone to connect every settlement in the Colony which can be reached.
12. The re-organization of the Fishery Department.
13. Single outport electoral districts.
14. Elective School and Municipal Boards - the former on denominational lines, the latter to expend all road, charity and old age pension grants.
15. Amended sealing laws as outlined by the F.P.U. Agreement.
16. The sale of timber areas by public auction and the enforcement of the Fishermen's Timber Limit Laws and the Crown Lands Act re timber grants.
17. The payment of \$500 sessional indemnity for members of the House of Assembly.
18. Laws to make combines in trade punishable by imprisonment only.
19. Law to establish the Referendum and the Recall.
20. Retrenchment in every department of the public service and working hours of officials from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Appendix G - Cont'd.

21. The amendment of the Election Act, to permit the counting of votes by each Deputy Returning Officer.
22. Laws to punish any member of the Legislature who receive financial profit or gain directly or indirectly from the public treasury except what is openly voted by the Legislature as salary- sessional indemnity- or in payment of services rendered to the Colony.
23. The utilizing of the cash reserve to the Colony's credit at the banks to purchase fishery supplies and motor engines.
24. The establishment of a Transportation Commission to operate the contracts of Reid, Bowering and Crosbie.
25. The fixing of a minimum wage for labour by a Commission and wages to be paid weekly and in cash.
26. A Royal Commission to investigate public affairs.
27. Bonus for clearing land and encouragement to settlers upon the land and of stock raising.
28. The construction of a harbour on the Strait Shore.
29. The closing down of whale factories.
30. Fishing debts over two years old to be uncollectable by process of the courts of law.
31. The granting of a subsidy to steamers supplying coals to rough outport settlements.

APPENDIX H  
FORTY THOUSAND STRONG<sup>1</sup>

This song of which the author is unknown was quite popular among Union Members during the early years of the F.P.U.

We are coming Mr. Coaker from the East, West, North and South,  
 You have called us and we're coming to put our foes to rout;  
 By Merchants and by Governments too long we've been misruled,  
 We're determined now in future and no longer we'll be fooled.  
 We'll be brothers all and free men and we'll rightify each wrong,  
 We are coming Mr. Coaker and we're forty thousand strong.

We are coming Mr. Coaker, men from Green Bay's rocky shore,  
 Men who stand the snow white billows down on stormy Labrador;  
 They are ready and awaiting, strong and solid, firm and bold,  
 To be led by you like Moses, led the Israelites of old.

They are ready for to sever from the merchant's servile throng  
 We are coming Mr. Coaker and we're forty thousand strong.

We are coming Mr. Coaker, blood of Saxon and of Celt,  
 You arouse a feeling in us that before we never felt;  
 Valiant men from far Placentia whom the angry ocean braves,  
 They are with you heart and spirit, breasting Cape St. Mary's waves,  
 They are with the fight for freedom and its Union is their song,  
 We are coming Mr. Coaker and we're forty thousand strong.

<sup>1</sup>Fishermen's Advocate, September 20th. 1913, page 5.



Appendix H - Cont'd.

We are coming Mr. Coaker, and though sharp shall be the fight,  
Yet we trust in you our leader, and our God will do the right.  
All our beacon fires are lighted and we see them brightly burn;  
With our motto "No Surrender" all our enemies we will spurn,  
Led by you we'll never falter, God shall help our cause along,  
We are coming Mr. Coaker and we're forty thousand strong.





②



PERMISSION HAS BEEN GRANTED  
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WITHOUT RESTRICTION

FELTHAM, JOHN

39  
171  
139→

The  
Development of  
the  
F. P. U.  
in  
Newfoundland,  
(1908 - 1923)  
by  
John Feltham

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master  
of Arts, Memorial University of Newfoundland, March 16, 1959.



## THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE F. P. U. IN NEWFOUNDLAND, (1908-1923)

### ABSTRACT

It is essential for the reader to bear in mind that the F.P.U. was not only a union, but from its beginning adopted an important role in commerce and politics. It had also functioned as a municipal council in the many settlements throughout the east and north-east coasts, and had many of the characteristics of a fraternal society.

This monograph is an attempt to trace the growth of the F. P. U. in each branch of its development, with particular emphasis on the factors which made such a movement possible and explanations for its ultimate failure. However, before attacking the primary problem, the writer has devoted considerable effort to the background history of the pre-union period in an attempt to make clear to the reader the conditions which existed in Newfoundland before the movement began.

The major problem can be clearly divided into several minor ones. Of primary importance is a study of the inception and development of the union itself, with special reference to why it failed to expand beyond the east and north-east coasts, and to the aims of the union as initially planned by the founder.

In the field of politics each of the following topics has been considered: the original political aims of the F. P. U.,

its role in politics before the formation of the Union Party, the "Donavista Platform", the decision to coalesce with the Liberal Party in 1913, the election of 1913, the record of the Union Party in the House of Assembly before 1917, the National Government (1917-1919), the second Liberal-Union coalition, and the role of the union candidates while part of the Government.

Detailed study has been given to each of the commercial endeavours of the F.P.U. and considerable effort devoted to the effects this activity had on the movement itself and on the country generally. In this respect particular attention has been given to the change that took place in this commercial policy from 1908 to the 1920's.

The writer has also tried to create a verbal picture of W. F. Coaker. Included is a chronological biography and also a detailed character analysis. Particular emphasis has been given to the noticeable changes which took place in his character from the year he founded the F. P. U., (1908), to his retirement in 1932.

Finally, in the conclusion an attempt has been made to show how the F.P.U. compared with similar development in other parts of the world at the same time, and how it has left a mark on the life of the country that in many respects is still apparent today.

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Preface

The Fishermen's Protective Union ceased to be prominent in the commercial and political life of Newfoundland when I was quite young. Nevertheless, as long as I can remember, I have had a strong curiosity concerning this movement. As a boy I remember the "Union Hall" of the small Bonavista Bay settlement where I was born, and vividly recollect, as one of a group of boys, breaking its windows by throwing stones through them. My father had been a union member, chairman of a local council and a delegate to the Annual Convention of 1912. He was also a shareholder of the Union Trading Co. Consequently, the F.P.U. and its leaders were often discussed in our home during my boyhood.

As time passed I found that many people had strong ideas concerning the F.P.U. and its leader. On the one hand, there were those who believed that Coaker had sincerely attempted, through the F.P.U. to uplift the northern fishermen; and on the other hand, there were others who believed that his primary motive was to satisfy his own desire for power and wealth. I often wondered what the true function of the F.P.U. was, and what its leader had tried to do. Investigation on my part showed that no attempt had been made to answer this question. J. R. Smallwood, the present Premier of Newfoundland, in 1927, had written a book entitled Coaker of Newfoundland, but it failed to provide the answer I sought, for it dealt principally with Coaker's ability as an orator and his attempt to regulate and modernize the salt cod industry.

Investigation, however, showed that a great deal of primary material existed. For convenience this material can be divided into four groups: (1) writings of W.F. Coaker in the form of articles contributed to the press, political speeches, addresses delivered before the F. P. U. Annual Convention, etc. (2) the printed records of the

Annual Conventions of the Supreme Council of the F.P.U. from 1909 to 1923. (3) the F. P. U. paper, the Fishermen's Advocate, which devoted a great deal of attention to the union role in politics and commerce; (4) the written opinions of contemporary writers; (5) government publications. It was also still possible to interview several people who had had direct associations with the F. P. U. and its leaders.

While my own curiosity was a primary factor in causing me to select the topic, I soon found that the F. P. U. though seldom mentioned by those who have written on the history of Newfoundland, played an important role in the economic, political, cultural, and social life of the country, during the quarter century from 1908 to 1932. Indeed, in many ways, its influence can be detected today.

An attempt has been made in the first chapter, to describe the economic and political conditions in Newfoundland during the half century preceeding the founding of the F. P. U. The remainder of the monograph is an effort to provide an answer to the question "what was the role of the F. P. U. during the years from 1908 to 1933 and what were its effects on the subsequent history on the country?"

I am greatly indebted to Dr. G. O. Rothney for supervising my research, for his constant encouragement and constructive criticism. I should also like to express my thanks to the cheerful help of the staff of the Gosling Memorial Library and to Miss Agnes O' Dea who gave invaluable help in my research and for information in preparing my bibliography.

My sincere appreciation also to the many people who co-operated with me in my search for material, in particular Miss C. Coaker, who presented me with several pamphlets otherwise unavailable; and Mr. A. Bailey of Port Union, who placed the files of the Fishermen's Advocate at my disposal. I offer also my grateful thanks to the Canadian Council for the grant which made it financially possible for me to use many sources of material during the summer of 1958 which otherwise would not have been available.

## Chapter 1.

### Economic and Political Background

The problems which Newfoundland faced at the beginning of the twentieth century had their roots in conditions which had already existed for generations. These conditions can be traced to a number of geographical and economic factors. Thus in order to understand the developments of the twentieth century, it is necessary to study the economic and political history of the island from the time of its discovery.

Of primary importance in the study of Newfoundland history is a knowledge of the part played by the fishery. "The country has always been, first and foremost, a fishing country ...." <sup>1</sup> It is in this respect that Newfoundland differed most from other British North American colonies. All the maritime colonies north of the Hudson had an initial fishing economy; all but Newfoundland early developed other interests and in time the fishery became relatively unimportant. In Newfoundland the story was altogether different. The geography of the country, the poor soil, the restrictions on land cultivation and settlement, all played part in retarding the development of the meagre agricultural resources. The forests were of little value for the production of lumber, and there was no demand for pulpwood before the turn of the century. From the mid-nineteenth century mining had attracted many men from the fishery but it had never occupied more than a secondary position in the economy of the country.

1. Newfoundland Royal Commission, 1933, Report, (H.M.S.O., London 1933), p. 73.

Thus Newfoundland has had to rely, from the first, on an economy dependant almost entirely on the production and sale of fish and fish products. The fishermen settled in "places from which the fishery could most easily be conducted".<sup>2</sup> In determining a choice of residence they deliberately avoided the populated settlement and searched out isolated, sparsely populated regions. They preferred the isolated island, the exposed headland or the out-of-way cove.<sup>3</sup> The nature of the industry necessitated a sparse population living in close proximity to the sea-shore but, added to the requirements of the industry, was the desire on the part of the early fishermen to escape the attention of the Naval Authorities.

By the turn of the century, Newfoundland had a population of somewhat less than a quarter of a million people,<sup>4</sup> living in approximately 1300 settlements. The distribution of the population in numerous hamlets, separated from each other by the roadless wilderness or, for the greater part of the year, by the sea made impassable by ice, has had far-reaching consequences. Administration was difficult and expensive. Education, health and welfare presented well-nigh impossible problems and were a

2. Ibid, p. 3.

3. Appendix to Report of the Royal Commission for the Preparation of the Case of the Government of Newfoundland for the Revision of the Financial Terms of Union, 1957, p. 25.

4. Newfoundland Royal Commission, 1933, Report, Appendix A, p. 23



3

tremendous burden on the finance of the country. The smallness of the outport settlements has also been a contributing factor to the growth of sectarianism,<sup>5</sup> which in turn has complicated the problem of education and created additional problems in administration.

Newfoundland has also differed from other B.N.A. colonies in its failure to develop a system of local government. An act was passed by the legislature in 1888 providing for the election in St. John's of a group of men to administer local affairs. With this exception there was no local government until 1938.<sup>6</sup> There are several explanations for this dearth of municipal organization. In the first place, there were very few settlements large enough to support a municipal government. In the second place, the standard of academic and civic education was at a very low level. In the third place, the low national and per capita income made it impossible for most communities to support a municipal council.

The absence of local administration was an important factor in determining the nature of the government of the country. The lack of such an institution left the voters with little opportunity to comprehend the purpose and function of government, and they were liable to fall prey to the first lavish promise of an unprincipled politician. The standard of education and the lack of newspapers

5. Rowe, F.W., The History of Education in Newfoundland, (The Ryerson Press, Toronto, 1952). See also, Newfoundland Royal Commission, 1933, Report, pp. 74-75.
6. Report of the Royal Commission for the Preparation of the Case of the Government of Newfoundland for the Revision of the Terms of Union, pp. 488-9.
7. Ibid, p. 492.

4

throughout the greater part of the country accentuated these conditions. The failure to develop local administration caused the majority of the voters to dissociate themselves from the government. They had never been called upon to make a direct contribution to the expenses of any administration and did not associate government spending with taxation. On the other hand, the standard of living in many of the outports and the lack of transportation facilities made it difficult for any contact to exist between the voters, scattered over thousands of miles of coastline, and their representatives in far-off St. John's, the seat of all administration for the whole country.<sup>8</sup> This absence of local government not only tended towards a lack of political education on the part of the voters, but left the outport districts incapable of finding local representatives for the House of Assembly. The result was that some districts were consistently represented by St. John's lawyers or professional politicians. Of greater importance, perhaps, than these three factors combined was its tendency to create in the people a reliance on the Colonial government for every communal improvement. This attitude in time created a "spoils system" so vicious that it threatened to destroy the usefulness of the whole civil service.<sup>9</sup> Though recent progress has been made in the development of municipal institutions, there remains still some of the same problems as a heritage of the past

8. Newfoundland Royal Commission, 1933, Report, p. 217.

9. Ibid, pp. 202-203.

Since the F.P.U., in its early years was a strong agitator against the "spoils system" and during its later years helped to perpetuate it, some attention will be given to this system as it existed during the early twentieth century. With each change in government, civil servants, regardless of their efficiency, were liable to lose their jobs. No position was secure, from well-paid officials to the most lowly mail clerk.<sup>10</sup> Because there was no local government, all district grants were handled by the district representative, or, if this member were in opposition, by some other government member.<sup>11</sup> (The Union Party agitated against this policy during its first session in the House.)<sup>12</sup> Quite often the money granted for public use ended up in the hands of party supporters.

By the beginning of the twentieth century the following results of this system were apparent. Firstly, a large percentage of the money granted either ended as a private gift to party supporters or was spent on unnecessary projects. Secondly, the civil service functioned in a very inefficient manner. There was no system of competitive examinations. Practically all appointments were political, and experienced workers recruited in this manner were replaced with each change of government by a new slate of inefficient workers. Thirdly, it tended to make each succeeding government a little more extravagant than its predecessor. This resulted in more and more borrowing and ultimate bankruptcy.

10. Ibid, pp. 87, 202-3. See also, Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1914.

11. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1914, p. 239-243.

12. To prevent this policy from continuing the Union Party advocated that "road boards" be established in every settlement and that all government grants be made through these boards.

These conditions were aggravated still further by the existence of a strong sectarian feeling. In practice all major religious denominations were proportionately represented in the House of Assembly, the Legislative Council and the Executive Council. This same practice was applied to all government appointments; often resulting in an unnecessary multiplication of service and a rigidity in the selection of government officials, which probably contributed to the low level of efficiency in the civil service.

13

The Royal Commission of 1934 reported that party politics as then existing in other countries was non-existent in Newfoundland. In place of the political platform calculated to interest the electorate, was an appeal to one or more religious denominations, either threatening what the opposing party would do if <sup>it</sup> were elected, or by promising a greater share of government patronage. There were exceptions to this policy from time to time, but in general, the sectarian appeal played an important part in the majority of elections from 1832 to 1932. This unfortunate influence of sectarianism on politics was and still continues to be one of the most apparent effects of the experiment in Responsible government in Newfoundland. It is to the credit of the F.P.U. and the Union Party that both attempted to remove this insidious growth from the politics of the colony.

14

In no small measure, the economic conditions within the country can be traced to some aspect of the political life of the day. As already mentioned, Newfoundland produced principally salt cod for

13. Newfoundland Royal Commission, 1933, Report, p. 88.

14. See below, Chapter 2, p. 37

the various European and South and Central American countries. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, there was a ready market and a steady demand for all of this commodity that Newfoundland could produce. But the nineteenth century brought many problems. The catch had not increased in proportion to the number of fishermen engaged,<sup>15</sup> and the European markets began to find a better quality of fish in Iceland and Norway. These countries had adapted themselves to the changing times, and had not only undersold the Newfoundland product but managed to market a better product as well.<sup>16</sup> Neilson claimed that the market for cod "...has been ruined from careless and inferior modes of pack and cure in the past."<sup>17</sup> Almost half a century later we find the following observation: "In the past quarter of a century the quality of Newfoundland dried cod has lagged behind the quality of the dried cod produced by her principal competitors, Norway and Iceland. The difficulty is not that the quality of the Newfoundland product has declined but rather that the quality of the competing product has improved."<sup>18</sup> One of the principal factors which contributed to Newfoundland's failure to improve its salt cod was the

15. Newfoundland Royal Commission, 1933, Report, Appendix D, p. 24.
16. Mr. Adolph Neilson was a Norwegian inspector in the employ of the Newfoundland Government during the last decade of the nineteenth century.
17. Annual Report of the Newfoundland Department of Fisheries for the year 1894, (St. John's, Newfoundland, Queen's Printers). Reprinted, (St. John's, D.R. Thistle, 1936), p. 78 (pamphlet).
18. MacKay, R.A., Newfoundland, Economic, Diplomatic and Strategic Studies, (Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1946), p. 83.

lack of centralization. The fishery was carried on as an individual enterprise. The fisherman himself owned his equipment and caught, cured and marketed his own catch. Under such a system there was no uniformity of cure, neither could division of labour, effective supervision nor specialized machinery be applied. Thus the basic cause of the marketing problem was the failure to apply new methods of catching and curing. Newfoundland had continued to practise the older methods and, in consequence, could not compete with Norway and Iceland, where the industry was highly concentrated and subject to division of labour and specialized machinery. <sup>19</sup> These countries continued to improve and increase their catch and gradually replaced Newfoundland as a supplier of salt cod to the European markets. <sup>20</sup> Newfoundland was therefore forced to search for less discriminating markets and sold more and more of her catch to the West Indies, which demanded a low priced product and was satisfied with poor quality. <sup>21</sup>

\* Another serious drawback to the fish trade was the failure of the government to take any interest in regulating the cull of salt fish or in controlling shipment to foreign markets. The merchant paid

19. Ibid

20. See Newfoundland Royal Commission, 1933, Report, p. 109, for the following data:

Date	1885	1892
Newfoundland	1,300,500 quintals	1,113,000 quintals
Iceland	100,000 "	1,500,000 "

21. Report of the Department of Natural Resources, Fishery Section, Newfoundland, 1935.

the culler and set the standard. He also determined the quality to be shipped to the various markets. There were hundreds of merchants engaged in the salt fish trade, and there was no central control. Each merchant determined his own standard, and consequently, the foreign buyer could never be sure what quality he would receive when he bought Newfoundland fish. These merchants shipped when and how they wished, with the general effect that a strong market was often flooded overnight and the captains of various vessels forced to sell at a reduced price or run the risk of having the whole cargo spoiled. This state of affairs was allowed to continue decade after decade, not because of ignorance of the<sup>22</sup>true conditions, but because every attempt to bring improvement<sup>23</sup>was sabotaged by the "corrupt" political machine.<sup>23</sup> In this respect it is also significant that two of the first demands of the F.P.U. concerned a uniform cull of dried cod, and the placing of trade agents by the government in each country that bought Newfoundland<sup>24</sup> fish.

Because of the numerous variations in the fishing industry found throughout Newfoundland's 6,000 miles of coastline, it is difficult to give a complete picture. The method of catching, curing and marketing was not uniform but varied extensively. Thus it is convenient to limit this description to the three main divisions of the fishery, namely the shore, Labrador and bank.

22. While inspector, Neilson warned the Government of the true conditions of the fish trade. See Annual Report of the Department of Fisheries for the Year 1894.
23. Newfoundland Royal Commission, 1933, Report, pp. 104-115.
24. Coaker, W.F.(ed.), The History of the Fishermen's Protective Union of Newfoundland, (St. John's, Union Publishing Co., Ltd., 1920) pp. 4,7.



The shore fishery was carried out along the whole coast, often in conjunction with some other branch of the fishery, such as salmon, herring, lobster, turbot or squid. In this group the standard of living varied greatly, and depended to some extent on individual initiative and the amount of capital involved. All shore fishermen except those of some parts of the south coast, supplemented their earnings with various agricultural pursuits. In addition, a great number took part in the annual seal hunt out on the ice-fields of the North Atlantic and the Gulf of St. Lawrence.

The Labrador fishery can be conveniently divided into two types, "Floaters" and "Stationers". The first group were those fishermen who visited the Labrador coast in vessels ranging from 20 to 150 tons. The fishing was done from the vessel and the fish cleaned and salted on board. The men remained on board during the fishing season, and moved from harbour to harbour until a load was procured or until the approach of winter forced them to return to their home ports.

The "Stationers" were carried to and from the Labrador Coast by schooners or by coastal steamers that made special trips each spring and fall for this purpose. They fished from "rooms" situated in some convenient harbour and normally took their families with them to help in the curing of their catch. They sold their catch to a fish buyer before returning home in the fall. Most of the "stationers" came from the various towns of Conception Bay. Since<sup>25</sup> the number of men who could prosecute the shore fishery in any area

25. For a description of the Labrador fishery, see Smith, Nicholas, Fifty-two Years at the Labrador Fishery, (London, Arthur H. Stockwell, Ltd., 1936)

was limited, (the Law of Diminishing returns is soon reached in respect to any fishing ground), the Labrador fishery played an important role, for it permitted the growth of larger settlements than those dependent solely on the shore fishery. Both the "Floaters" and the "Stationers" worked on a share basis and their earnings were seldom over the subsistence level.

The bank fishery was prosecuted from the south coast and the Avalon peninsula. The vessels used were larger and the method of catch different from that of the Labrador fishery. The "bankers" fished for the greater part of the year. However, they were forced to compete with fishermen from other countries. Consequently, this branch of the fishery was the first to decline.<sup>26</sup>

The fishery was a precarious way of earning a living.<sup>27</sup> There were a number of imponderable factors which could cause a poor season, such as, scarcity of bait, scarcity of fish, poor fishing weather, bad curing weather, very low prices, and the presence of ice on the coast during the fishing season. In the favourable season most fishermen managed to catch enough fish to provide the necessities of life for themselves and their families. During the very bad seasons only the best fishermen managed to remain independent. Since bad seasons came frequently and sometimes several occurred consecutively, a large portion of Newfoundland fishermen were in perpetual debt to their merchants.

26. See Annual Report of the Department of Fisheries for the year 1894, p. 71, for the following comparison:

Year	Number of Vessels	Number of quintals of cod caught
1889	330	336,882
1894	58	53,842

27. For a general description of the Newfoundland cod fishery see, MacDermott, Hugh, MacDermott of Fortune Bay, (London, Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., 1938).

⌈The policy whereby the merchant provided the fisherman with food and fishing supplies in the spring and in return took his fish in the autumn and gave him a supply of food for the winter, is known as "the credit or truck system".⌋ If a fisherman were fortunate enough to have a favourable balance at the end of the season it was often carried on the merchant's books. The merchant, in order to cover the loss which he expected to occur through some of his dealers failing to pay their accounts, fixed his prices high enough to cover this possible loss, which made it all the more difficult for the good fishermen to retain their independence. Thus this system left the honest fishermen at the mercy of the dishonest merchant and the honest merchant at the mercy of the dishonest fishermen.

Much has been written describing this "credit system", little of which is favourable. In 1894, Neilson wrote: "The credit and supplying system proves clearly in the long run to have turned out one of the greatest curses that ever fell upon this country and its people...it has had the effect of sapping the very foundations upon which we as an independent people stand." Gosling, a well-known Newfoundland writer, in his book, Labrador: its Discovery, Exploration and Development, wrote: "It is certain that the system is evil, equally bad for both supplier and supplied." The following comment on the effects of the "credit system", by a New

28. Annual Report of the Department of Fisheries for the Year 1894, p. 46.

29. Gosling, W. A., Labrador: Its Discovery, Exploration and Development, (London, Alston Rivers Ltd., 1910), p. 468.

Zealander, A.H. McIntock, in his book, The Establishment of Constitutional Government in Newfoundland, is also noteworthy: "in the primitive and isolated fishing stations, these methods produced a careless and improvident attitude towards life and in years of plenty, habits of profuse extravagance."<sup>30</sup>

Several factors led to the inception and development of this "credit system". In the first place, the uncertainty of the fishery - the hope of a good season encouraged the fishermen to borrow and the merchant to give credit. In the second place, there were numerous small settlements with only one merchant, which eliminated the need for cash as the fishermen could only trade at the local store. In the third place, the settlers who came to Newfoundland brought very little with them in the form of worldly goods and needed a "grubstake" in order to make a start. In the fourth place the low level of education left the fishermen in no position to figure out the disadvantages of this system. Its simplicity appealed to an illiterate people. As a result of these various factors the "credit system" developed over the whole island and although recognized as a menace to the welfare of the country, no effective attempt was ever made to wipe it out. *ended late 1950's*

It is difficult to estimate the entire effects of this system on the life of the country, but the following results are perhaps the most obvious. 1. It affected the moral character of the people by encouraging extravagance, carelessness, luxury, recklessness

30. McIntock, A.H., The Establishment of Constitutional Government in Newfoundland, (London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1941), p. 123.

31. Ibid, pp. 121-122.

regarding the future, and dependence.<sup>32</sup> 2. It was the principal factor which caused the poor quality of Newfoundland cod and the resulting loss of markets.<sup>33</sup> 3. It contributed greatly to the high rate of government relief - the people simply substituted their dependence on the merchant for dependence on the government.<sup>34</sup> 4. The failure of the fishery when based on such a system led to the bankruptcy of many merchants<sup>35</sup> and threatened the economy of the whole country. (The financial crisis of 1894 is an extreme example of how serious a failure of the fishery could become). 5. It fostered class feeling - fishermen against the merchant class.<sup>36</sup> 6. It was one of the principal factors which contributed to the stagnation of the fishing industry. 7. In impoverishing the fisherman, it left him but a pawn in the merchant's political schemes. It can be said with<sup>out</sup> risk of overstatement that the "credit system" has exerted a tremendous influence for harm on the whole economic, social, cultural and political life of the country. Its roots have grown so deep that even today (1959) its unpleasant effects are still apparent.

The last half of the nineteenth century brought difficulties not only to the salt cod industry, but also a serious decline in the seal fishery. This industry had reached its peak in the mid-nineteenth century and from this time began to dwindle in importance. During the same period iron ships were introduced which dealt a serious blow to the shipbuilding industry. In 1857, this

32. Annual Report of the Department of Fisheries for the Year 1894, p. 46.

33. Ibid.

34. McIntock, The Establishment of Constitutional Government in Newfoundland, p. 123

35. Harvey, Rev. M. Newfoundland as it is in 1894: A Hand-book and Tourist Guide, (St. John's, J.W. Withers, 1894), p. 202.

36. Newfoundland Royal Commission, 1933, Report, p. 80.

industry employed 400 ships and 13,000 men.<sup>37</sup> Its decline had a great effect on the economy of the country, mainly because of the loss of winter employment that this industry had created. Before 1840, nearly every vessel that had prosecuted the seal fishery had been local built.<sup>38</sup> This provided work for lumbermen, carpenters, sailmakers and riggers. In addition, every winter, a great number of punts, oars, gaffs, etc., had to be provided for the following spring.

The seal fishery was prosecuted from the east and north-east coasts where the cod fishing season was short and thus provided winter employment where it was most needed. This industry was primarily responsible for the growth of many of the coastal towns in this area, and with its decline, they diminished in importance and population. The seal fishery proved complementary to the cod fishery in another important manner. The sealing ships during the summer, fall and winter proved ideal for carrying salt cod to foreign ports. Newfoundland's marketing troubles began only after the steamship replaced the sailing ship at the seal fishery.

The seal fishery played another important role. It brought together hundreds of men from numerous settlements who in time became aware of their unfavourable working conditions. They also learned the value of concerted action, for as early as 1860, a

37. Kean, A., The Seal Fishery, Past, Present and Future, (Lecture delivered by Captain A. Kean before the Historical Society of Newfoundland, January 13, 1921), (Robinson and Co., Ltd., St. John's, 1921), p. 14.
38. Chafe's Sealing Book, (St. John's, Trade Printers and Publishers Ltd., 1924), p. 16.

strike occurred at Brigus, Conception Bay, involving 3,000 men. The strikers demanded that Berth Money (the fee that sealers were forced to pay the owners of the sealing vessels for their berths) be abolished.<sup>39</sup> A similar strike occurred at St. John's in 1902.<sup>40</sup> It is difficult to determine how effective the seal fishery was in fostering a desire for unity. However, it helps to explain the speed with which the F.P.U. movement spread throughout the east and north-east coasts, and its failure to appeal to the fishermen of the west coast.

Hand in hand with the decline of the seal fishery and the marketing difficulties of the cod fishery grew the financial problems of the government. In 1864, Newfoundland's per capita debt was less than a third of that of Nova Scotia and about one-quarter that of Canada.<sup>41</sup> Carter and Shea, the Newfoundland delegates to the Quebec Conference, emphasized Newfoundland's sound financial position. At that time, the national debt was low, the credit good there was a favourable balance of trade and the revenue was adequate for the immediate needs.<sup>42</sup> This was a picture vastly different from that of 1894 when the country was on the brink of utter financial ruin. Two of the best known banks were forced into insolvency, the savings of thousands of fishermen had disappeared overnight, and the government itself was in dire financial straits.

39. Ibid, p. 38

40. Ibid.

41. MacKay, Newfoundland, Economic, Diplomatic and Strategic Studies, p. 415

42. Ibid, p. 421.



\* Thus Newfoundland's unenviable position at the beginning of the twentieth century can be regarded as the result of many unfortunate circumstances. The difficulties were primarily economic. In this respect the following factors played a prominent role. 1. The failure to develop any industry other than the fishery. 2. The failure to introduce modern methods of catching, curing and marketing to the cod fishery, and the consequent failure to compete with European rivals. 3. The unhealthy effect of the "credit system" on the whole country. 4. The dwindling of the seal fishery which in turn contributed greatly to the disappearance of ship-building.

There were also political factors which accentuated the economic difficulties. The absence of local government left the people unprepared for the greater role of responsible government on a colonial level. In addition, the ambitious railway undertakings of the government during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, although it brought temporary prosperity to the people, resulted in strangling foreign debts.

Finally, the country was beset with social problems which were due both to historical and geographical factors. The following bear noting. 1. The low level of education, due to some extent to the failure of the government to maintain effective schools and to the tender age when children, through economic necessity, were forced to work. 2. The presence of a strong sectarian feeling throughout the whole country. \*3. The low standard of social services principally due to the inability of the government to finance such services except by borrowing.

Certainly Newfoundland, by the beginning of the century was greatly in need of reform in the economic, political and social fields. It was with the avowed purpose of providing this reform that the Fishermen's Protective Union: was established.

The Formation and Growth of the F.P.U.

The F.P.U. represents the first effort to unite the workers of Newfoundland into one great union. There were unions in Newfoundland before its formation, but they had limited their membership to one craft and made no attempt to go beyond the narrow confines of that craft. Consequently, the membership of such unions was small and they had no great influence on the economic or political development of their day. The F.P.U. was truly a labour union and did not limit its membership to the fishermen of the colony but also accepted loggers, farmers and coasters. At its peak it had a membership of over 20,000 and certainly played a prominent role in moulding the political and commercial affairs of the country during the period from 1908 to 1932.

This organization was planned and organized by William Ford Coaker, who fifty years ago, emerged from voluntary seclusion on an isolated island of Notre Dame Bay, to become one of the most prominent political and commercial leaders of his day. He was born on October 19, 1871, on the South Side of St. John's. His father had come to this town from Twillingate, a fishing village of Notre Dame Bay. The grandfather of the F.P.U. founder had emigrated in 1830<sup>1</sup> from Devon, England.<sup>2</sup>

He attended Bishop Feild College, a Church of England school in St. John's, but his career there was short, for at the age of

1. The Fishermen's Advocate, (St. John's, Newfoundland, Nov. 19, 1910), p. 1.
2. Coaker, W.F., (ed.), Twenty Years of the Fishermen's Protective Union of Newfoundland, (St. John's, Advocate publishing Co., 1930), p. 331.

eleven he left to work on the St. John's waterfront.<sup>3</sup> Even at this tender age he showed a strong interest in politics, for he spent many of his evenings in the House of Assembly.<sup>4</sup>

In spite of his brief scholastic career he had ample opportunity to gain a practical education, for the St. John's of the 80's, the centre of the cod fishery and the seal fishery, taught him much. There is no better proof of his mental and physical maturity than the trust placed in him by the firm of McDougall and Templeman, which appointed him in his sixteenth year to manage its branch at Pike's Arm, near Herring Neck, Twillingate District.<sup>5</sup> Four years later, when this firm dissolved its partnership, Coaker operated the business for himself until 1894.<sup>6</sup>

During the seven years at Pike's Arm, Coaker lost no opportunity to learn everything he could about the life of the fishermen, and when possible to improve their lot. He had a strong interest in the political life of the North, and tried to improve the educational standard of the fishermen by conducting a night school during the Autumn months.<sup>7</sup>

In 1890, he began an agricultural experiment at Coakerville, and continued to farm until the pressure of business after the formation of the F.P.U. forced him to abandon it. However, during his

3. The Fishermen's Advocate, Sept. 2, 1911, p. 1. See also, Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1914, p. 172.
4. Coaker, Miss C., Personal interview, St. John's, Oct. 31, 1957. See also, "Second Draft of Morine's History of Newfoundland", Archives, Memorial University of Newfoundland, Ch. 10, p. 1.
5. The Evening Advocate, St. John's, Dec. 22, 1917, p. 1. (Coaker reviewed his early life and the history of the F.P.U.).
6. Ibid.
7. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1914, p. 172.
8. See below, Ch. 11, p. 20

early years as a farmer, he often spent his winters in other pursuits. For example, he spent two years as telegraph operator and sub-collector of customs at Port Blandford, Bonavista Bay.<sup>9</sup> In 1895, while engaged in this work, he founded a Telegrapher's Union and was also the founder and editor of a paper, The Telegrapher,<sup>10</sup> which this union sponsored. In [1895-6] he took up permanent residence at Coakerville, Twillingate District, where he built up one of the most prosperous farms in the country.

Coaker chose for the site of his farm a low, level island, about three miles in circumference, situated at the eastern end of picturesque Dildo Run, a narrow strait which separates New World Island, Notre Dame Bay, from the mainland. This strait has numerous wooded islands and its unspoiled beauty probably appealed to him. In a shallow cove at the eastern end of this island, he built a home for himself and sheds for his livestock.<sup>11</sup> With the help of Charles Bryant, a young man from the Church of England Orphanage at St. John's, he managed to clear many acres suitable for crops or for pasture for his livestock.<sup>12.</sup>

He was married in 1901 but was separated from his wife and child about five years later. He refused to give financial support to his wife after separation but supported his daughter after her

9. Coaker, W.F., Past, Present and Future, a series of articles contributed to the Fishermen's Advocate, 1932.

10. Coaker, (ed), The History of the Fishermen's Protective Union of Newfoundland, p. 141.

11. The farm is now almost completely covered with forest growth. The concrete foundation of the barn remains and also a concrete well. See, Coaker, (ed), The History of the Fishermen's Protective Union, p. 185, for photos of the house and barn at Coakerville.

12. [Louter, T.E.], "The F.P.U. and its leader", (The History of the F.P.U., edited by W. F. Coaker), pp. 182-187.

13  
eighteenth year.

During the period from 1896 to 1908, he made his home at Coaker-ville. In spite of the apparent inactivity, this was an important period in his life, for through reading, mediation and discussions with his fishermen friends, the idea of a union began to take shape in his mind.<sup>t</sup> The atmosphere was conducive to quiet reading and meditation, and if he wished, he could easily visit his friends of the neighboring settlements. On many evenings, after the day's work was over, he walked over the ice to the nearby settlement of Boyd's Cove, to chat with his old Roman Catholic friend, John Clair; or to Herring Neck to visit his many fishermen friends there. During these friendly visits he not only gained a thorough knowledge of the fishermen, but also discussed some of his theories of unionism with them.

On several occasions Coaker referred to his extensive reading during this period, but he neglected to inform his readers of the nature of his reading material. However, it is significant that the earliest issues of the Fishermen's Advocate show that he was cognisant with the world's labour movements.<sup>14</sup>

During this period he gave much thought to the nature of the union he planned to establish. He had no doubt concerning what its purpose should be, for he believed that the union he planned to

13. Coaker, C., Personal interview, St. John's, Oct. 21, 1957.

14. The Fishermen's Advocate, St. John's, May 14, 1910, p. 1.  
(describes the labour movement in Australia).  
June 21, 1911, p. 1. (refers to labour leaders in England, Ireland and Australia).

establish among fishermen would help them to help themselves. The following passage from his own writing will indicate his thoughts during this period:

The winter evenings and stormy Sundays gave me leisure for reading and study and whatever I worked at I always found myself drifting away to thoughts of the toiler's life and its hardships, while so many lived lives of ease and luxury without toil or producing. 15

Having decided to establish a union among the northern fishermen, Coaker found it necessary to draft a constitution for this union. He left the following description of his efforts:

Many a winter's night when all had retired I spent until morning drafting and redrafting the constitution. The whole of it is original. I had no rules or constitution of any kind to guide me. What the constitution contained in 1908 was original though based on life experience and close observation...I discussed each part with him [Charles Bryant] as we chopped timber together...I drafted and redrafted the sections, erased some and added others until in 1908 it was ready for use. 16

Thus was created the F.P.U. constitution and although it was modified and expanded from time to time, because of weaknesses shown up by the stress of application, in the main, it served the purpose for which it was framed.

✓ Coaker set November 2, 1908, as the day to attempt the unfolding of his plan to a group of fishermen.<sup>17</sup> It was natural that he should select Herring Neck, for he had worked in this vicinity for twenty-one years and knew most of its fishermen personally. ✓ The years from 1908 to 1910 were spent in a ceaseless round of organization during the fall and winter, and in working his farm in the spring.

15. The Evening Advocate, St. John's, Dec. 12, 1917, p. 1.

16. Ibid, Dec. 22, 1917, p. 1.

17. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 4.



and summer. Although the work of organization continued during the following three years, a great deal of time was devoted to commercial activity.<sup>18</sup>

He ran for the three-member district of Bonavista in 1913 and headed the poll. Sir Robert Bond, the Liberal-Union leader, resigned his seat for Twillingate, also a three-member district, and Coaker, wishing to augment the debating power of the Liberal-Union Party, resigned his Bonavista seat, leaving the field open to A. B. Morine, who had returned to Newfoundland from the mainland at that time. Morine had represented Bonavista district in the Assembly for a number of years, and Coaker was very well known in the district of Twillingate. The result of this shuffle was that both men were elected by acclamation. During the years from 1913 to 1917 Coaker was active in the House of Assembly as an opposition member.

A National Government was formed in 1917 and Coaker became a Cabinet Minister without portfolio. Under his leadership, the Liberal-Union Party again went into opposition in May, 1919, when a lack of confidence vote against Dr. Lloyd, the Liberal Premier, who then headed the National Government, was carried.<sup>19</sup>

The Union Party coalesced with the Liberal-Reform Party in September, 1919, under the leadership of R. A. Squires. This coalition was successful in the election of November, 1919, and Coaker accepted the Cabinet Post of Minister of Marine and

18. See below, Ch. V.

19. Journal of the Assembly, Newfoundland, 1919, p. 77.

20  
 Fisheries. It was during this administration that he initiated  
 his famous "Fishery Regulations".<sup>21</sup>

In 1923, he was knighted by the King. During the same year he again brought the Union Party to the side of the Liberal-Reform Party. In this election the Union-Liberal coalition was again successful. However, the Squires administration was forced to resign a few months after the election. The Liberal-Reform party continued to hold office under the leadership of W. R. Warren until it was defeated by a vote of want of confidence in 1924.<sup>22</sup> Coaker did not become a candidate in the general elections of that year. In 1926 he resigned the presidency of the F.P.U.,<sup>23</sup> a position he had held since 1908. He brought the F.P.U. members to the fold of the Liberal Party once more in 1928, and during the four years following represented Bonavista district in the House of Assembly. He retired from active politics in 1932 and after his retirement spent much of his time on a plantation which he had acquired in Jamaica. He died in 1938 at the age of 67 years and was buried at Port Union, a town which remains a monument to his efforts.

The career of W. F. Coaker as can be seen from this brief biography was closely linked with the Fishermen's Protective Union. His successor as F.P.U. President, J. H. Scammell, during the eighteenth Annual Convention of the Supreme Council (1926), said:

The whole fabric of the F.P.U. - its inception and organization, its expansion and its achievements, its

Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 169.

21. See below, Ch. VI, p. 113

22. Coaker, (ed.), Twenty Years of the F.P.U. of Newfoundland, p. 38

23. Ibid, p. 243.

successes, its trials, its renown - has been so closely woven around the dynamic and magnetic personality of Coaker that his name can never be divorced therefrom as long as the F. P. U. endures or is remembered in our land. 24

The task that Coaker set himself in 1908 seemed a hopeless one. The leader was a self-appointed recluse, who had farmed on a lonely northern island for several years. He was without the benefit of a high-school education and had little experience in union organization. His followers were northern fishermen, strongly individualistic and scattered throughout many isolated hamlets and islands. The locale was one in which transportation was difficult at all times, and for a great part of the year, because of ice and weather conditions, well nigh impossible. Coaker was not the type of man one could have expected to be a successful union organizer; neither could his fishermen friends be regarded as ideal union members; nor would one regard the north-east coast of Newfoundland as a suitable cradle for a labour movement.

Coaker was undoubtedly familiar with labour organization, for his native St. John's had various trade unions even before he moved north. He was also familiar with the co-operative movement, which was well established in the Old World at that time and had its infant counterpart here in Newfoundland, Sir Wilfred Grenfell having established several small co-operative societies on the Northern Peninsula. 26

In the fall of 1908, fortified with the knowledge gained from

24. Ibid.

25. Smallwood, J. R., (ed.) The Book of Newfoundland, (Newfoundland Book Publishers Ltd., 2 Vol., 1932), Vol. 2, pp. 100-102.

26. The Evening Advocate, St. John's, Nov. 28, 1917, p. 4.  
See also, Waldo, F. L., With Grenfell on the Labrador, (New York, Fleming H. Revell Co., 1930), p. 78.

experience and study, Coaker emerged from his self-appointed exile determined that he would create an organization among the northern fishermen that would help them to improve their living conditions. With this idea in mind, he held his first public meeting on the evening of polling day, November 2, 1908, in the little fishing village of Herring Neck, Notre Dame Bay.<sup>27</sup> On the following evening another meeting was held in the same settlement. During each meeting, Coaker, in speeches of two hours duration, damned the three traditional enemies of the fishermen - the trader, the fish exporter and the government.<sup>28</sup> At the close of the second meeting, he appealed to those present to remain and become members of a Fishermen's Union, which he proposed to establish.<sup>29</sup> The Orange Hall, where the meeting took place, was filled to capacity (about 250) and of the number present, nineteen remained, who, with their leader, comprised the first Local Council.<sup>30</sup> The constitution, which Coaker had previously prepared, was adopted at this meeting.<sup>31</sup> The majority of the nineteen members<sup>32</sup> were young men who had known their leader for several years. Besides this personal appeal, some saw in Coaker's promise a little hope for the future, for he did not promise to help them but to show them how to help themselves.

The news of the formation of this union spread quickly, and applications were made for copies of the constitution by many nearby

27. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 4.

28. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 1.

29. Ibid.

30. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 4.

31. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 1.

32. See Appendices for list of original members of the first F. P. U. Local.

33 settlements. Meanwhile, Coaker spent the fall and winter of 1908-'09 in preaching his "gospel" throughout the districts of Twillingate and Fogo. From this humble beginning the movement spread unchecked throughout the whole east and north-east coasts of the Island.<sup>34</sup>

The factor which contributed most to the precipitious growth of the F.P.U. was the herculean efforts and demagogic appeal of the founder.<sup>35</sup> However, other factors were at work. It is apparent that a strong "union readiness" existed along the east and north-east coasts which did not exist in other areas of the country. The nature of the fishery on this coast offers an explanation for this phenomenon. Almost all the sealers came from this region. This branch of the fishery brought men together from many settlements in large groups, (some sealing ships carried as many as 250 men) for a month or two each spring; and in larger groups for a period of three or four days in some coastal town before departure and while unloading. It is significant that the history of the seal fishery, prior to 1908, records several strikes and other action of the type which is usually associated with the union movement.<sup>36</sup> The Labrador fishery was limited almost entirely to this same coast, and although the crews were small, many vessels often fished from the same harbour. In addition, the voyage to the Labrador coast and the return journey resulted in a great inter-

33. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 1

34. See Appendices for table showing growth of F.P.U.

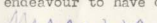
36. The Fishermen's Advocate, December, 19, 1923, (R.G. Winsor traces growth of united action among fishermen). See also Chafe's Sealing Book, p. 38

mingling of fishermen from various parts of the coast. The voyage to St. John's in the spring for supplies, and in the autumn to market their catch, permitted further association to these itinerant fishermen.

The south and west coast fishermen had no corresponding opportunities to associate with their fellow-workers. Those engaged in the inshore fishery met only the fishermen of their immediate locality. The crew members of the off-shore bankers normally came from the same settlement, and while fishing, had no opportunity to associate with other fishermen.

Some estimation of the extent of the "union readiness" existing throughout the east coast can be gained from the following letter written to a daily paper by three fishermen of Bay de Verde (approximately 200 miles from Herring Neck), ten days after the formation of the first Local Council:

The report of the meeting held at Herring Neck to consider the advisability of forming a Fishermen's Union has aroused public sentiment as never before, and the fishermen are unanimous in favour of it. We promise our hearty co-operation to our friends of the North, and thank them sincerely for starting the most desirable movement which must result in great benefits to those engaged in the prosecution of the fishery...Public meetings will shortly be held here and we call on all fishermen all over the Island to unite together in an honest endeavour to have our grievances redressed. 37



This letter is indicative of the welcome held out to union organizers by the fishermen of the east coast. It was not necessary to "sell" the idea of a union for in many cases they were invited by the fishermen themselves to come to their settlement and organize a local branch.

As a further explanation for the precipitous union growth, it should be remembered that the constitution was framed by one, who, for twenty-one years, was very closely associated with the northern fishermen, and included every device calculated to arouse their interest. The regular weekly meetings enhanced their social life and created in them a feeling of accomplishment. /The union button, flag and Guernsey sweater, each bearing the emblem of a codfish,<sup>38</sup> aroused in the fishermen a great pride in their calling. Coaker<sup>h</sup> exhorted them to display these emblems proudly as a proof that they were the country's producers. The constitution also provided for annual parades, but permitted the District Councils to determine when they would be held.<sup>39</sup> This provided entertainment and appealed to the simple nature of the fishermen, who enjoyed the spectacle of flying flags, Guernsey-clad men marching two abreast, gunfire, yapping dogs and cheering women and children. To the more serious members, the union also provided an attraction, for its motto, suum cuique<sup>40</sup> - "to each his own", held out a promise of a bright future.

The structure of the F.P.U., as planned by Coaker, was to some extent determined by the distribution of population. Each settlement had a right to a Local Council, to which all fishermen,<sup>41</sup> coasters, planters, loggers and farmers were eligible for membership.

38. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 2.

39. Ibid, p. 45.

40. The Fishermen's Advocate, Oct. 29, 1910, p. 1.

41. Ibid, Nov. 19, 1910, p. 1.



Meetings were held weekly and the conditions of the country and of the fish trade were discussed. Editorials of The Fishermen's Advocate<sup>42</sup> and circulars<sup>42</sup> sent by the president, were read by the chairman and in turn discussed. These councils dealt principally with local affairs but had the right to send recommendations to the District and Supreme Councils.

The District Council was composed of all the locals in an electoral district, and dealt with the affairs of the district. The Chairman, Deputy-chairman, Secretary and Treasurer of all Local Councils in a district comprised the membership of the District Council.<sup>43</sup> These councils had the power to forward their decisions to the Supreme Council for consideration and often took advantage of this right. Since each council was composed of men from every settlement of the district, it was in an advantageous position to judge the needs and the wishes of the district. In consequence, these District Councils were responsible for many of the petitions and resolutions discussed at the Annual Convention of the Supreme Council. A large number of these were eventually translated into law in the House of Assembly itself. The District Councils also selected the candidate or candidates to represent the Union Party in the district,<sup>44</sup> and paid part of the expense<sup>5</sup> of the election campaign.<sup>45</sup> These councils provided valuable training ground for potential politicians, which helped fill the void created by the

42. Coaker, (ed.) The History of the F.P.U., pp. 32, 49, 68.

43. The Fishermen's Advocate, Nov. 19, 1910, p. 1.

44. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., pp. 29, 52.

45. Ibid, pp. 31, 70. The 1913 campaign cost \$2,000, the Supreme Council paid \$1,200, the District Councils \$800.

46

dearth of local government. In fact the Union Party drew many of its members from the various District Councils. The District Councils also discussed problems of a local nature and sent their opinions to the district representatives in the House of Assembly.<sup>47</sup>

At the head of the whole organization was a Supreme Council. This Council was composed of the Chairman of all Local Councils and the officers of all District Councils.<sup>48</sup> Past officers of the Supreme Councils and chairmen of District Councils, who had held office for three consecutive years, also had the right to attend. In addition, all Union representatives in the House of Assembly<sup>49</sup> were regarded as members.

There was no set meeting place until the completion of Port Union in 1918, and the date of meeting varied from early November to late December. The meetings normally lasted for a period of three days.<sup>50</sup>

The first Annual Convention of the Supreme Council had a membership of nine, but the number grew rapidly and reached 200 by 1914.<sup>51</sup> The F.P.U. leader tried to maintain a high level of interest in these Annual Conventions. On one occasion even, he issued a notice to all Local Councils that failure on the part of any local to send a delegate to an Annual Convention would be punished by a fine of ten dollars.<sup>52</sup>

46. See above, Ch. 1, pp. 3 - 4

47. Clouter, "The F.P.U. and its leader", (The History of the F.P.U., pp. 182 - 187.)

48. The Fishermen's Advocate, Nov. 19, 1910, p. 1.

49. Ibid, Jan. 11, 1913, p. 4.

50. See Appendices for place and date of Supreme Council meetings.

51. See Appendices for the membership of the Supreme Council.

52. The Fishermen's Advocate, Nov. 18, 1911.

In general, the procedure of the conventions followed the same pattern. The president - Coaker held this position until his resignation in 1926<sup>53</sup> - opened the convention with a lengthy report on the years work and accomplishments of the F.P.U. and the commercial concerns affiliated with it. He also commented on the action of the government in various fields which were of interest to the fishermen and suggested steps which the F.P.U. should take in each. Following the president's report, committees were appointed from the delegates present to enquire and report on questions or problems suggested in the president's address.

The committee members showed very little initiative and generally arrived at a conclusion or decision compatible with that suggested by the president in his address.<sup>54</sup> A. B. Morine, who, for several years was closely associated with the F.P.U. as its solicitor, and who may have attended Supreme Council meetings, wrote: "Proceedings at these conventions were always commenced by a 'speech from the throne' by the president, and an address in reply presented by the delegates. It is not on record that a reply ever failed to re-iterate subserviently all that was said in the speech".<sup>55</sup> The records of Supreme Council meetings indicate the truth of this statement. The meetings were remarkable in their lack of discussion. The delegates, puppet-like, prefaced their comments or reports with "we endorse your remarks"<sup>56</sup> or "we strongly support

53. When Coaker resigned in 1926, he was made Honorary President for life. He also selected his successor, J. H. Scammell.

54. For Annual Reports of the Supreme Council for the Years from 1908 to 1928, see Coaker, (ed.), Twenty Years of the F.P.U. of Newfoundland.

55. "Second Draft of Morine's History of Newfoundland", Ch. 10, p. 25.

56. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 21.

your remarks", or with some similar phrase indicating their agreement with the president's policy and their faith in his decisions. This lack of dissension was due more to the subservient nature of the fishermen than to the dictatorial spirit of the leader. They were offered the opportunity to express their wishes, but centuries of economic peonage and political subservience made them incapable of taking advantage of the offer.

Nothing is more indicative of the fishermen's faith and dependence on their leader than the readiness with which they paid the union fees, which Coaker thought necessary, without raising a dissenting voice, even though their own purses were affected. It was agreed at the first convention (1909) that each member should pay a fee of twenty-five cents, ten cents of which was to be forwarded to the Supreme Council. In 1910, Coaker suggested the fee be raised to five cents per month per member, twenty-five cents of which would go annually to the Supreme Council, five cents to the District Council and the remainder to the Local Councils. In 1914, an initiation fee of one dollar was introduced and the lower rate of fifty cents to all under eighteen years, the whole amount collected in such fees to go to the Local Council. During the same year, a new section was added to the constitution providing for the expulsion or suspension of members who failed to pay their monthly dues for twelve months. However, the treasurer's report for the year 1914 showed that the financial standing of the union was

57. Ibid., p. 13.

58. Ibid.

59. Ibid., p. 15. See also, The Fishermen's Advocate, April 30, 1910.

60. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 91.

61. Ibid.

sound with a favourable balance of over \$11,000.<sup>62</sup> Accordingly, the President notified all members during the following convention that no fee would be collected that year for the Disaster Fund, as all fully paid up members would be entitled to all benefits which this fund provided.<sup>63</sup> During the following convention (1916), the President recommended that the annual fee be decreased to thirty cents, all of which should go to the Local Councils, "...because the union is now strong enough financially to dispense with the annual assessment of twenty-five cents per member paid to the Supreme Council."<sup>64</sup> These two steps were undoubtedly part of Coaker's plan to prove to the fishermen that he got no financial gain from the F.P.U. or its commercial undertakings. Besides, by 1916, the question of fees that was of great importance during the early years of F.P.U. activity, gave place to other, more important, affairs in the fields of commerce and politics.

The question of incorporation was considered during the first convention and the decision made to grant permission to the President to take steps to have the F.P.U. incorporated. As a result, on November 17, 1910, incorporation took place under the Trade Union Act, passed by the previous session of the Legislature.<sup>#</sup> The F.P.U. was the first Union registered under the new Act.<sup>65</sup>

During the years at Coakerville, when Coaker conceived the idea of a fishermen's union, the work of the various councils, the

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid, p. 98

64. Ibid, p. 107.

# Journal of the Assembly, Newfoundland, 1910, p. 142.

65. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 16.

amount and division of fees and incorporation, were all woven into his plan. However, it is doubtful whether he gave any thought to the extent of his union. Certainly he had a vague vision of uniting all fishermen of the colony but he had made no attempt to delimit a sphere of operation. From available evidence it seems that he had no idea that his efforts would be blessed with such results. However, the success in the districts of Twillingate and Fogo in 1908-'09 showed what great possibilities lay ahead, and immediate plans were made to organize the whole country. To cover the expense of further organization he recommended an assessment of ten cents on each member during the convention of 1909, special attention to be given to the southern and western shores. <sup>66</sup> Thirty locals were established during the fall of 1908 and winter of 1909 in the districts of Fogo and Twillingate. By 1910, the number of locals had increased to 66 and the field of operation had spread to include two other districts, namely Bonavista and Trinity. The number of Union members had increased to 12,500 by 1911, and to <sup>67</sup> 20,000 by 1914. By this time the movement had spread north to include the District of St. Barbe and south to the southern shore of Conception Bay. / There was little expansion after 1914 either in membership or in extent.

The failure of the F.P.U. to expand beyond the east and north-east coasts can be attributed to several factors. 1. The fishermen of this region, because of the peculiar nature of their work, were different from the fishermen of the rest of the island in that

66. Ibid, p. 2.

67. See Appendices for growth of Union membership.

there was a great "union readiness" already existing among them.

2. The F.P.U. became deeply involved in politics after the election of 1913. This left Coaker with little time for organization "The initiative, the energy, the enthusiasm which conducted the attempt through the campaign...were supplied by Coaker..."<sup>69</sup> Thus, when the F.P.U. became a political power it prevented the leader from further organization. 3. As the movement spread southward more and more opposition was experienced from settlements strongly influenced by St. John's, the core of union opposition.<sup>70</sup> 4. In spite of the appeal of the leader, the F.P.U. remained essentially a Protestant movement and consequently, made little or no progress beyond the head of Conception Bay. This was the first region in the path of Union expansion, with a Roman Catholic majority.

5. The depression of the first decade of the century fostered the growth of the F.P.U. The First World War brought prosperity and this deadened the desire for the kind of service the F.P.U. could offer. The younger men, familiar with the prosperous war years but not with the conditions that existed prior to 1908, were particularly apathetic.<sup>70</sup> 6. The F.P.U. by 1914, had undertaken considerable commercial activity, which placed an additional strain on its few capable leaders. In spite of recurrent attempts during the following decade to unionize the remainder of the country, very little was achieved.

68. See above, Ch. 11, p. 27

69. "Second Draft of Morine's History of Newfoundland", Ch. 10, p. 25.

70. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 7.



Coaker planned to enlist the fishermen of all denominations in his union. He clarified his position in this respect during the first convention when he said, "...we desire the co-operation of North and South, of Protestant and Catholic, in this mighty fight for country and fishermen..."<sup>71</sup> When members of the Roman Catholic Church objected to taking the oath which the F.P.U. constitution required, Coaker arranged an agreement with Bishop McNeill of St. George's whereby a declaration of Membership was substituted for the oath.<sup>72</sup> To preserve the non-denominational nature of the F.P.U., Coaker appointed a Roman Catholic, Andrew Broders, as its Vice-president;<sup>73</sup> and chose another Roman Catholic, M. Hawco, as Union Organizer in the District of Harbour Main.<sup>74</sup>

The F.P.U., in spite of these efforts, made little headway among the Roman Catholic population. Isolated Catholic settlements throughout the area where the union was influential had strong Local Councils; for example, Boyd's Cove and Fortune Harbour in Twillingate District, Tilting in Pogo District, and St. Brendan's, Keels and Red Cliffs in Bonavista District.<sup>75</sup> But elsewhere the F.P.U. regardless of the aims of the founder can be considered as almost entirely Protestant.<sup>76</sup> Thus from its birth-place in Notre Dame Bay, the union expanded southward until it reached the Roman Catholic district of Harbour Main, and north and west until it reached the Roman Catholic district of St. George's. Attempts to by-pass these

71. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 1.

72. Ibid.

73. The Evening Telegram, St. John's, Nov. 10, 1913, p. 5.

74. Ibid., Dec. 16, 1913, p. 7. See also, Coaker (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 71.

75. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 44.

76. See Appendices for denominational distribution and distribution of Union membership.

districts and unionize the south coast with its Protestant majority had very little success as other factors<sup>77</sup> prevented any worthwhile growth from occurring.

During the quarter century of union prominence (1908-'32), the F.P.U. aims underwent many changes. However, at this point only the initial aim<sup>6</sup> of the movement, as outlined to the fishermen by the founder, will be considered. What the F.P.U. aimed to accomplish was apparent from its motto, Suum Cuique, "to each his own". Coaker assured the fishermen that everyone in the colony, except the fishermen and other primary producers, got their own and perhaps a little more. In simple, inspiring language, he reminded them that they were robbed both in selling and in buying and that their taxes went to pay government officials who scorned and mistreated them.<sup>78</sup> Since the majority of civil servants were political appointees, and the F.P.U. declared itself the avowed enemy of the government from the beginning, it is natural to expect that the F.P.U. members would be mistreated by many government officials. However, Coaker warned all civil servants that their jobs would be forfeited after 1913 if they were found guilty of failing to give proper treatment to his followers.<sup>79</sup> He also threatened to petition the Government for the dismissal of all public officials who were over-critical of the F.P.U.,<sup>80</sup> a threat which was carried out on several subsequent occasions. In this manner the F.P.U. aimed to make all fishermen proud of their

77. See above, Ch. 11, pp. 26 to 29

78. The Fishermen's Advocate, Oct. 29, 1910, p. 1.

79. Ibid, April 15, 1911, p. 4.

80. Ibid, Jan. 7, 1911, p. 1.

calling and to regard all government officials as their servants.

Another aim of the F.P.U. was "...to uplift and improve the<sup>81</sup> lot of the toilers, to co-operate for mutual advancement..." Coaker saw more and more fishermen losing their economic freedom and becoming the slaves of the merchants, through the evil effects<sup>82</sup> of a vicious "credit or truck system".

The union leader aimed to eliminate this system by introducing co-operative buying and selling and by establishing a chain of cash stores.

"...the F.P.U. seeks to control the government of the colony - that is one of the fundamental principles on which it was founded, one of the great objects of its existence..."<sup>83</sup> Since his boyhood Coaker had an active interest in politics. He was aware of the insidious growth of corruption in every phase of government activity and believed that only a complete upheaval in the basic nature of the government could arrest this growth. (Thus, one of the fundamental aims of the union, which he created, was to re-organize the system of government by political education, through the F. P. U., to fill the void, which was the result of the absence of local government. He also planned to make the government more democratic by sending a number of fishermen's representatives to the House of Assembly. In time he hoped to build up a fishermen's party that would command a majority in the House.)

81. Ibid, Jan. 17, 1914, p. 2.

82. See above, Ch. 1, pp 11 to 13

83. The Fishermen's Advocate, Jan. 17, 1914, p. 4.

"The masses must rule" he claimed, "we will sweep away every  
<sup>84</sup>  
 vestige of autocratic rule..."

The following quotation from the founder's address to the eighth Annual Convention of the Supreme Council (1916) is a clear statement of union aims:

Remember, comrades, that the sole aim of our union is to promote independence, prevent pauperism, help the masses to rise above demoralizing influences that find solace in the acceptance of charity that entail national degeneration and a pauper's grave...we aim also to create confidence and hopefulness for working men, to be a beacon of light to which when hard pressed all may look for guidance and advice.

Our endeavours are also directed to lessen the great inequalities that exist wherever we turn and to diffuse the luxury and comforts of life more evenly and to treat all...as members of one family .... 85.

The F. P. U. was essentially a working-class movement and as such, represented no mean effort on the part of the founder, who was a member of the class which he organized. It compared favourably with similar movements in other parts of the world at the same time. It succeeded in organizing a great majority of the fishermen of the east coast of Newfoundland into a single union under the domination of one man. The F. P. U., as created by Coaker, was capable of having considerable influence on the future of the country.

84. The Weekly Advocate, St. John's, Jan. 5., 1918, p. 4.
85. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 108.

F.P.U. Political Action Previous to 1913 Election

The question might well be asked if Coaker created the F.P.U. to enable him to establish a political party, or whether he created the political party to arouse the interest of more fishermen in the F.P.U. The union and the political party grew side by side and tended to be complementary to each other. As the party became more active it aroused greater interest in the union on the part of the fishermen. On the other hand every F.P.U. member was obligated to support candidates of the Union Party.<sup>1</sup>

There are many indications that, from the beginning, Coaker intended the F.P.U. to be a political as well as a commercial and social organization. He had a strong interest in politics from his boyhood and took an active role in political meetings from his early manhood.<sup>2</sup> In November, 1909, during the first Annual Convention of the Supreme Council, Coaker stated: "...I fear if we wish to have the wishes of the fishermen of the Colony respected, it will be necessary to elect eight or ten Union members for the House of Assembly..."<sup>3</sup> This statement was made at a time when the F.P.U. had but thirty Local Councils and certainly was not taken seriously by contemporary politicians.

1. Coaker, (ed) The History of the F.P.U., p. 45
2. Coaker, W.F. "President Coaker's Triumphant Tour of the North, 1919", (History of the F.P.U., edited by W.F. Coaker), p. 147.
3. Coaker, (ed), The History of the F.P.U., p. 2.

During these early years (1908-1912), there was no thought of creating a third major party. Coaker aimed to send a half-dozen union members to the opposition to act as watchdogs over the Government.<sup>4</sup> Party politics was not considered. In this phase of his union's development, he aimed for one goal, to send union representatives to the House of Assembly. When the time arrived for union members to sit in the House, he planned that they would "act exactly as the Labour Party in England - support the Government that will do the utmost for the Masses".<sup>5</sup> The Union members would comprise a separate independent unit with no allegiance to any major party. In a speech delivered at Joe Batt's Arm, Twillingate District, February 10, 1910, he stated: "The Union candidates must not combine with any other party.. .If a political party in power will treat our recommendations favourably we will make no quarrel with them".<sup>6</sup>

It was essential during the years from 1908 to 1913 for Coaker to pilot the F.P.U. into paths of political neutrality. The districts that he had successfully organized, in the two previous elections had given equal support to the two major parties.<sup>7</sup> Any tendency on Coaker's part to favour either party would bring opposition from the adherents of the other. Coaker, himself, before the formation of the Union Party, was a Liberal as the following

4. The Fishermen's Advocate, July 9, 1910, p. 4

5. Ibid, Oct. 29, 1910, p. 1.

6. Ibid, Nov. 26, 1910, p. 3.

7. The Union Party won 8 seats but five Liberal Candidates were returned through F.P.U. backing. Of these thirteen seats, seven had been won by the People's Party and six by the Liberals in the previous election (1909).

quotations from his own writings will indicate: "I was 16 years old and happened to attend a political meeting and in response to an invitation by one of the Tory candidates I asked a question which brought about the collapse of the meeting which baptized me into the ranks of the Liberal Party." <sup>8</sup> On another occasion he wrote: "Sir Robert Bond has represented Twillingate district from 1897 to 1913, and I had been intimate as an active supporter of his for several years. For years he kept up a regular correspondence with me." <sup>9</sup> If Coaker had not insisted that the F.P.U. would remain neutral, he would have been regarded as a Liberal canvasser, rather than a F.P.U. organizer.

Coaker, on the other hand, might have decided that his followers could have been served best by a neutral policy. P.K. Devine, one of his associates, before the formation of the F.P.U., wrote: "I believe that the union would have been more powerful...if kept between the two parties in politics for a balance of power. In fact, this was Mr. Coaker's original intention..." <sup>10</sup> Whatever his early intention might have been, in 1913 he thought it expedient to bring his followers into a coalition with the Liberal party. <sup>11</sup>

\*The first political action of the F.P.U. took the form of proposals, petitions, resolutions and memorials to the Government concerning current problems and grievances. The Annual Conventions and to a lesser extent the District and Local Councils all played

8. Coaker, W.F., "President Coaker's Triumphant Tour of the North, 1919", (The History of the F.P.U., edited by W.F. Coaker) p. 147.
9. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 29
10. Devine, P.K., "Memories of the F.P.U. in the Early Days of Its Organization." (The History of the F.P.U., edited by W.F. Coaker), p. 142.
11. See below, Ch. 111, p. 52



a part in preparing these demands. As early as March, 1909, the F.P.U. proposed to the Government that a trade agent be appointed for South America.<sup>12</sup> During the first Annual Convention (1909), a memorial to the Government was drafted which recommended changes in every aspect of the salt cod industry. There were other recommendations dealing with education, pensions and conservation of natural resources.<sup>13</sup> The following convention (1910), drafted a memorial to the Premier containing all the recommendations of the previous year, with additional demands for outport hospitals, adult education and many others of lesser importance.<sup>14</sup> Finally, in 1912, the F.P.U. sent a protest to the Governor against the action of Honourable D. Mor/ison, who, while a minister of the Crown, had been implicated in several timber deals.<sup>15</sup> The Governor forwarded the F.P.U. protest to the Secretary of State, who warned Mor/ison that he should not participate, while a minister of the Crown, in such undertakings.<sup>16</sup>

The numerous demands of the F.P.U. during the years from 1908 to 1912 provided constant activity for the Local and District Councils, which in turn created a feeling of accomplishment and greater interest in the union. The Government gave very little attention to these demands, thus proving that Coaker had been right when he had told his followers that their wishes would not be considered until they sent fishermen as representatives to the House

12. Coaker (ed), The History of the F.P.U., p. 10.

13. Ibid, pp. 6-13.

14. Ibid pp. 22-27. See also, The Fishermen's Advocate, Jan. 28, 1911, p. 2.

15. The Fishermen's Advocate, April 6, 1912, p. 1

16. Ibid, July 13, 1912, p. 1.

of Assembly. These demands also provided a nucleus around which<sup>17</sup> a party platform could be framed.

The first step in the formation of the Union Party was taken during the second Convention of the Supreme Council (1910), when Coaker in his opening address said: "I sincerely recommend you to take steps...to formulate plans for the establishment of a Union Party to take the field in 1913"<sup>18</sup>. The following quotation from Coaker's address to the third Annual Convention, indicates the progress made in 1911 and the plans for the ensuing year:

As this Council at its last Convention decided to form a Union Party, and to place its candidates in every possible district, meetings have been held, of the District Councils concerned, to select Union Candidates to take the field at the General Elections...It is therefore our duty to give full consideration to the preparation and adoption of a Union political platform, erecting it from the planks we have manufactured at our previous Conventions and adding what we consider advisable.<sup>19</sup>

During the same convention, a committee was appointed to consider and draft a Union political platform. The result was the first statement of the aims of the infant party.<sup>20</sup> During the following Convention (1912), this statement was enlarged from twenty-three to thirty-one planks and henceforth known as the "Bonavista Platform".<sup>21</sup>

This platform represented the hopes, frustrations, grievances and fears of the thousands of fishermen which the delegates to this convention represented. There was hope that the future would have greater opportunities for gain and better working conditions;

- 17. Coaker, (ed), The History of the F.P.U., p. 17
- 18. Ibid, p. 17
- 19. Ibid, p. 29
- 20. Ibid, p. 40
- 21. Ibid, p. 50

there was the frustration of half a century of self-government that had failed continuously to improve the lot of the governed; there were grievances against an economic system which had kept them ever at the mercy of their merchants, and fears for their welfare when engaged in work in which human life had far too little value.

Many of the planks of this platform endured as Union policy for two decades; others, more idealistic, were abandoned when political experience showed their impracticability. Its influence went beyond the confines of the F.P.U., as the Liberal Party agreed to accept many of its planks on the occasion of the various Liberal-Union coalitions.

The F.P.U. members through their Local and District Councils and Annual Conventions were thoroughly familiar with every aim of this platform. In fact, it was unique in that it was created "by the electorate rather than for the electorate". It represented the honest efforts of the F.P.U. leaders and members to improve the economic, social, political and cultural conditions of their day. Much that the framers of this platform envisioned has since become common practice, which attests to the progressive aims of its creators.

Eight of the planks of the Bonavista Platform<sup>22</sup> dealt directly or indirectly with various branches of the fishery and attempted to improve through legislation many of the obsolete methods of catching, curing and marketing, with which this industry was plagued. One would expect Coaker to give particular attention to the fisheries, for though primarily a farmer himself, he believed

22. See appendices for "Bonavista Platform".

that the prosperity of the country depended on the proper development of the wealth of the sea. In the main the planks dealing with the fishery were worthwhile and practical and have since been accepted as common government policy.

When we consider that the F.P.U. consisted principally of illiterate fishermen, led by a farmer-fisherman who had but little schooling, it is surprising, to say the least, the emphasis which was placed on the need for education. It is more surprising when we consider that the educational aims of the F.P.U. proved basically sound and are today accepted government policy. In this field the union platform demanded schools for every settlement containing twenty children of school age and free and compulsory education seven months of each year. Both these demands have since been realized. The platform also demanded the establishment of night schools in the outports during the winter months which has been attempted on a small scale. The fourth, which recommended elected school boards, has not been introduced by the Newfoundland government.

A great deal of attention was also given to the need for changes in the structure of government as it then existed. In this respect the following demands were noteworthy: single-member electoral districts for the outports, laws to establish the Referendum and the Recall, the amendment of the Election Act to permit the counting of votes by each Deputy Returning Officer, and the reorganization of the Fishery Department.

The platform also contained several demands that can be regarded as being exceptionally enlightened for its day. In this respect, the following are worthy of consideration: old age pensions for all over seventy years of age; the fixing of a mini-

imum ~~wage~~ for labour, and the conservation of the forest by introducing more equitable methods of land alienation.

A copy of this platform was distributed to every Local Council following the convention of 1912, which resulted in a high level of interest throughout the union districts. <sup>23</sup>

In order to test the union strength at the earliest possible moment the F.P.U. demanded that an election be held in November, <sup>24</sup> 1912. The term of the Morris Government would not expire until June, 1913. A spring election was inconvenient in Newfoundland, and if the election were postponed to the fall of 1913, the colony would be without a legal government for at least four months. However, the demand was ineffective.

During the same convention (1912), plans were made for the forthcoming fight. <sup>25</sup> It was agreed that the District Councils should be responsible for the selection of political candidates and that each candidate would be obliged to take an oath before a magistrate and in the presence of the District Council, that he would be true to the Union Party, that he would take no bribe from any source and that he would resign his seat when called upon to do so by his District Council. <sup>26</sup> Note that "the right of recall" was one of the planks of the "Bonavista Platform", that was drafted during the same convention. These measures were regarded as necessary for they would enable the F.P.U. to maintain control over candidates after they were elected as district representatives. Plans were

23. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 60.

24. Ibid, p. 41.

25. Ibid, p. 39.

26. Ibid.

made, as well, to secure honest, loyal candidates. Coaker emphasized the importance of this in October, 1911, when he wrote:

...Select only true, well reasoned men that money cannot buy...men that will sincerely take the oath which every candidate must subscribe to...that no offer or bribe will be accepted by him from any source...Do your duty, friends, by selecting men that you know will never sell their principles for gain of any sort. 27

An attempt was also made to keep all F.P.U. members in line as supporters of the Union Party candidates, as the following addition to the constitution made in 1912, indicates:

When the Chairman of a Local Council is approached for the Annual Pass for 1913...he shall first administer a test...and the words to be used will be: 'Will you vote at the coming election for the Candidates selected by the District Council'...and if the answer is 'yes' the Pass shall be communicated, but if the answer is not '~~Yes~~' the Pass will be withheld and the member suspended from membership. 28

Every opportunity was taken to create and maintain a high level, of interest in political affairs. In this respect the Union Party had a great advantage as in practice it was not distinguishable from the F.P.U. Each had the same leaders and to a great extent the same supporters. Each used the same channels to disseminate its ideas; namely, The Fishermen's Advocate, and circulars to Local Councils. The Advocate was received by one or more people in every unionized settlement and in many of these northern hamlets there was no other paper. Circulars were sent regularly from F.P.U. headquarters to every local with the explicit instructions that they be read during one or more meetings. <sup>29</sup> Since both provided the material for discussion and debate, the ideas they con-

27. The Fishermen's Advocate, Oct. 21, 1911, p. 1

28. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 45.

29. Ibid, pp. 32, 68.

tained spread also to the illiterate members of the community. Thus in the northern districts, the Union Party, through the F.P.U. exerted considerable control over the ideas of the people.

The fifteen years from 1894 to 1909 was a period in which Newfoundland suffered many financial hardships. This period began with the bank crash of 1894 and terminated with the very low prices paid for cod during the first decade of the twentieth century. The economic difficulties of these years were reflected on its politics which was characterized by abrupt changes in the party alignment of various districts of the country. The Liberals, under Bond, were in power from 1900 to 1908. The election of 1908 resulted in a tie, with the Liberals under Bond and the People's Party under Morris, each returning an equal number of members. Another election was held in the spring of 1909 which resulted in a victory for Morris by a large majority.

The F.P.U. leaders, before the formation of the Union Party, had often expressed their hopes of placing candidates in every district in Newfoundland.<sup>30</sup> However, on the eve of the election in 1913, the movement had not spread beyond the east and north-east coasts.<sup>31</sup> This region sent to the Assembly less than half its total members, therefore the question of coalition with one of the other parties was important, as the Union Party could not hope to win a majority over the two other parties. During the fourth Annual Convention (1912), it had been agreed that negotiations should be opened with both parties for the adherents of the Union Party had been about evenly divided as supporters of the other two parties

30. Ibid, p. 29

31. The Daily News, St. John's, Sept. 30, 1913, p. 5. See also above, Ch. III, p. 3.



in the previous election (1909).<sup>31</sup> During this same convention Coaker had stated: "...the Union controls the election of fourteen members of the House of Assembly, which ought to be sufficient to enable us to secure the reforms we have been working for, should we co-operate with any of the Parties hitherto in charge of public affairs."<sup>32</sup> However, during a secret session of the same convention, a resolution was adopted, empowering the president to negotiate with both parties and to co-operate with the party most sympathetic with F.P.U. political aims.<sup>33</sup>

The wisdom of coalescing with either party at this time has often been questioned. After the election the Union Party would be in a strong bargaining position; particularly if neither party won a majority. The political situation was uncertain. Of a total of thirty-six seats, the Union Party had strong hopes of winning fourteen. If the remaining twenty-two seats were divided in such a way that no party had a majority, then the Union Party would be in a strong bargaining position. There was, however, the possibility that one of the other parties would win a majority, in which case, Coaker, as the leader of a fourteen member party, would be expected to lead the Opposition. Since neither he himself, nor any of his followers, were experienced in parliamentary procedure, this he wished to avoid. In a letter to Captain Yates,<sup>34</sup>

31. The Daily News, St. John's, Sept. 30, 1913, p. 5. See also above, Ch. III, p. 3.

32. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 52

33. Ibid, p. 61. See also, The Fishermen's Advocate, Sept. 27, 1913, p. 8.

34. See below, Ch. III, p. 54

explaining his action in co-operating with the Liberal Party, Coaker wrote: "...If we were able to fight Morris and had the learning to run a government...we would not trouble to make terms with any party..."<sup>35</sup> In a subsequent letter he informed Yates that<sup>36</sup> the only alternative was to remain aloof from both parties which would leave the Union Party in opposition and powerless to carry out the reform it had planned. During the fifth Annual Convention (1913), which met shortly after the election, in a speech to the assembled delegates, Coaker said: "We co-operated with the Liberal Party in the fight, as unless we had don<sup>e</sup> so, the whole responsibility of fighting the Government would have been cast on my shoulders."<sup>37</sup> Thus it was expedient that the Union Party co-operate with one of the other parties, as this would give it a fair chance of being on the winning side and would also enable its members to gain political experience while serving this apprenticeship.

When the decision was made to coalesce with one of the other parties, several factors favoured the Liberals. In the first place, Coaker had been a staunch, if somewhat critical follower of Sir Robert Bond. Morine claimed much later that "Coaker was a Liberal by her<sup>e</sup>dity and a radical by nature..."<sup>38</sup> Coaker certainly regarded himself as a Liberal before he established the F.P.U.<sup>39</sup> Thus in any decision to co-operate with another political party, the Liberals would undoubtedly be favoured. In the second

35. The Daily News, Aug. 21, 1913, p. 7.

36. Ibid, Aug. 30, p. 7

37. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 65.

38. "Second Draft of Morine's History of Newfoundland", Ch. 10, p. 16.

39. See above, Ch. 111, p. 42

place, the People's Party, headed by Sir Edward Morris, during the four years previous to the election had earned the enmity of the F.P.U. members, through its strong criticism of the new movement, and its refusal to consider union demands as expressed in the various petitions. <sup>40</sup> (In the third place, the F.P.U. had functioned as an unofficial opposition since 1909 and it was natural for it to join forces with the official opposition, the Liberal Party, against a common enemy. In the fourth place, the Liberals, with their small minority had great need of union support if they hoped to succeed, and consequently, were willing to make greater concessions to union demands; whereas the People's Party, having won in 1909 with a large majority, hoped to win in 1913 without having to share the honours with a minority group.

In addition to the four factors listed above, there is a strong possibility that Coaker had been influenced by Richard Seddon, the well known labour leader of New Zealand. <sup>41</sup> He had brought the Labour members into the fold of the Liberal Party and during the years from 1893 to 1906 the reforms introduced by his government had aroused world-wide interest. Therefore, the possibility exists that in co-operating with the Liberals in 1913, Coaker was trying to <sup>42</sup> accomplish for Newfoundland what Seddon had done for New Zealand.

The decision to co-operate with the Liberals brought little or no opposition from the union ranks. The only recorded opposition

40. See above, Ch. III, p. 43

41. For Seddon's Role in New Zealand politics see, Knapland, Paul, The British Empire, 1815 - 1939, (New York, Harper and Brothers, 1941) pp. 478-479.

42. Coaker refers to the work of Seddon on several occasions. See Fishermen's Advocate, January 21, 1911, p. 1.

came from Captain Yates, who had been appointed by the Twillingate District Council as Union candidate for that district. However, he was forced to withdraw because of the agreement with the Liberal Party and accused Coaker of betraying union principles.<sup>43</sup> Yates then contested the election in the same district as a candidate of the People's Party but was badly beaten.<sup>44</sup>

After the defeat of his party in 1909, Sir Robert Bond had retired from active politics although he had retained his seat in the House. His decision to lead the Liberal Party again in 1913 was influenced, perhaps, by an appeal published in The Fishermen's Advocate. In this appeal Sir Robert was invited: "...to re-enter the political arena...and to assume the leadership of the Liberal and Union forces in the approaching battle."<sup>45</sup> Since the union membership at this time was approximately 18,000, this appeal probably influenced him to assume Liberal leadership.

A committee of the Liberal Party met with Coaker on several occasions with a view to co-operating in the election.<sup>46</sup> These meetings culminated in a conference between Sir Robert and Coaker at "The Grange" (Sir Robert's country home at Whitbourne), during which the following arrangement was made. Coaker, representing the Union party, agreed to withdraw two candidates in the three-member district of Twillingate and one each in Trinity (three-member district), Bay de Verde (two-member district) and St. Barbe

<sup>43.</sup> The Fishermen's Advocate, Sept. 27, 1913, p. 8.

<sup>44.</sup> Yates received 698 votes. Twillingate was a three-member district and he was beaten by all the other candidates.

<sup>45.</sup> The Fishermen's Advocate, Aug. 16, 1913, p. 1.

<sup>46.</sup> Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 29.

<sup>47</sup>  
 (one-member district). Consequently, only nine Union members were nominated instead of the fourteen which the party had originally planned to place in the field.

Early in October, Sir Robert issued a manifesto stating the aims of "The Liberal-Union Party"<sup>48</sup>. In this manifesto he made considerable concessions to the F.P.U. by including in it twelve of the planks of the "Bonavista Platform". Coaker also issued a manifesto in which he explained his stand in uniting with the Liberal Party. He informed his followers that no union aim as set forth in the "Bonavista Platform" would be set aside although several planks were not specifically mentioned in Bond's manifesto. Coaker also included the thirty-one planks of the "Bonavista Platform" and gave an explanation ~~for~~ of each. However, this manifesto was primarily an appeal to all F.P.U. members to give their support to the Liberal-Union candidates.<sup>49</sup>

The Liberal-Union manifesto as issued in 1913 by Sir Robert Bond, sprang from two complementary sources. It contained the wishes of thousands of unschooled fishermen and their inexperienced leaders, conscious of their needs and for the first time emboldened to make their demands heard. It was also molded by a practical, experienced politician, who on previous occasions had proved his devotion to his country. In framing this manifesto, Bond used the "Bonavista

<sup>47</sup>. Ibid, p. 29. See also, The Fishermen's Advocate, Aug. 23 1913, p. 1.

<sup>48</sup>. The Evening Telegram, October 4, 1913, pp. 6-7.

<sup>49</sup>. The Fishermen's Advocate, October 6, 1913, p. 4.

Platform" to determine the people's fears, grievances and wishes. To this foundation he applied his practical knowledge of government and his broad understanding of the country. What was undesirable, harmful or impractical in the "Bonavista Platform" he omitted and to the remainder he added other worthwhile measures of his own choosing. The result was a practical programme which, if applied, could bring many essential improvements to the life and work of the people.

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The Liberal-Union Party adopted the slogan "Bond Can't Lose".

However, in spite of union strength and Bond's prestige, the People's Party succeeded in gaining a majority of six seats, having returned twenty-one out of a total of thirty-six members. The F.P.U. returned eight of its nine candidates, having lost the ninth by a margin of ten votes. <sup>51</sup> Seven of their Liberal allies were elected, including Bond himself. Five of the seven came from districts in which the F.P.U. was very strong.

\*In spite of the discrepancy in seats, the Liberal-Union Party gained a majority of 3,421 votes over its opponents. <sup>52</sup> This majority of votes failed to result in a majority of seats because practically all successful Liberal-Union candidates had received very large majorities. In addition, the distribution of seats was arranged in a manner that satisfied the demand for proportional denominational representation. The result was that district

50. The Fishermen's Advocate, Oct. 16, 1913, p. 4.

51. Coaker, (ed), The History of the F.P.U., p. 65. See appendices for the actual result of the election.

52. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1914, p. 161.

27  
representation was not proportional to population. The District of Ferryland, for example, had two representatives, whereas Fogo, with a larger population, had but one.<sup>53</sup>

It is convenient to analyse the 1913 election results according to the following geographical divisions. 1. The east and north-east coasts which included the districts of St. Barbe, Twillingate, Fogo, Bonavista and Trinity. These districts returned Liberal-Union candidates with overwhelming majorities. The area was predominately Protestant and was also the stronghold of the F.P.U. 2. The Roman Catholic districts of the Avalon Peninsula which returned candidates of the People's Party by very large majorities. 3. The Conception Bay districts, St. John's and the south and west coasts, which returned mainly candidates of the People's Party, but by small majorities. The F.P. U. won six seats that had returned candidates of the People's Party in 1909, but in general the election of 1913 brought no great change in party alignment.

Sectarianism, which had always played a major role in Newfoundland politics, was particularly noticeable during the 1913<sup>54</sup> election campaign. The F.P.U., with its positive and somewhat radical platform, was branded as a socialist organization, and its attempts to improve the educational standard caused it to be<sup>55</sup> accused of favouring "Godless Schools". Following the election Coaker wrote:

There cannot now be any doubt, but that the Morris Party was returned by base appeals to Catholic voters. They

53. The Evening Telegram, Nov. 12, 1913, p. 4

54. See above Ch. 1, p. 6

55. The Daily News, St. John's, Oct. 30, 1913, p. 5.



were told that if they voted for the Liberal-Union candidates they would vote against the Catholic religion, for godless schools and for that socialism which is so strongly condemned by the Roman Catholic Church. 56

The solidarity of the Catholic vote gave some grounds to the validity of Coaker's claim.

Encouraged by their political success, the Union leaders hoped to continue the process of organization throughout the Avalon Peninsula and the south and west coasts. Thus it was essential that the allegations made by union opponents during the election campaign be disproved. With this aim in mind, the Union leaders, by means of the press and in the House of Assembly, attempted to clarify the union position in respect to the school question, socialism and sectarianism. In one of his first speeches in the House, Coaker said:

...there is no such thing as sectarianism connected with us. We want to unite the people and we have done it. In our councils we have Catholic and Protestant members sitting side by side. No such thing as religious differences is ever witnessed...our whole aim has been to unite all denominations in our councils and nothing has ever done more to banish sectarianism from the colony and to bring all our people together...57

There is some truth in this claim, but it should be remembered that the success to which Coaker referred was limited to Catholic settlements in districts with a great Protestant majority. In regions that were predominantly Catholic no gain had been made and the old denominational divisions continued to exist. Nevertheless, the F.P.U. must be given credit for attempting to destroy sec-

56. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 65.

57. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1914, p. 34.

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tarianism, even though it achieved but a limited and transient success. However, the election and the accompanying campaign created a sectarian barrier that the F.P.U. was powerless to overcome and no further gain was made among the Catholic population.

In the Northern districts, the political success of the Union candidates created greater prestige and popularity for the F.P.U. The interest in the political affairs of the country did not die with the election, and although their eight representatives were entering the House of Assembly as members of the opposition, their performance in the House was awaited with feverish expectation.

Political Activity of the F.P.U. (1913-1917)

The election of 1913 ushered in a new phase in the life of the F.P.U. During the years from 1908 to 1913, a growing interest in the political affairs of the country developed. (This period was characterized by agitation against the Government and by the effort to create a party platform.<sup>1</sup>) In the election of 1913, the Union Party proved its political strength but a greater fight lay ahead. The eight Union members had to prove themselves worthy representatives of the House of Assembly. They had to show that they were efficient guardians of the country's natural and human resources and capable of creating the legislation which the "Bonavista Platform" had promised. Thus the twenty-third General Assembly was awaited with anticipation by the twenty thousand F.P.U. members who expected that their wishes would be made known in the House by their eight representatives. The opponents of Unionism also awaited the day when these usurpers from the fishing boats would have an opportunity to show their ignorance as members of the Assembly.

The Liberal-Union Party succeeded in returning 15 members, eight of whom were Union. However, the Union Party had withdrawn five other candidates,<sup>2</sup> as a concession to the Liberals, in districts where the F.P.U. was strong and where its candidates could have been easily elected. This brought the number of seats which the Union controlled to 13. The Liberal Party returned two members in St. John's East, which was entirely outside the Union sphere

1. See above, Ch. 3, pp. 46, 47.

2. Ibid.

of influence. The other five Liberal seats were, St. Barbe, one; Twillingate, two; Trinity, one; and Bay de Verde, one.<sup>3</sup> Each of these districts was a stronghold of the F.P.U., being the same five seats where Union candidates were withdrawn in accordance with the agreement made with Bond before the election.<sup>4</sup> However, there was no great change in party alignment. The Liberal-Union Party won six seats that had returned Morris candidates in both 1908 and 1909, and regained two that had supported Liberal members in 1908 but returned Morris candidates in 1909. The People's Party gained three seats that had returned Liberal members in both previous elections.

The co-operation of the Liberal and Union parties was carried out with the understanding that Sir Robert Bond would be the joint leader. At the time of the agreement, the popularity of the Liberal-Union Party seemed strong and opposition to the Government formidable. But the election resulted in two great surprises - the Government was returned by a small majority and the opposition consisted of a majority of Union members. Undoubtedly, Sir Robert had considered the possibility of being defeated when he accepted the Liberal-Union leadership, but it is doubtful whether he expected to be the leader of only a minority in the opposition.

Although the Liberal strength was disappointing, the Union Party had phenomenal success. There were nine seats contested and in eight the Union candidates were successful. The ninth seat

3. See appendices for 1913 election results.

4. See above, Ch. 3, p. 54

(H. Barrett, Bay de Verde) was lost by a margin of 10 votes. Thus the election resulted in embarrassment for Bond and increased prestige for Coaker. Sir Robert, who had been a prominent politician for thirty years, found himself in the unenviable position of leader of an opposition of which he controlled only a minority. His position was made more embarrassing<sup>at</sup> when Coaker, while addressing the Supreme Council on December 5, 1913, at St. John's, stated:

The result of the elections has proved without doubt the power and influence of our Union, and indicates the necessity of establishing the Fishermen's Protective Union all over the Colony and fighting at the next election when it comes, as a Union Party aided by outside patriots anxious to co-operate with us... 6

This was tantamount to declaring that the Union Party had co-operated with the Liberals only because they were not yet strong enough to succeed alone, and that by the next election they hoped to be able to win without co-operating with any other party. Under these circumstances Bond saw no other alternative but to resign. In a letter to J. A. Clift (Liberal M.P. for Twillingate), notifying him of his resignation, he wrote:

A man in the position of leader of a party has no possible chance of succeeding unless he receives loyalty and co-operation from the party inside and outside parliament. It is entirely evident that I cannot expect such loyalty and support from the opposition party as at present constituted, and I have retained my position almost beyond the conditions of dignity and respect. 7

5. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 65.

6. Ibid,

7. The Evening Telegram, Jan. 10, 1914, p. 10.

Coaker refuted Bond's statement by claiming that he had promised Bond support only in the election of 1913, and during the term following this election, and that he had never disguised the fact that the F.P.U. was seeking to control the government of the colony.<sup>8</sup> "That is one of the fundamental principles on which it was founded, one of the great objects of its existence."<sup>9</sup>

There are two possible explanations for Bond's resignation.

1. He realized that he owed even his seat in the House to Coaker and the F.P.U., and, because of this, his position would be subordinate to that of the Union leader.<sup>10</sup> Twenty years later Coaker claimed that during the election campaign Bond was often upset by Union men demanding cheers for their leader.<sup>11</sup> 2. He had entered the political arena only because of the strong chance of defeating Morris, and when he failed to do this, having no desire to lead the opposition for four years, he resigned, and used the alleged disloyalty of the Union leader as his excuse. Morine supported the first of these explanations as attested by the following extract from his writings: "Displeased with the dominance of Coaker in the coalition opposition, Bond resigned the leadership in 1914..."<sup>12</sup>

Bond certainly showed none of his early skill as a party leader in this campaign. Coaker accused him of spending the three weeks

8. Ibid, Jan. 12, 1914, p. 5. See also, The Fishermen's Advocate, Jan. 15, 1914, p. 4.

9. The Fishermen's Advocate, Jan. 15, 1914, p. 4.

10. Coaker, "F.P.U. Progress, 1909 to 1919", (The History of the F. P. U., edited by W. F. Coaker) p. 190.

11. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 29.

12. "Second Draft of Morine's History of Newfoundland", Ch. 10, p. 16.

previous to the election in his own district of Twillingate,<sup>13</sup> which was strongly Liberal in both the previous elections and was also one of the strongholds of the F.P.U. Had he spent these three weeks touring the districts of the south coast and Conception Bay, he might have succeeded in winning some of the seats in these regions which had returned Morris candidates by small majorities.

Bond's resignation left Twillingate with only two representatives, whereupon Coaker resigned his seat for the district of Bonavista and was declared the Twillingate representative by acclamation.<sup>14</sup> The debating ability of the Liberal-Union team had suffered greatly through Bond's resignation and it was hoped that this deficiency could be filled by an experienced, able speaker. The choice was A. B. Morine who had represented Bonavista for twenty years before his return to his homeland (Ontario), in

<sup>15</sup> 1906. In respect to the choice of Morine for the Bonavista seat, Coaker wrote:

One of the reasons why I resigned my seat for Bonavista was to strengthen the opposition party in the House of Assembly by the addition of the able debater and brilliant orator, Mr. Morine, whose long public experience will be of utmost importance and assistance in opposing the Government's recklessness and extravagance for although he will stand for Bonavista as an independent candidate, he is opposed to the Government. 16.

Coaker's choice of A. B. Morine as the representative for Bonavista

13. The Fishermen's Advocate, Jan. 17, 1914, p. 1

14. The Mail and Advocate, Oct. 24, 1914, p. 5.

15. Ibid, Nov. 7, 1914, p. 5.

16. Ibid, Oct. 24, 1914, p. 5.



indicates the difficulty of finding suitable representatives among his followers, and also his perturbation when faced with the possibility of opposing his political opponents in the House backed only by his seven untried followers and four Liberal allies. In spite of this ill beginning the members of the Liberal-Union Party worked in harmony during the years from 1914 to 1917 under the leadership of James M. Kent (Liberal, St. John's East), and during the fifth session (1917), under that of Dr. W. F. Lloyd (Liberal, Trinity)<sup>17</sup>. This harmony existed in the sense that each party opposed the Government and not because of any unity of purpose. Coaker regarded his position in the House as leader of the Union section of the opposition. On one occasion during this period he said: "...occupying as I do the important position of the leader of a party in this House..."<sup>18</sup> Further proof that the Union Party had remained a separate body can be found in the equal distribution of Cabinet posts between the two parties which had previously made up the Opposition, when a National Government was formed in 1917.<sup>19</sup>

It can be argued that the people of the northern districts of Newfoundland had won self-government for the first time in the election of 1913, for the Union members were in reality, as well as in name, representatives of the fishermen, who were, by far, the majority of the voters in these districts. During the half century of Responsible Government preceding the 1913 election,

17. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 119.

18. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1917, p. 42.

19. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., 119.

the northern fishermen had been represented by either local merchants who were interested only in maintaining the old conditions of economic dependence which made thousands of fishermen their slaves, or professional politicians from St. John's, who had no further interest in their districts after they were elected.

The election of 1913 brought the following changes. 1. The Union members, with few exceptions, were selected from the "toiling class". 2. They were selected by the District Councils of the F.P.U., which represented the whole district. 3. The District Councils could keep the representatives informed about the conditions and needs of the district. 4. The representatives were obliged to take an oath to resign if called upon to do so by the District Council.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the F.P.U. succeeded in creating a greater measure of democracy in the northern districts, and in this respect it was regrettable that the movement did not spread throughout the whole country. The following quotation from Coaker's maiden speech in the Assembly indicated the change which the F.P.U. had accomplished:

...Our presence here indicates something unusual. It is not by accident that we have come here. A revolution, though a peaceful one, has been brought about in Newfoundland. The fisherman, the common man, the toiler of Newfoundland, has made up his mind that he is going to be represented upon the floors of the House to a larger extent than he ever was before; and the day will come, Mr. Speaker, when the fishermen of Newfoundland will have the controlling power in the House...The common man all over the world...has made up his mind that the future is going to be a different thing from what the past has been...They are going to be represented and to have a voice in the making of the laws of their country. 21

20. See above, Ch. 3, p. 47.

21. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1914,  
p. 37.

During the same session, John Abbott, Union member for Bonavista, made the following observation: "It is only by Union that the masses can hope for proper treatment, and by placing the F. P. U. on the floors of this Assembly they are taking the proper steps to have their voice heard in legislation and to make our politics honest and clean."<sup>22</sup> This was not only the opinion of the Union members in the House of Assembly but the sentiment of the northern districts, that were afire with the determination to create a government over which they themselves exercised some control. Truly, the F.P.U. had become more than a union or a co-operative for it was not only responsible for creating a new political party, but also a new attitude towards government among its thousands of followers.

The seven men who accompanied Coaker to the House as F.P.U. members were 1. R. G. Winsor, fisherman, manager of F.P.U. store, Newtown, Chairman of Bonavista District Council, Member for Bonavista. 2. John Abbott, fisherman, manager of the F.P.U. store, Bonavista, and the third member for the Bonavista District. 3. John Stone, boat-builder, manager of the F.P.U. store, Catalina, Member for Trinity. 4. Archibald Targett, tinsmith, second Union member for Trinity. 5. William Halfyard, Principal of the Methodist school at Catalina for 15 years, Cashier of F.P.U. Trading Company, Union member for Fogo. 6. Walter Jennings, fisherman, Union member for Twillingate, 7. George Grimes, clerk (St. John's), manager of the dry goods department of the Union

22. Ibid, p. 339.

Trading Company Store at Port Union, Union member for Port de  
 23  
 Grave.

A. B. Morine, who was closely associated with the F.P.U. as legal advisor, Union-backed <sup>member</sup> for Bonavista (1913-1919); and the greatest opponent of the F.P.U. and its leader after 1919, described the Union Party as follows:

The elected unionists and their successors from time to time, were, upon the whole, good types of the class, but not qualified to be legislators. They had one-track minds, through lack of liberal education and political experience, and after their first deliverances subsided into abject dependence upon Coaker, whose erratic leadership they blindly followed through morasses of governmental extravagance and corruption. 24

They were certainly, for the greater part, uneducated, all were without political experience and there was a great deal of dependence placed on their leader. However, had Morine been fair in his criticism, he would have noted also the accomplishments of this group; for in spite of their disadvantages, they did accomplish much during the years from 1914 to 1917.

Their first concerted action was to clarify their position in the House; that is, why they were there and what they aimed to do. They made it clear that they were sent there by the fishermen of the northern districts as their representatives to see that their welfare was given every consideration. They would give their support to the Government concerning any measure worthy of support but would oppose strenuously any bill which was, in their opinion, to the detriment of the country and the fishermen whom they

23. The Mail and Advocate, Dec. 24, 1914, p. 20.

24. "Second Draft of Morine's History of Newfoundland."  
 Ch. 10, p. 14.

represented.<sup>25</sup> They would use their power as members and would call on the 20,000 F.P.U. fishermen to oppose any measure that did not meet with their approval. They did not attempt to disguise their lack of education. They were plain fishermen and claimed to be nothing more. "We are here for the most part as fishermen, and not used to public speaking".<sup>26</sup> Statements of this kind were not made in the form of an apology. Coaker had convinced his followers that their calling was a noble one and that representation in the House was theirs by right. His fellow members admitted their lack of education on many occasions but never their inability to do what they were sent there to do. As fishermen they had an incontrovertable right to be there as representatives of their clan, and it was to protect the interests of their fellow toilers that they were there. But for one or two exceptions they spoke the dialects of their nothern districts which did not prevent them from voicing their opinions on any issue under discussion. They wore the rough clothing of the fishermen but each was conscious of his work and gave no attention to the ridicule of his opponents. X

After each member had made his maiden speech, a campaign to investigate every phase of Government activity during the previous term began. No stone was left unturned in an attempt to discover any dishonest practice of the preceding administration. They not only demanded information from the various Government

25. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1915, p. 262.

26. Ibid. 1914, p. 339. (R. G. Winsor.)

27  
 departments but insisted that it be released. On one occasion, Coaker threatened to move an Address to the Governor asking to have certain information produced which he had asked for, if it were not tabled immediately.<sup>28</sup>

( They not only investigated all Government expenditure but also all appointments and dismissals, discrepancies in salaries for similar work, increases in salaries where no particular reason was evident, and appointments to responsible positions of inefficient and unqualified workers. What the Opposition brought to light, the press carried to the people, and in this way thousands of "questionable actions" were made known. The same untiring energy which they were wont to apply to their own work as fishermen they now applied to their task of opposing the Government.

They did not oppose for the sake of opposition but with the honest desire to improve. Coaker emphasized this policy when he said:

It is true that we have criticized the Government, but we have done so fairly, and we have not made any personal attacks whatever. The Government must expect to be attacked because what else are we here for...There are matters of importance that the people want to know about, and for that reason I have asked for information concerning them. 29

Mr. W. Halfyard, in a similar attempt to explain the constant demand of the Union Party for information said "Our constituents are constantly asking us to inquire into various public matters. They want everything ventilated, and it is our duty to get them the information they want."<sup>30</sup>

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., 1915, pp. 309, 310.

29. Ibid., 1914, p. 309.

30. Ibid., p. 311.

Coaker proved to be the most hot-tempered of the Union team and on several occasions he became involved in heated arguments with Sir Michael Cashin, who was at that time Minister of Finance. Occasionally they were forced to apologize by the Speaker for their respective insults.<sup>31</sup> Even this experience, Coaker tried to turn to his own advantage by claiming that it was inexcusable on the part of the Minister of Finance, with his long parliamentary experience, but should be excused in his own case on the grounds of ignorance.<sup>32</sup>

Coaker, as the leader and founder of the Union Party, bore the brunt of the struggle, but his seven associates were also active opposition members. He showed the same boundless energy in the House as he had shown when engaged in the herculean task of organizing the F.P.U. To participate in such a manner necessitated a great amount of work on the part of the Union members. Nevertheless, the little group continued to exert itself and in no way relaxed until the formation of the National Government in 1917.<sup>33</sup>

The Union members took pains to inform the country that their stand on any question was in accordance with instructions from their districts. Their decision to back a bill, oppose it or recommend amendments could, on almost every occasion, be backed up by some decision of an Annual Convention, or petition from a District

31. Ibid, 1916, pp. 441-445.

32. Ibid, p. 445

33. See below, Ch. 4, p. 29



or Local Council. In this way their stand on any issue assumed an importance disproportionate to their numbers; for they were ever ready to show that their party demands were those of their district by the simple expedient of asking their constituents, a great number of whom were F.P.U. members, to forward petitions to the Government or the Governor.

In spite of the days of deadlock, the Morris Government of 1913-1917 accomplished much useful and desirable legislation, a great deal of which was the result of the patient efforts of the Union members. Several measures adopted by the Government had their origin in persistent Union demands. [The Government, with its majority of 21 to 15, could kill any bill originating in the Opposition, but in sponsoring such bills the Opposition showed itself the champion of the working people and the Government could oppose such measures only at the risk of losing its appeal.]

During their first session in the House of Assembly (1914), the Union members attempted to carry out their campaign promises concerning new legislation to govern the operation of the logging and the sealing industries. The Logging Bill, which was introduced by Coaker, attempted to prevent the exploitation of the loggers by improving their wages and living conditions.<sup>34</sup> The Premier took exception to the clause respecting minimum wages but after some slight amendments, it passed through the House without a dissenting vote.<sup>35</sup> However, it was turned down by the Legislative Council.

34. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1914,  
pp. 561-564.

35. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 80.

During the following session, (1915), it passed both branches of the Legislature and received the assent of the Governor on June 5, 1915.<sup>36</sup> Before attempting to draft this bill Coaker visited the logging camps (winter of 1914). He examined every aspect of the logger's life and work. The sleeping arrangements, food, medical care, the wage level and provisions for proper sanitation all met his critical eye and all were considered in the bill which he drafted.<sup>37</sup>

The F.P.U., from its beginning, showed itself interested in living conditions aboard the sealing ships and in the apparent dwindling of the seal herd. In the spring of 1912, Coaker addressed a mass meeting of sealers at St. John's<sup>38</sup> and during the same spring, acting on behalf of the F.P.U. members, made an agreement with the St. John's sealing firms whereby better food and accommodations<sup>m</sup> would be provided for the sealers, and measures taken for the protection of the old seals.<sup>39</sup> Many of the sealing firms<sup>40</sup> lived up to their promises. A bill embodying the terms of the 1912 agreement was introduced to the House in February, 1914, but<sup>41</sup> was considerably amended by the Legislative Council. During the

36. Journal of the Assembly, Newfoundland, 1915, p. 156.

37. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1914 pp. 561-564.

38. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 67

39. The Fishermen's Advocate, Jan. 20, 1912, p. 1.

40. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 68.

41. Ibid, p. 81.

following spring, Coaker decided to improve his knowledge of the industry by joining the S.S. Nasconie,<sup>42</sup> one of the ships of the sealing fleet, for the spring's voyage. During this same spring two great disasters occurred which together took the lives of 251<sup>43</sup> men. Coaker called these disasters "The price of negligence and indifference".<sup>44</sup> Some of the clauses of the 1914 bill were designed to prevent accidents of this nature from occurring. During the sixth Annual Convention (Nov. 1914), Coaker stated: "These amendments in some cases, greatly interfere with the successful operation of the measure, and I would like to review the whole Act and draft Amendments in view of making the new law more effective and workable, as well as to propose additions to the Act, calculated to reduce the possibilities of loss of life..in future."<sup>45</sup> When the House opened in 1915, Coaker had a much greater knowledge of the industry. His sealing voyage plus the great attention which he gave to the matter after the 1914 disasters made him a formidable champion of the sealers' cause in the House during this session. The tragic experience of the previous year made the Government more reluctant to oppose his suggestions.

A commission was appointed in the spring of 1914 to enquire into the disasters.<sup>46</sup> The recommendations of this commission, in the form of a bill, were introduced to the House by the Premier, Sir Edward

42. The Daily Mail, St. John's, April 11, 1914, p. 4.  
See Also, Coaker (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 84.
43. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 84
44. The Daily Mail, April 11, 1914, p. 4.
45. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 81.
46. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1915, p. 27.

47

Morris. In introducing this bill the Premier suggested that it might contain other matters relevant to the seal fishery if the House so desired.<sup>48</sup> The eight Union members of the Assembly and their northern followers thought that it should contain much more.

The 1915 session, while the disasters with all their unpleasant details were fresh in the minds of the people, was an opportune time to force the Government, and through it, the sealing firms, to concede every possible step that would be an advantage to the sealers. Consequently, Coaker, his followers and Liberal allies, carried out a continuous struggle during the 1915 session. However, "...Both bills [The Sealing Bill and a bill to regulate the price of Labrador fish] were so altered by the Legislative Council as to make them unacceptable and they were therefore killed."<sup>49</sup> During the following session (1916), the Sealing Bill passed both branches of the Legislature and on May 4, 1916, received the official sanction<sup>50</sup> of the Governor.

The agitation of the Liberal-Union Party in the House of Assembly and the demands of the F.P.U. Councils resulted in other legislation equal in importance to that already described. The list of bills presented for the Governor's signature during the years from 1914<sup>51</sup> to 1916 have a striking similarity to the "Bonavista platform", for much of the legislation which the Union Party promised was added to the Statute Book during these three years. The Liberal-Union Party must be given a great deal of credit for these laws for

47. Ibid.

48. Ibid.

49. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 97

50. Journal of the Assembly, Newfoundland, 1916, p. 108.

51. Ibid., 1914, pp. 133-135; 1915, pp. 154-155; 1916, pp. 106-108.

it brought their necessity to the attention of the Government and the people. The following bills passed during these three years were a tribute to the efforts of the Opposition: 1. An Act to amend the law relating to the representation in the House of Assembly; 2. An Act to provide for the investigation of combines and monopolies; 3. Local Affairs Act; 4. Act to encourage ship-building; 5. An Act to reorganize the Department of Marine and Fisheries. Undoubtedly, the Government drafted or amended these bills as they wished and they were further altered by the Legislative Council. Yet they were still capable of fulfilling the purpose for which they were originally planned.

The year 1917, the final session of Liberal-Union opposition, brought a struggle of a different kind. In the fall of 1916, Premier Morris, with other Commonwealth Premiers, ~~was~~ called to London for an Imperial Conference and his late return delayed the opening of the House until May 30.<sup>52</sup> The Government was now faced with a serious problem. According to constitutional procedure an election was required in the fall of 1917, but many of the other self-governing Dominions declined to hold an election during the war as it would tend to prevent a united effort. Morris was inclined to avoid the election if possible and on his return attempted to create a coalition with the Opposition leader, Dr. W. Lloyd.<sup>53</sup> Morris also realized that his Government had failed to solve many pressing problems brought about by the war, which only

52. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1917, p. 3.

53. Ibid, pp. 23, 315.

a National Government could ever hope to solve. No party government would attempt to introduce conscription and yet it had apparently become a necessity as it was impossible to keep up the strength of the Newfoundland Regiment by recruiting.<sup>54</sup> Thus, at a time when unity was imperative, the country was divided into two camps - the Liberal-Union Party and its norther<sup>n</sup> supporters who wanted a fall election (1917); the People's Party and its southern supporters who wanted the election postponed till the end of the war. The Liberal-Union Party and its supporters should not be considered unpatriotic for they had ample grounds for their opinions. Shortly after the outbreak of war, the Opposition offered to form a coalition with the Government and kept the offer open until the end of December, 1916.<sup>55</sup> When the Government signified its wish for a coalition in May, 1917, the Opposition believed that the sole purpose of this offer was to avoid an election. The Liberal-Union Party made it clear to the House that now it was their turn to refuse the coalition which the People's Party had refused to consider since the beginning of the war. On June 14, Coaker stated in the House: "I regret that we have not been able to accept the Government's invitation to form a coalition Government...if the Government had come to us in the earlier stages of the war we would have done all that lay in our power to assist them in such a crisis, but three years have gone by...in which we have not been considered at all."<sup>56</sup> On June 22, Dr. Lloyd, the leader of the

54. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 118. See also, The Weekly Advocate, June 29, 1918, p. 5.

55. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1917, p. 315.

56. Ibid, p. 171.

Opposition, made the following statement:

...we left the door open until December last because we had hoped that the Government was ready to deal fairly with us, and not drive [delay] the formation of a National Government until the term of the Assembly was almost over.. We were willing to risk unpopularity, if the Government was willing to join at any reasonable time in the term of the Assembly.. 57

Thus the Liberal-Union Party felt justified in declining the last minute offer of their political opponents to form a National Government, and claimed that the sole purpose of this offer was to avoid an appeal to the electorate.

When the House met in April, 1917, the Government had a choice of adopting one of three steps. It could unite with the Opposition to form a National Government; it could use its majority in the House to bring in a bill for an extension of parliament; or it could make the necessary preparations for an election during the following fall. As already noted, the Morris Government decided to attempt to form a National Government and was immediately turned down by the Opposition. Having refused to coalesce the Opposition, before taking any further action, decided to await the passing of the Estimates which would inform them whether any provision had been made for an autumn election.

When the Estimates were brought before the House with no provision for an election,<sup>58</sup> the Opposition informed the House of its decision to fight the Government to the full extent of its power. On June 14, 1917, Dr. Lloyd informed the House of this decision

57. Ibid, p. 316.

58. Ibid, pp. 148-149.



in the following words:

...but we are not prepared to let the Estimates go through and then find ourselves in the position of having an extension bill forced through because of your majority..We are going to make a stand now... if you make up your mind to have an election, we will aid you in putting them through as early as possible. But if you intend to bring in a Bill to put off an election, we will fight you. 59

During the same day Coaker stated: "If you attempt to prolong the life of this Government, you will have the people rise up against you; you will turn the country upside down.." <sup>60</sup> Coaker threatened that he would bring the 20,000 F.P.U. members into the fight.

Thus the result of the refusal of the Government to signify its intention regarding the impending election, was a filibuster which began on June 14 and continued to July 16. At this time the Premier announced that a National Government had been formed. <sup>61</sup> The new Government was created on the basis of equality, with an equal number of Cabinet members selected from the People's Party and from the Liberal-Union Opposition. <sup>62</sup> The Cabinet was increased from nine members to twelve members and consisted of the following men: Hon. E. Morris, Hon. M.P. Cashin, Hon. J.R. Bennett, Hon. R. A.

Squires, Hon. J. C. Crosbie, Hon. M.P. Gibbs, Hon. W.F. Lloyd, Hon. J.A. Clift, Hon. W. F. Coaker, Hon. A. E. Hickman, Hon. W.W. Halfyard, Hon. W. J. Ellis. <sup>63</sup> In addition, John G. Stone (Liberal-

59. Ibid, p. 175.

60. Ibid, p. 176.

61. Ibid, p. 468.

62. Ibid, p. 470. See also, Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., P. 118.

63. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1917, p. 469. See also, The Evening Advocate, Dec. 22, 1917, p. 4, for Cabinet Ministers and Their Positions. See also, Year Book of Newfoundland, 1918, (St. John's, Newfoundland, J. W. Withers, King's Printer, 1918), p. 17. The first six were members of the People's Party, the last six, Liberal-Union Party.

-Union Member for Trinity) and William Woodford (People's Party member for Harbour Main) were made heads of departments but not members of the Executive Council.<sup>64</sup>

The Opposition undoubtedly held out for an election until the terms offered by the Government were liberal enough to cause a change in policy. Coaker explained the necessity for such a step to the F.P.U. Convention in 1917, in the following words:

A condition of affairs had presented itself in the House of Assembly that demanded strong action by the Government. The Country desired...protection for the people against profiteering, the possible expenditure of a large amount to purchase steamers to export fish, the importation of food and coal...the keeping of the Regiment intact, the raising of a large loan for war expenditure,...the necessity of securing financial support for the treasury by placing a tax on surplus war profits...and after much consideration the Opposition Party unanimously decided to consent to the formation of a National Government... 65

Sir Edward Morris was destined to lead this Government for a very short period for he resigned on December 31, 1917.<sup>66</sup> During his last four months in office, Dr. Lloyd was Acting Premier. Morris, having spent this period in London, had ceased to lead the National Government almost immediately after its formation. He was officially succeeded by Dr. Lloyd on January 5, 1918.<sup>67</sup>

A. B. Morine explained Sir Edward's resignation in the following manner: "In the 1917 session of the Legislature a Conscription Act was passed which could not have been enacted without the support of Coaker, who perhaps made the change from Morris to Lloyd

64. Year Book of Newfoundland, 1918, p. 17.

65. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 118.

66. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 30

67. The Weekly Advocate, Jan. 5., 1918, p. 4.

the price of his support!"<sup>68</sup> Whatever the cause, Sir Edward's resignation left the Liberal-Union Party with one of its members as Premier and with a majority of seats in the Cabinet. In Coaker's own words: "The formation of the National Government ended the Morris administration and ushered in the first Fishermen's Govern-<sup>69</sup>ment the Colony ever possessed."

The years from 1914 to 1918 can be considered as the apex of F.P.U. political importance. During this period, the union members, though few in number, made up an active, virile party which maintained its individuality in spite of its coalition with the Liberals. In no other period did it achieve so much in the form of legislation or was it so popular with the northern fishermen. \*

68. "Second draft of Morine's History of Newfoundland", Ch. 10, p. 24-25.

69. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 120.

## Chapter 5

The Commercial Activity of the F. P. U.

The union that Coaker planned to establish, he claimed during his first address to a group of fishermen, would aim to protect them from traders, fish-exporters and the government.<sup>1</sup> The union, from its first Annual Convention (1909), began to play an important and ever growing political role.<sup>2</sup> Its achievements in the commercial field, initially planned to free the fishermen from the merchant and the exporter, though less spectacular, were also important.

In examining the commercial activity of the F.P.U. it is important to remember that there was no fixed or pre-conceived plan but each endeavour was the result of Coaker's attempt to provide for some immediate demand of the organization he had created. It is also important to remember that, at the beginning, the F.P.U. had neither funds, nor experienced business leaders, nor premises of any kind and its business activity was limited until funds could be raised, leaders trained and suitable headquarters acquired. In addition to these difficulties, it was inevitable that the existing commercial class would oppose the F.P.U. commercial efforts in every way.

F.P.U. activity was, at first, along co-operative lines. Consumer goods needed by the fishermen were supplied to them through the Local Councils of their union. The President of the F.P.U. took orders from the various Local Councils and supplied their

1. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 1

2. See above, Chapters III and IV.

needs at cost price. There was no necessity for profit, as this work was one of the duties of the F.P.U. President. During the Convention of 1909 plans were finalized whereby goods were bought wholesale at St. John's to supply orders from the Local Councils.<sup>3</sup> To make this type of service effective, an office was required in St. John's and Coaker requested and received this authority from the delegates of the first Annual Convention, (1909).<sup>4</sup> In his address to the second Annual Convention (1910), Coaker said: "The office at St. John's has conferred very material benefits upon members...by causing the price of codfish and oil to advance and [by] cutting down the price of provisions where branches are working."<sup>5</sup> This system proved inconvenient, as in practice it was difficult to supply Local Councils except on an annual basis and<sup>6</sup> even then only a limited number of commodities could be supplied.

The need for a more practical system was voiced by Coaker during the Annual Convention of 1910 in these words: "I strongly recommend the establishment of cash stores to accommodate the business of members at settlements [where] branches contain at least two hundred members."<sup>7</sup> A committee appointed to consider this recommendation empowered the President to organize such stores and also assured him that the Supreme Council would assume<sup>8</sup> responsibility for his action in all matters concerning these stores.

3. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 3.

4. Ibid, p. 15.

5. Ibid, p. 15.

6. Ibid, p. 16.

7. Ibid, p. 16.

8. Ibid, p. 26.

During the following year (1911), four branch stores were established. Three of the four were located in the Notre Dame Bay settlements of Botwood, Change Islands and Doting Cove, and the fourth at King's Cove, Bonavista Bay. The number of cash stores continued to increase during the following years and reached a peak of 40 in 1917. The table below shows the numerical growth of Union cash stores over the period from 1911 to 1918, as well as the dividends paid by the Union Trading Company over the same period.

Year	Number of Cash Stores Established	Total Number in Operation	Dividends Paid Union Trading Co. Per Cent
1911	4	4	-
1912	10	14	10
1913	12	24	10
1914	2	20	8
1915	6	26	10
1916	7	33	10
1917	7	40	10
1918	-	40	10

Note that the growth was steady from 1911 to 1917, except for 1914 when only two stores were opened and six previously established were closed down. Coaker gave the following explanation:

"Owing to conditions created by the war, which affected the demand for goods, we closed a few small stores...." <sup>11</sup> The real cause for the

9. Ibid, p. 29.

10. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., Annual Convention reports from 1911 to 1918.

11. Ibid, p. 82.

closing of these stores may be attributed to the poor choice of location. The union leaders had to learn through experience the nature of the settlements that would be a suitable centre for a store. When certain stores established during the previous three years did not pay, and had no hope of paying in the immediate future, they were abandoned. In an attempt to avoid the opposition of the union members in these six settlements, Coaker laid the blame for closing the stores on conditions created by the war.<sup>12</sup> Another difficult task which confronted the union leader was the problem of finding suitable men to manage these stores. There were few available men with managerial ability and the supply was further limited by the F.P.U. desire to place its own members in these positions whenever possible.<sup>13</sup>

Coaker created the outport cash stores<sup>14</sup> to make the fishermen independent of the local merchants. There is some possibility that he formulated the plan for the system himself, but it is more likely that he had applied what he learned of similar institutions in other countries to his particular problem in northern Newfoundland. It is evident that he attempted to gain knowledge of similar institutions from the following quotation: "I have had some correspondence with a Fishermen's Association in Scotland, which will show us what those fishermen are doing regarding the advancement of their affairs."<sup>15</sup>

12. See above, Ch. 5, p. 84

13. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 26

14. See appendices for settlements where cash stores existed.

15. Coaker, (ed), The History of the F.P.U., p. 3.



When the first cash stores were established in 1911, they were supplied by the F.P.U. office at St. John's, which was established in 1909. The supplies were bought wholesale from St. John's firms and forwarded to the various stores. Thus the Union cash stores, and through them, the fishermen, were still dependent on the St. John's merchants. Under these conditions it was apparent that a central wholesale business concern, that would supply the branch stores, was a necessity. This need was supplied by the Union Trading Company, which was incorporated in the fall of 1911, and started business on the first of May, 1912. Its purpose was to import merchandise to sell to union members and to supply Union stores.<sup>16</sup> In his address to the Annual Convention of 1912, Coaker said: "Without such a Company Union Stores could not exist. Without it the Union would always be at the mercy of the merchants, who deal in supplies here."<sup>17</sup>

The infant company found it difficult to acquire capital. Shares were sold only to F.P.U. members. These fishermen to whom Coaker appealed had suffered for centuries from a pernicious "credit system" and besides were reluctant to invest their earnings in any manner since the bank crash of 1894. Perhaps Coaker's greatest accomplishment was his success in persuading his fishermen followers to buy shares in F.P.U. sponsored companies. He appealed to them as their friend, their benefactor and their fellow-toiler. He continually reminded them that he had nothing to gain, that he desired only to help them, that he had no desire to retain the

16. Ibid, p. 46

17. Ibid.

position of manager of the Union Trading Company. "My ambition," he told his followers in November, 1911, "is to remain as I am, a poor man."<sup>18</sup>

Coaker adopted two other policies which he hoped would increase the sale of shares. In the first place, he made it necessary for any union settlement that wished a cash store to purchase a definite number of shares, and at the same time he tried to persuade the members of settlements that had cash stores to increase their share holdings, "...in order to provide capital to meet the increasing demands for larger stocks and increased sales."<sup>19</sup> In the second place, he attempted to prove to the fishermen that investment in the Union Trading Company would be profitable by declaring a dividend of 10 per cent during the first year of its operation and a total of 68 per cent during the seven years from 1912 to 1918.<sup>20</sup>

Capital was urgently needed, not only to procure stock, but to purchase or build suitable premises in the outports where business was carried on. When convenient, the Union Trading Company bought stores and enlarged and improved them where necessary. When suitable premises could not be bought, a portion of the waterfront was acquired, and wharves and buildings were constructed. Each branch when completed consisted of a retail store, fish store, salt shed and a pier capable of accom<sup>m</sup>odating trading schooners. Many of these branches are still in operation with little alteration since they

18. Ibid, p. 31.

19. Ibid, p. 46.

20. Ibid, p. 127.

were constructed almost half a century ago.

In building, enlarging or repairing the outport cash stores, the F.P.U. members of the settlements concerned often gave free labour. In other instances they were paid in Union Trading Co. stock. Some of the councils which possessed stores erected them without cost to the Union Trading Company.<sup>21</sup>

Coaker's campaign to raise funds by encouraging his followers to invest in Union Trading Company shares proved to be successful. During the year the company was incorporated, 1912, 600 fishermen purchased shares to the value of \$31,000, an average of approximately \$50 each. During the same year the company transacted over a quarter of a million dollars worth of trade.<sup>22</sup> By 1916, the value of the shares held by the fishermen had risen to \$300,000, the number of shareholders to 3,000 and the value of the trade to over one and one half million dollars.<sup>23</sup>

Through the cash stores and the Union Trading Company, the F.P.U. adopted methods common to co-operatives all over the world. The capital with which the stores operated was supplied by the F.P.U. members and the annual profits distributed among the fishermen shareholders. During the Annual Convention of 1918, Coaker called the Union Trading Company "...a co-operative concern owned entirely by working people."<sup>24</sup> However, the Union Trading Company failed to be truly co-operative in that only a small percentage of F.P.U. members were shareholders. All F.P.U. members could trade at Union

21. The Weekly Advocate, Jan. 5, 1918, p. 1

22. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 54.

23. Ibid, p. 107.

24. Ibid, p. 128.

stores but only those who were shareholders had reason to be concerned with the success of these stores. This seems to have been the weakest link in the commercial undertakings planned by Coaker for the F.P.U. All union fishermen were invited to trade at union cash stores; but since relatively few of these fishermen were shareholders, the undertaking failed to be co-operative and could be classed with the other mercantile establishments which Coaker had taught his followers to hate. The only real difference was that the profits from the Union Trading Company were divided among greater numbers.

In failing to organize the Union Trading Company along co-operative lines, Coaker was responsible for creating an organization in which the majority of his fishermen followers had no interest, which contributed greatly to the difficulties with which this organization was later faced.

The next step in his plan to make the fishermen independent of the merchants was the creation of a company to export the products of the Union fishermen to the world's markets. In April, 1915,<sup>25</sup> the Union Export Co. was organized to carry out this role. During the sixth Annual Convention of the Supreme Council, Coaker stated that the attempts of the merchant opponents of the F.P.U. to kill the Union Trading Company made the formation of an export company necessary. During the same convention he stated that he had planned this company "...to make sure that the independent fishermen's interest will not be sacrificed by big fish buyers and Government

25. Ibid, p. 97. See also, The Mail and Advocate, Dec. 5, 1914.

26

intolerance and indifference."

The Union Export Company was managed by a board of directors, and the F.P.U. leader became its president.<sup>27</sup> The sale of shares was not limited to Union members as with the Union Trading Company.<sup>28</sup> However, Coaker offered fishermen a bonus on all fish sold to this company in the hope that this incentive would encourage them to buy its shares.<sup>29</sup>

Although the Export Company was planned in 1914 and organized in 1915, it did not function as an exporter of fishery products until 1917, because of the necessity of planning and building suitable premises at a location chosen for this purpose at Catalina, on the north shore of Trinity Bay.<sup>30</sup>

As soon as Coaker's plan for an export company was sanctioned by the Annual Convention of 1914, he began the search for suitable premises that could be used for the handling, packing and shipping of fish. It was impossible to acquire a suitable location at St. John's, with the limited funds at the disposal of the F.P.U. Besides, the opposition to the F.P.U. was such that no St. John's property owner would consider selling to it.<sup>31</sup> Even before the establishment of the Export Company, Coaker thought it would be an advantage to operate from some outpost because "The taxes and charges in St. John's are enormous..."<sup>32</sup>

There were hundreds of suitable harbours throughout the Union districts but the presence of ice along the coast during the winter and spring made it necessary to limit the choice to a port south

26. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 83.

27. The Mail and Advocate, Dec. 5, 1914.

28. See above, Ch. 5, p. 86

29. The Mail and Advocate, Dec. 5, 1914.

30. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 81.

31. Ibid.

32. Coaker, (ed.) The History of the F.P.U., p. 46.

of Cape Bonavista. Coaker attempted to make the location for the union enterprise as central as the geography of the country would permit. Therefore the north shore of Trinity Bay was the natural selection. The two possible ports in this area were Trinity and Catalina. Both had good natural harbours and access to the Bonavista branch of the Newfoundland Railway. There is evidence that Coaker favoured Trinity as his choice for union development but the merchant opposition in that town had proved too strong.<sup>33</sup>

During the Convention of 1912, two years before the planning of the Export Company, Coaker referred to Catalina as a suitable out-port base for union commercial establishments.<sup>34</sup> He was familiar with this port as the convention of 1910 was held there.<sup>35</sup> The harbour was a commodious one and the site chosen was acquired for the sum of \$500. One hundred years before, a Scottish firm, operated by a man called Thomson, was located in the same spot.<sup>36</sup>

No further move in the development of Catalina took place until the Seventh Annual Convention (1915), when plans were made to begin the actual building of a Union town.<sup>37</sup> During the winter of 1916 \$5,000 worth of timber was secured and in May of the same year the building of the F.P.U. premises began.<sup>38</sup> The greatest obstacle to the completion of this undertaking was the difficulty of obtaining funds. Coaker was obliged to appeal to the fishermen to buy more and more shares. The Eighth Annual Convention (1916), carried the following record of his appeal to the assembled F.P.U. delegates:

33. Bailey, Aaron, private interview, Port Union, July, 1958.

34. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 46.

35. See Appendices for time and place of Annual Conventions.

36. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 81.

37. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 97.

38. Ibid, p. 105. See also, Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 81.



"...I rely upon every man who can to aid the work by purchasing what shares their [his] means will afford. I expect Catalina members to respond nobly to their promise to take up a large slice of shares in return for free labour."<sup>39</sup>

During the early stage of the building of the F.P.U. headquarters at Catalina, no reference was made to it under the name "Port Union". The earliest recorded use of this name was in 1917,<sup>40</sup> when it was used during the annual convention of that year.

An idea of the extent of the Port Union premises can be estimated from the following description written by Coaker himself in 1932:

Hand in hand grew the Hydro Electric Plant, the Ship-building plant and the erection of dwelling houses and a church...an equipped Woodworking Factory and Store extension and a Sealoil Plant...

All the buildings are equipped with elevators and [other] labour saving appliances. The Fish Stores are the most modern and conveniently arranged in the country. Adjoining the Fish Stores...is the Drier capable of covering 150 quintals, and equipped with Electric Blowers, Fans and Heaters...At the other end of the Fish Store is situated the Salt Store and a Cooperage equipped with machinery that provides all the fish packages used on the plant...The Provision Stores, Machine Shop, a modern equipped Forge, Garages, Stables, Boiler House...are all constructed along the waterfront.

The Hall known as 'Congress Hall' was built by the F.P.U. ...The Trading Company owns 50 tenement houses...<sup>41</sup>

This accomplishment can be attributed to the foresight of the F.P.U. founder and to the unbounded faith which a great number of northern fishermen had in their leader. It could not have succeeded without the business acumen and daring spirit of the leader; not

39. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 106.

40. Ibid, p. 117.

41. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 83.



or without the faith of the fishermen which resulted in the investment of their meagre savings in the enterprise. The risk of such a venture and the difficulties of the founder were multiplied by the opposition of the merchant class. Fifteen years after its founding Coaker wrote: "Port Union is a compact, convenient, safe and self-contained commercial venture established by the northern fishermen in the face of bitter opposition of large commercial and financial interests. The obstacles it had to overcome were many and severe, and the whole history of its trials and perplexities will never be generally known."<sup>42</sup> In February, 1918, the F.P.U. moved its headquarters from St. John's to Port Union. However, the Union Publishing Company continued to operate from St. John's until 1924.<sup>43</sup>

The building of Port Union represented the high-water mark of Union accomplishment. It was the climax of the movement that had its humble beginning nine years before with a single local council of 20 members. It was a concrete sign of the strength and power that unity had brought to the northern fishermen. It was also a monument to Coaker who had planned and dared to establish both the union and the town.

Coaker planned to make Port Union a modern town which required some source of electric power to provide lights and to supply power for the electric elevators, etc. This power could only be acquired if the F.P.U. itself took measures to produce it. Coaker

<sup>42</sup>. Ibid, P. 83.

<sup>43</sup>. Coaker, (ed.), the History of the F.P.U., p. 127.

decided to harness the stream which ran through the town, and thereby produce power enough to supply not only the needs of the Union town, but of some of the nearby settlements as well. During the Seventh Annual Convention of the Supreme Council, Coaker informed the assembled delegates that it would be necessary to build a power plant at Catalina.<sup>44</sup> It was decided that the production of electric power would be entrusted to a company established for this purpose, called the Union Electric Light and Power Company. On May 4, 1916, the Governor gave his assent to an act which provided for the incorporation of this company.<sup>45</sup> The power plant at Port Union cost \$70,000,<sup>46</sup> but when we consider that it provided the comfort of electricity to thousands of fishermen's homes, throughout the Bonavista Peninsula for the last fifty years, and that this has been one of the few rural areas of the province that has been electrified until quite recently, we must agree that the money was well spent.

The introduction of steam to the sealing fleet, and the tendency to replace all sailing vessels by iron ships propelled by steam, deprived Newfoundland of a very important industry. Not only had the ship building yard employed many workers but it had also provided winter employment for many fishermen in cutting timber. It was indirectly responsible for creating additional labour, for all ships built had to be fitted with sails, rigged and manned. Coaker decided that this industry should be recreated, and under-

44. Ibid, p. 98.

45. Journal of the Assembly, Newfoundland, 1916, p. 107.

46. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.N., p. 134.

took two measures to achieve this aim. The primary part of his plan involved the establishment of a ship-building company with headquarters and building facilities at Port Union.<sup>47</sup> In addition, through the efforts of the Union Party, an act was passed by the Legislature which aimed to encourage ship-building.<sup>48</sup> This encouragement took the form of a guaranteed dividend of seven per cent on all capital invested in ship-building up to the amount of \$30,000. In addition, this Act increased the bounty from eight to sixteen dollars per ton, and permitted all shipbuilding material to enter the country free of duty.<sup>49</sup>

During the two years from 1918 to 1919, five vessels were built at Port Union with a total tonnage of 1,087.<sup>50</sup> In 1921, two vessels were built; in 1922, five. By 1925 a total of twenty-five had been completed and by 1928 the number was increased to thirty.<sup>51</sup> To improve his knowledge of the ship-building industry, Coaker visited the ship-building yards of Canada and the United States, particularly those of Shelbourne, Nova Scotia and took with him Captain Jones, who later became the chief builder at Port Union.<sup>52</sup>

The most important commercial venture of the F.P.U., in terms of the overall effects on the people of its time, was the Union Publishing Company. This company, by means of its weekly and daily papers, not only influenced the political life of its day but the commercial activity as well, for without its aid in appealing to

47. Ibid, p. 105.

48. Journal of the Assembly, Newfoundland, 1916, p. 106.

49. Proceedings of the Legislative Council, Newfoundland, 1916, pp. 77, 96.

50. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., pp. 127, 174.

51. Coaker, (ed.), Twenty Years of the F.P.U., pp. 203, 209, 237 and 387.

52. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1916, p. 47.

the people for funds, etc., the other commercial undertakings already described, in all probability would not have succeeded.

There was little hesitation on Coaker's part in respect to the power exerted by the press, and the possibilities that a fishermen's paper would give the person or persons who controlled it. During the first Annual Convention (1909), he urged the delegates present to set up a committee to study the matter. This committee recommended that a Union paper should be established without delay, that a circular be sent to all Local Councils soliciting subscriptions, that the subscription rate should not exceed fifty cents annually, and that the F.P.U. President be empowered to manage such a paper and arrange for its publication.

The first Fishermen's Advocate, February 12, 1910, was issued from Coakerville and was published by The Sun Printing Company, Twillingate, Notre Dame Bay. It consisted of two sheets, six by ten inches, and contained reports of the House of Assembly, Minutes of F.P.U. meetings, and copies of F.P.U. memorials to the Government. On March 5, 1910, a new enlarged edition was issued and on March 26 of the same year, it was again enlarged and its printing entrusted to Barnes and Company, 421 Water Street, St. John's. The issue of July 23, 1910 was the first to carry advertisements. After September 3, 1910, it was no longer issued from Coakerville, but from St. John's. It was printed by the Union Publishing Company as soon as that company was established

53. Ibid., p. 5.

54. Ibid.

55. The complete files of the Advocate, daily and weekly, exist at Port Union, Fishermen's Trading Co. premises.

56. The Island in Notre Dame Bay where Coaker had his farm, see Chapter 2, p. 20

in August, 1911. By 1912, it had grown to eight sheets of regulation size and had a circulation of 6,000 copies. In January, 1914, The Fishermen's Advocate was renamed The Mail and Advocate, which had both a daily and a weekly edition. In 1917, the Union Publishing Company acquired a building on Duckworth Street and installed Linotype Machines and other modern equipment, and, in addition to publishing a daily and weekly paper, did job printing as well. When the Union Publishing Company was established in 1911, Coaker took measures to keep The Fishermen's Advocate under the control of the F.P.U. by permitting only fishermen to purchase shares in the company.

The Fishermen's Advocate and its successor The Mail and Advocate proved to be very popular among the fishermen. Its influence was much greater than the circulation might indicate because in the first place, it reached practically every settlement on the east and north-east coasts, and in the second place, the custom of Local Councils of reading and discussing its editorials disseminated its opinions among the whole population. During the Fourth Convention of the Supreme Council, Coaker said:

The Advocate has become the most popular paper in the Colony...The Advocate has exposed transactions that has made the Government totter...it cares neither for Governor Williams or Donald Morrison...and before the present editor will shirk his duty in exposing the action of such men, he will resign the editorship. 59

As editor of the paper, Coaker was quite outspoken and as a result,

57. All information contained above in respect to The Fishermen's Advocate acquired from that paper found in the files at Port Union.

58. The Fishermen's Advocate, October 11, 1911, p. 2.

59. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 46.

60

it was often involved in libel suits. But because he dared to criticize the F.P.U. enemies, he and The Advocate became more and more popular with the fishermen. On one occasion (1912), he asked the Local Councils to contribute \$250 to pay the award granted to the claimant in a libel suit against The Advocate, and the resulting contributions amounted to over \$800.<sup>61</sup> During the Fourth Annual Convention of the Supreme Council, a committee appointed to reply to the President's address stated:

...we are more endeared then ever to our paper, and appreciate the help it has rendered our union and the cause of right and pure Government for the Colony.... we could not do without that paper, and we wish it every success...it is the greatest paper in the Colony today.. It has filled a longfelt want, and every toiler is delighted with it... 62

This committee, in respect to The Advocate, expressed the general opinion of the northern fishermen.

Coaker attempted to make his followers feel that since they had financed the Union Publishing Company, The Advocate belonged to them, and that they should be proud of their paper. During the fifth Annual Convention of the Supreme Council he said: "...the fishermen have been plucky enough to establish and maintain a paper of their own..."<sup>63</sup> During the same address he stated: "Let it be your proud boast, and the fishermen's glory that you do at least possess a paper which reaches all parts of the country, and is feared by every agency of evil that abounds in the Colony."<sup>64</sup>

60. The Government took 18 libel actions against The Advocate (see Fishermen's Advocate, January 27, 1912, p. 1.)

61. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 46.

62. Ibid, p. 54.

63. Ibid, p. 67.

64. Ibid.

Coaker claimed that no other Newfoundland paper could express a free opinion because each depended on the mercantile class for advertising, without which it could not exist. The Advocate was different, he asserted, in that although it solicited advertisements, it did not depend on this source of revenue. In fact, The Advocate, after it had built up a large circulation, had no shortage of advertising. However, its advertisements were not limited to those of a few large commercial establishments but included that of numerous retailers who took advantage of the extensive and widespread circulation and had no desire to control the paper's opinion on any issue. During the eighth Annual Convention of the Supreme Council (1910), Coaker stated:

The daily press has become a hireling press - controlled entirely by business and political interests - and the public cannot rely upon its utterances or trust its statements intended for the protection of the rights of the masses...Your paper is fearless and unpurchaseable and will defend right only and severely condemn wrong no matter by whom committed. Your paper is, therefore, the only guardian of the Public Conscience in the Colony. 65

The Advocate certainly proved itself the guardian of the fishermen's rights during the years when the Union Party was a part of the Opposition. When the formation of the National Government in 1917 made the Liberal-Union Party a part of the Government, The Advocate was wont to praise rather than condemn, to gloss over questionable Government action, that during the years from 1910 to 1917, it would have subjected to a searching criticism. In fact, it became a "hireling press" rather than a "guardian of the public conscience".



The four enterprises described above, namely, The Union Trading Company, The Union Export Company, The Union Shipbuilding Company and The Union Electric Light and Power Company, comprised the bulk of the F.P.U. commercial activity. The prosperity of the war years (1914-18), brought a measure of success to each, but the difficulties of disposing of salt cod and the general trade stagnation of the early twenties resulted in many difficulties. However, two of the Union sponsored companies, The Union Trading Company and The Union Light and Power Company, still operate (1959)..

It is easy to praise and just as easy to condemn the F.P.U. ventures in the commercial field. Certainly they were praised enough by the F.P.U. and its sympathizers and condemned just as heartily by its commercial and political enemies. J. R. Smallwood, in an appreciation of Coaker's efforts, wrote: "There is not in Newfoundland a business man of keener judgment, greater ability or more decided success." <sup>66</sup> Even A.B. Morine after he had become one of Coaker's greatest critics admitted that "...his work was remarkable". <sup>67</sup>

The following are some of the beneficial results which sprang from the commercial efforts of the F.P.U.: 1. It brought at least a transient relief from the strangle hold which the merchants had over the country. 2. It introduced into the fisheries new methods of cure and attempted to control marketing. 3. It taught the fishermen the value of co-operative buying and selling. 4. It

66. (Smallwood, J.R.), A Sincere Appreciation of Newfoundland's Greatest Son, by "An Admirer", St. John's, Union Publishing Co., (before 1927) (Pamph.)

67. "Second Draft of Morine's History of Newfoundland", Ch. 10, p. 6.

succeeded in bringing electricity to a number of rural homes in many settlements of the Bonavista Peninsula. 5. It attempted with some success to re-create the local shipbuilding industry.

6. Through The Advocate, it made the fishermen cognisant of the affairs of their country and made them aware of the commercial and political power which was theirs<sup>s</sup> through union.

There were other effects that had stagnating and undesirable results on the country, of which the following are perhaps the most obvious: 1. After 1920, it helped to perpetuate the "credit system" which it had, during its early years, sworn to destroy. 2. The F.P.U. had declared itself the enemy of all combines during the early years of the movement but in 1917 its commercial activity had grown to such an extent that it could be and often was, regarded as being most guilty in this respect. 3. Through The Advocate the four commercial concerns described above exerted a greater control over the fishermen than any merchant politician had ever exerted during the pre-union days. 4. The dependence of the fishermen, F.P.U. personnel, and Union members on one man fostered the growth of the "demagogic" appeal of the Newfoundland politician.

Before criticizing the F.P.U. commercial endeavour too strongly perhaps it would be wise to note the words of the founder, written twenty years after the F. P. U. was established.

...I may have failed in some respects, but I can honestly assert that I have sincerely endeavoured to do a man's part towards the Country and towards those who trusted me, commercially and politically....

It will be someone's duty in coming years to write a history of our time, and when that is accomplished it will, if impartial, bestow a meed of praise on the good work of the F.P.U. 68

The Political Role of the F.P.U. after 1917.

The Union Party during the years from 1914 to 1917 proved itself a very active opponent of the Government and was also responsible for the introduction of several measures that improved the welfare of the fishermen. The period of Union opposition came to an end with the formation of the National Government in July, 1917. Dr. Lloyd, the Liberal-Union leader, became Premier on January 5, 1918, and from this time the National Government was dominated by the party of which he was leader. The primary motive for the foundation of this government was the need for certain war measures which the preceding administration failed to undertake. Consequently, it made no attempt to introduce any reform legislation, but restricted itself to the primary problems created by the war. The necessity of a conscription act was one of the principal reasons for the creation of this government.

Coaker was a strong patriot and deeply conscious of the need for Empire unity. When war broke out in 1914. he opposed the formation of a Newfoundland Regiment and favoured instead the sending of naval recruits to serve in the Royal Navy. He believed that any Newfoundlanders who preferred to serve in the army could join a Canadian regiment.<sup>1</sup> However, after The Newfoundland Regiment was formed, he supported all recruiting programmes. During the years from 1916 to 1917, he took part in forty five patriotic meetings.<sup>2</sup> In an address to the Annual Convention

1. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1918, p. 168

2. Ibid.

of 1916, he exhorted the assembled delegates to go to their respective settlements and encourage the young F.P.U. members to volunteer for service in the Newfoundland Regiment.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps his greatest contribution to the war effort was an appeal for fifty young Union men to volunteer to go overseas as "Coaker Recruits", and he threatened to resign as President of the F.P.U., and go himself if this number did not respond,<sup>4</sup> (1916). As an additional incentive, he promised each recruit who survived the war a job with the F.P.U., or with the civil service. As a result of this appeal, 130 young men came forward of whom 78 were accepted.<sup>5</sup> In spite of this contribution to the war effort both the F.P.U. and its leader were branded as unpatriotic and anti-British by some city newspapers during the early winter of 1918. The reason for this slander was Coaker's delay in giving his support to the Conscription Act.

Probably the greatest gamble made by Coaker during his twenty years as a politician was his decision to support conscription. He realized that this act would be unpopular among many of his followers and that it would not pass without his consent. During the 1919 session of the Assembly, he stated: "I was flooded with hundreds of messages from F.P.U. councils and members asking me to oppose conscription and not to consent to it."<sup>6</sup> Though in practice, he always made all F.P.U. decisions, in theory he had acted according to the wishes of his followers. The decision to support conscription was his, and his alone. He knew that in supporting

3. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 109.

4. Ibid, pp. 109, 190.

5. Ibid, p. 118.

6. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1919, p. 5.

this act he was risking his ten years work as a commercial and political leader. His enemies, he realized, would delight in declaring him, the man who made conscription possible. Yet the country and the Empire were in great need of men. The recruiting system was not providing men enough to keep the Newfoundland Regiment at full strength. The only possible solution was selective conscription and Coaker decided to risk all and support an act making this possible.

The real reason for Coaker's decision may never be known. A. B. Morine, writing much later, claimed that Coaker's decision to support conscription was payment for Sir Edward's resignation as Premier in favour of Dr. Lloyd. (December 31, 1917). Coaker, however, gave the following explanation in the Assembly: "I took the stand, after mature consideration, that conscription was the only thing for us." A few months later, in addressing the tenth Annual Convention of the Supreme Council, he stated:

I did not decide to support conscription without giving it the fullest consideration and counting the cost. I expected to be misunderstood by some friends and misrepresented by my enemies, and I made up my mind to face what I considered was a most critical period of my public career. 10

In all probability there was some truth in each opinion, for Coaker could, by supporting conscription, further his political ambitions, as Morine asserted, and at the same time fulfill what he considered his duty to the Empire. He also might have had a personal reason, for his record in this respect was certainly important later when he was being considered as a candidate for knighthood.

7. Ibid, 1918, p. 20.

8. "Second Draft of Morine's History of Newfoundland" Ch.10, p. 25.

9. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1918, p. 169.

10. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.F.N., p. 126.

After giving his support to the Conscription Bill (1918), Coaker sent out a circular to all Local Councils of the F.P.U., explaining how conscription would be enforced and generally minimising the effect this act would have on his followers. His opponents claimed that he opposed the enforcement of conscription. Coaker, on the other hand, asserted that the purpose of his circular was to facilitate the enforcement of conscription, and to prevent armed resistance.<sup>11</sup> Actually, the circular was an attempt on Coaker's part to forestall his political opponents by explaining to his followers the urgency for this bill and by giving his reasons for supporting it. Coaker certainly lost some of his popularity because he had chosen to support conscription but the effect of this action was transient and soon forgotten. He stated during the tenth Annual Convention (1918), that he had asked his Twillingate constituents to avail themselves of their right to recall him as the constitution provided,<sup>12</sup> and "not one council or one of my constituents had fault to find."<sup>13</sup>

The war ended on November 11, 1918, too late to make it possible to hold an election during the fall. The House met on April 2, 1919. An act was passed on April 15, to extend the term of the existing legislature<sup>14</sup> and provision was made for an election during the following November.<sup>15</sup> However, the National Government that the war had made necessary was destined to break up before the election could be held.

11. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, 1918, p. 169.

12. For the "Right of Recall" see Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 39.

13. Ibid., p. 123.

14. Journal of the Assembly, Newfoundland, 1919, p. 4.

15. Ibid., p. 104.



The National Government was dominated by the Liberal-Union  
 16  
 Party although the majority of the members of the Assembly belonged  
 17  
 to the People's Party. The bond of unity erected by the war no  
 longer existed. Because there was no opposition many members did  
 not have enough interest to attend the Assembly and on two occasions,  
 18  
 April 30, and May 19, the House was without a quorum. The unanimity  
 which had existed since this Government was established in 1917 was  
 noticeably absent in the 1919 session and stronger opposition de-  
 veloped as the days passed. A. B. Morine, Independent Member for  
 Bonavista, who had been elected in 1914 through F.P.U. support,  
 became a strong opponent of the Government during this session. In  
 1916, Morine had notified the Assembly that he had decided to re-  
 19  
 sign his seat at the close of the session. However, he did not re-  
 20  
 sign and on his return to Newfoundland in 1918 he again adopted an  
 active political role but this time as a personal opponent of the  
 F.P.U. leader.

The end of the National Government came on Tuesday, May 20, 1919,  
 when Sir Michael Cashin, Minister of Finance and Customs and suc-  
 cessor of E. P. Morris as leader of the People's Party, presented a  
 21  
 motion that the House adjourn until the following Friday. In ad-  
 dition, he moved "that the House place on record its opinion that

16. See above, Ch. 4, p. 81

17. See above, Ch. 3, p. 56

18. Journal of the Assembly, Newfoundland, 1919.

19. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1916, p. 297

20. Morine claimed that he had spent the two previous years in  
 Toronto on a contract for legal work. See, Proceedings of the  
 House of Assembly, 1918, p. 176. He also claimed that Coaker  
 had persuaded him not to resign his seat. See The Evening  
 Herald, May 30, 1919, p. 4.

21. Journal of the Assembly, Newfoundland, 1919, p. 77.



"the Government as at present constituted does not possess the confidence of the House."<sup>22</sup> The motion was seconded by the Premier, Dr. Lloyd, and passed without a <sup>23</sup>division.

The new Government under the leadership of Sir Michael Cashin met for the first time on Friday, May <sup>24</sup>23, and the F.P.U. members found themselves once more in the ranks of the Opposition. John Stone, Union member for the three-member district of Trinity, and Minister of Marine and Fisheries in the National Government, joined the Cashin Government as head of the same department.<sup>24</sup> A. B. Morine<sup>25</sup> accepted a Cabinet seat as Minister of Justice.

In the spring of 1919, the Government made provisions for an election to be held during the following November. The period preceding the election brought problems for the F.P.U. leader similar to those he had faced before the 1913 election.<sup>26</sup> The F.P.U. had not expanded to any extent since 1913 and the Union Party was no stronger in 1919 than it had been in 1913. It is true that Coaker was no longer perturbed about leading the Opposition; but he and his followers had reaped the advantages of being a part of the Government from July, 1917 to May 1919, and probably preferred this role to the thankless labours of the opposition years (1913-'17).

The fourth Annual Convention of the Supreme Council (1912), had empowered Coaker to decide at his own discretion what the future

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 171.

25. "Second Draft of Morine's History of Newfoundland", Ch. 10, p. 26.

26. See above, Ch. 11, p. 36

policy of the Union Party should be. Consequently, the decision to coalesce with the Liberal Party in 1913 was made by Coaker himself. During the tenth Annual Convention (1919), he asked his followers for similar authority. On this occasion he stated:

...let me ask you to trust me fully and empower me to act on your behalf, as discretion shall direct...or replace me by someone to whom you will confer this power...

In the delicate matters that present themselves for arrangement and adjustment in forming our forces for the next election, I ask you to give me full power to act on your behalf, and the strict assurance that whatever I do you will abide by. This is asking you for a greater power, but it is the only way I know to meet the circumstances. I will know the inside movements of all concerned, and will be in the best position to act for your best interests and that of the country. 28

Though Coaker made this statement almost a year before the election, he was aware, it seems, even at that time that necessity might force him into an alliance with one or more of his previous opponents. He realized that the Union Party had to unite with some other group, if it hoped to leave the ranks of the Opposition, and had asked his followers to empower him to make the decisions himself as he had done in 1913 and for their backing in whatever plan he should adopt.

When Sir William Lloyd resigned as Premier in May, 1919, and accepted the position of Registrar of the Supreme Court, the Liberal Party was left without a leader. To fill this vacancy there came forward a young but experienced politician, R. A. Squires. He had been elected in 1909 as a candidate of the People's Party in

27. See above, Ch. 3, p. 51

28. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 133.

29. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 30

the three-member district of Trintiy but had suffered defeat in 1913, when this district had returned three Liberal-Union members.<sup>30</sup> Following this defeat, he was made a member of the Legislative Council and given the Cabinet Post of Minister of Justice.<sup>31</sup>

Coaker and Squires had begun their respective careers as public men at approximately the same time; Squires as a member of the Assembly and Coaker as the founder of a popular union. They had had a bitter hatred for each other since the beginning of their careers as public men. Each controlled a newspaper, Coaker, The Advocate and Squires, The Star, and each of these papers carried frequent references to the political misdeeds of the proprietor of the rival paper. In addition, they fired frequent broadsides at each other from the respective Houses of the Legislature (1914-19). Coaker, after his retirement from politics, wrote the following character sketch of Squires:

He was an able, alert and energetic leader. He was a politician rather than a statesman. In my opinion the cleverest politician the country has produced. His energy was astounding. He could get through as much work in a day as would take ordinary men a week to transact. Hard work and tongue ability [ability as an orator] made him what he became. He was not an easy man to work with. He lacked sincerity and took no one into his full confidence. Had conscience been his guide he could have taken a foremost place among the great public men of Newfoundland. 32

This character analysis was made at a time when Coaker had no apparent reason for not writing what he sincerely believed. However, what he wrote could very well be a self-portrait, for some of the characteristics he attributed to Squires were the hall-marks of his own character.

30. The Evening Telegram, Nov. 4, 1919, p. 7.

31. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 80.

32. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 20.

Early in September, 1919, Squires held a public meeting in St. John's, during which he claimed that he had been chosen by a group of Liberal supporters as the leader of "The Liberal-Reform Party"<sup>33</sup> Later, he claimed that he had interviewed Sir Robert Bond, who had assured him that he had retired from politics. After this interview Squires "proclaimed himself the successor of the late Liberal chieftain."<sup>34</sup>

A few days after the formation of this party Coaker and Squires, following a short period of negotiations, announced that a coalition between the Union and the Liberal-Reform parties had been formed, under the name of "Liberal-Reform Party".<sup>35</sup>

Some of the same factors which precipitated the Liberal-Union coalition of 1913 contributed to the similar development of 1919.<sup>36</sup> However, there was one additional factor. During the two previous elections (1909 and 1913), the Roman Catholic districts voted solidly for candidates of the People's Party. Coaker, who had always been aware of the sectarian barrier, regarded Squires as a natural Protestant leader. He was not only a Protestant, but the Grand Master of the Loyal Orange Lodge, and in addition had a considerable Roman Catholic following, because of his many years association with Sir Edward Morris. (The fact that he was elected in St. John's West a district with a Roman Catholic majority,<sup>37</sup> indicates the strength of his Catholic following).

33. The Evening Telegram, Sept. 9, 1919, p. 4.

34. Ibid, September 17, p. 6

35. Ibid, September 23, 1919, p. 4.

36. See above, Ch. III, pp. 52 - 53

37. See, Census of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1921, (St. John's, Newfoundland, 1923), p. 502.

The "Tories" (known as the People's Party since 1908), seemed greatly perturbed by this coalition under its two dynamic leaders, Squires and Coaker; and on the day following the announcement of this coalition held a public meeting in St. John's and adopted the name of "Liberal-Progressive Party".<sup>38</sup>

A Labour Party was also organized in St. John's and a manifesto issued. However, only three candidates were entered, all for St. John's West, and all three were badly beaten in the election which followed.<sup>39</sup>

In the 1919 election the Liberal-Reform Party won 24 of the 36<sup>40</sup> seats. The F.P.U. had entered twelve candidates and all but one were successful. The loser was George Grimes, who was defeated in Port de Grave District by Sir John Crosbie.<sup>41</sup> The election was fought on a strict denominational basis.<sup>42</sup> The policy of the party, and the ability of the candidates were completely ignored. The Liberal-Reform Party was supported by the Protestants and it succeeded in winning by large majorities in all non-Catholic districts. The Tory (Liberal-Progressive) Party returned only two Protestant members, one of whom, Mr. Bennett, represented the Roman Catholic District of St. John's West. The Roman Catholic voters were just as strongly Tory as they had been in 1913.<sup>42</sup> The great difference was that the Protestant voters had united solidly under the leadership of Squires and Coaker. The only Tory candidate to succeed in a district with a Protestant majority was Sir John Crosbie in Port de Grave.<sup>43</sup>

38. The Evening Telegram, Sept. 24, 1919, p. 4.

39. Ibid, Dec. 31, 1919, p. 8.

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid, Nov. 21, 1919, p. 14.

42. See above, Ch. 111, p. 58

43. The Evening Telegram, Nov. 21, 1919, p. 14.

When the Twenty-fourth General Assembly met in 1920, many of its members expressed their regret that the election had resulted in such a denominational division. Mr. Bennett, Liberal-Progressive <sup>Member</sup> for St. John's West made the following statement: "The whole question before the country was hidden altogether. I claim that the last election was not fought on any policy. It was not fought on the issue at stake...A man was not judged according to his ability but he was judged by the altar he worshipped at." However, the altar of the political candidate did not play as great a role as the denominational association of the leadership of the respective parties. The issue was clear cut. On the one hand was the Protestant Liberal-Reform Party. Its leaders, Squires and Coaker, were two well known members of the Loyal Orange Association and adherents of the two principal Protestant denominations. On the other hand, was the Roman Catholic Liberal-Progressive Party. Its core consisted of the old Tory Party, that had succeeded in 1909 and 1913 under the name of "The People's Party" by the solid support of the Roman Catholic voters. Its leader, Sir Michael Cashin, was the successor of Sir Edward Morris, the well-known Catholic leader of the People's Party. Thus the Liberal-Reform victory of 1919 was the result of solid Protestant support which, in turn, was the inevitable consequence of the Roman Catholic solidarity during the elections of 1909 and 1913.

From Coaker's point of view, the coalition of 1919 was a marriage de convenance. His followers had given him permission to determine

44. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1920, p. 90.

45. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 136.



the political policy of the Union Party. He chose to coalesce with his greatest opponent. The choice was expedient. He made no effort to justify his decision, neither did he attempt to whitewash his chosen ally in any way, whom he previously<sup>had</sup> criticized so severely.

Coaker had great plans for the future of Newfoundland, which could only be brought about if he were in a position to determine Government policy. To achieve this position he was willing to unite with his greatest enemy. His plans for the betterment of the country were along two broad lines. In the first place, he had planned involved and drastic legislation to reform the curing and marketing of fish, and in the second place, he hoped in a small way to make a beginning in the field of industrialization. A. B. Morine, in explaining the Squires-Coaker union, at a much later date, wrote: "A desire to have legislation enacted for the standardization of the cure of fish, and its controlled marketing, was one reason for the support given by Coaker and his colleagues in 1920-24."<sup>46</sup>

Coaker felt that the end of the war would bring a slump in the fish trade and sincerely believed that the Government should be prepared<sup>47</sup> to take steps to regulate the sale of this staple product.

The celebrated and much abused Fish Regulations (1920), introduced by Coaker while Minister of Marine and Fisheries (1919-'23), had many aims. In the first place, an attempt was made to modernize the fishery by introducing new methods of catching and curing.<sup>48</sup>

45. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 136.

46. "Second Draft of Morine's History of Newfoundland", Ch. 10, p.21

47. Smallwood, Coaker of Newfoundland, p. 66.

48. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1920, p.311.



Secondly, legislation was introduced providing for the standardization of cull both in <sup>49</sup>bying from the producer and in grading for market. <sup>50</sup>Thirdly, provisions were made for the appointment of trade agents to the various countries that purchased Newfoundland salt cod. <sup>51</sup>Fourthly, the Department of Marine and Fisheries was re-organized and provisions made for an information bureau to provide fishermen with relevant information, <sup>52</sup>and a scientific research department. <sup>53</sup>Fifthly, an attempt was made to establish controlled marketing by forcing all exporters to procure a government license before fish could be exported. <sup>54</sup>Associated with these regulations was an attempt to fix the price of salt cod in the foreign markets.

The various regulations introduced by Coaker during this period were to a great extent necessary and if successfully applied would have had a beneficial effect on the life of the country. However, the attempt to fix the price of fish in foreign markets was certainly unwise. In fact, the marketing of cod was a highly competitive business and Newfoundland certainly did not monopolize the supply to the extent that would make such a policy feasible.

Though there was a great necessity for the "Regulations" as planned by Coaker, there were several factors at work which ultimately resulted in the destruction of the whole plan. The primary factor was the knowledge that Coaker himself, as President of The

49. Ibid., pp. 140, 150, 312, 313.

50. Ibid., p. 7.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid., p. 426.

53. Ibid., pp. 312 - 313.

54. Ibid., p. 138. For a detailed account of the "Fishery Regulations" see, Smallwood, Coaker of Newfoundland, pp. 69-85. See also, The Fishermen's Advocate, Jan. 12, 1920, p. 4.

Union Export Company, was a fish exporter and his actions were naturally viewed with suspicion by his political and commercial rivals. This feeling was particularly strong on the south and west coasts, where the merchants and non-union fishermen believed that the "Regulations" were formed for the benefit of the F.P.U. fishermen of the east coast who produced principally "shore" and "Labrador" cure. They suspected that Coaker as F.P.U. leader would favour the east coast product over the "bank" cure of the south and west coasts.

A second factor which contributed to the failure of the "Regulations" <sup>"</sup> was the precipitous manner in which Coaker attempted to force this measure on the country. He was warned by his opponents in the Assembly to proceed with caution; <sup>55</sup> but in principle the members of the House, including the Opposition, were in favour of the plan. Many of the principal fish exporters also gave their support to the "Regulations". Coaker attempted to force every exporter to conform immediately, but the marketing customs of centuries could not be changed overnight. Had he attempted to educate the merchants to the necessity of such a move and introduced the "Regulations" a step at a time, the result might well have been different.

<sup>3</sup> A third factor which contributed to the failure of the "Regulations" was the general trade recession which hit the European fish-buying countries shortly after the plan was initiated. The exchange difficulties which accompanied this recession made it

55. Proceedings of the Assembly, Newfoundland, 1920, p. 346.

virtually impossible to maintain the "price fixing" which the "Regulations" recommended. The fourth factor which contributed to this failure was one that had wrecked every previous attempt to improve the fishery; namely, the tendency of the party in opposition to make a political issue out of any reform legislation planned for this purpose.

It was unfortunate that Coaker failed in this attempt to reorganize and modernize the Newfoundland fisheries, for when the "Regulations" were finally repealed in 1921, almost two decades were allowed to pass before any further attempt to reorganize was made, during which time the destructive methods and practices of the past were continued. The period of stagnation ended when the Commission Government (1935-49), attempted reforms very much on the lines of these which had brought so much adverse criticism to Coaker in 1921-23.<sup>56</sup>

The failure of the "Regulations" was undoubtedly a serious blow to the country. But more serious still was its effects on the F.P.U. leader. For eight years he had carried out a ceaseless round of reform. His efforts had resulted in measures which had brought material benefits to the whole country and in particular, the fishermen. The "Regulations" was his master plan, a panacea for all the ills with which the country was afflicted. It contained several ideas that had been prominent in F.P.U. demands since 1908, and other measures which had resulted from Coaker's extensive travels to the fish buying countries. In order to be in a position to put this plan into practice, he had co-operated with a man who for a decade

56. For the extend of this criticism see, The Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1921-1922.

had been his greatest enemy and the self-declared opponent of all F.P.U. activity.<sup>57</sup> But instead of bringing prosperity to the country, and glory to its creator, it brought chaos and ruin in the fish trade, and to Coaker, the unpleasant task of being forced to defend his plan to the Assembly and the country and explain its failure to thousands who blamed him for their economic ruin. The result was the dampening of that active spirit of reform which had characterized his behaviour since the formation of the F.P.U., and from this time until his retirement in 1932, he was just another pathetic politician caring and doing little about the welfare of the country. The one exception worth mentioning to this inactive political life, was the active support he gave his leader, Squires, in negotiating the deal which resulted in the founding of the paper mill at Corner Brook.<sup>58</sup>

The period beginning with the founding of the National Government (1917), and terminating in 1923, with the end of the first Coaker-Squires administration, from the point of view of the F.P.U., was exceedingly important. During this period the ultimate political fate of the Union Party was decided. In 1913, Coaker had brought the F.P.U. into the fold of the Liberal Party, but as a partner, not as a subordinate. The coalition was known as the "Liberal-Union Party" and during the years from 1913 to 1917, the Union members were regarded as being distinct from their Liberal allies. In 1919, the coalition between Squires and Coaker took the name "Liberal-

57. See above, Ch. 6, p. 109

58. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 26.

Reform Party", and in the ensuing Government the Liberal and Union members were indistinguishable.

In losing their identity in the Liberal Party, the Union members, including their leader, lost sight of the great aims which had been theirs during their years in opposition. During this period they were in a favourable position to abolish the "corruption" of which they had accused the Government while in opposition, but also failed in this respect. Although there is every indication that many of the Union members remained honest, yet the Government of which they were a part was in no way different from its predecessors.

The Union Party from 1919 to 1932 ceased to be the powerful force for good that it had been from 1913 to 1919. It continued to send members to parliament, but the militant spirit of the earlier years had disappeared. In spite of the early promise it had held out to the thousands of F.P.U. members, its efforts for reform gradually subsided until it became as apathetic as the members it had condemned and replaced.

It is to be added that his work was not without results.

One of the most apparent and outstanding characteristics of Sir William was his great physical strength and extraordinary capacity for work. He drove himself continuously, regardless of the type of work, whether physical or mental. While at Cambridge after a hard day's toil in the woods or on the field, he often went about to Carving Neck, a distance of six miles, attended a lecture.

1. "Second Part of William's History of the 'Islands', Ch. 20, p. 5.

## Chapter 7

Coaker of Newfoundland

The previous chapters have been an examination of the work of Coaker as a member of what he, himself, described as the "toilers", as the organizer of the F.P.U., as the creator of a political party, member of Parliament and Cabinet Minister, and as a commercial leader who had established several prosperous business concerns. In each of these three fields, union organizer, politician and business man, he became one of the most prominent figures of his day. He had lived the obscure life of a fisherman-farmer until his thirty-sixth year and yet possessed the ability to achieve such success in each of these three fields. He was certainly a controversial figure, but regarding his ability, there seems to have been perfect agreement. Even his enemies, who had considered him an upstart and ridiculed his every action, conceded to his ability. Morine, who after 1919 was one of his greatest detractors, at a much later date wrote, "...considering the conditions he had to grapple [grapple] with, and the results he achieved, it is to be admitted that his work was remarkable.<sup>1</sup>

One of the most apparent and outstanding characteristics of Sir William was his great physical strength and extraordinary capacity for work. He drove himself continuously, regardless of the type of work, whether physical or mental. While at Coakerville after a hard day's toil in the woods or on the farm, he often snow-showd to Herring Neck, a distance of six miles, attended a Lodge

1. "Second draft of Morine's History of Newfoundland", Ch. 10, p. 5.



meeting till midnight, and returned home in the same manner. While<sup>2</sup> organizing the F.P.U., his efforts were phenomenal as the following extract from The Fishermen's Advocate will indicate: "The President arrived at Coakerville on Monday...after travelling 60 miles with [on] snowshoes and addressing four Local Councils, a district meeting and a mass meeting during six days."<sup>3</sup> During the years from 1908 to 1913 all the labours of organization had to be carried out in the fall, winter and early spring, when travelling conditions were most difficult, for during the summer season he<sup>4</sup> had to work on his farm. He applied the same untiring energy and capacity for work to his political and commercial duties. His unhappy life after his separation from his wife and child undoubtedly drove him to further effort but from his early manhood he had always derived an unusual pleasure from work. His capacity in this respect is well illustrated by the following quotation: "...I met the future president of the F.P.U. running a Post Office<sup>5</sup> and a Telegraph Office but chafing for want of something to do.." In 1924, Coaker himself wrote, "...there is no pleasure for me<sup>6</sup> in anything but work." He betrayed the same spirit when he resigned from the post of Fishery Warden because he thought it was<sup>7</sup> a waste of time.

In spite of his physical fitness, the pace which he set and

2. Watkins, Hubert, (One of the original members of the first Local Council of the F.P.U.), personal interview, Herring Neck, Aug. 4, 1958.
3. The Fishermen's Advocate, March 12, 1910, p. 1.
4. [Clouter], T., "The F.P.U. and its Leader" (History of the F.P.U., edited by W. Coaker), p. 153.
5. Devine, P.K., "Memories of the F.P.U.", (History of the F.P.U., p. 141).
6. Coaker, W. F., Sir William Coaker Reviews Recent visits Abroad, Port Union, Union Publishing Co. Ltd., 1924, p. 44.
7. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1915, p. 594.



maintained undoubtedly contributed to the breakdown of his health. He was aware of what would happen, it seems, for he wrote in 1911, "...I am willing to continue my hard task until my successor can be found, although I am convinced that such work as I must perform, will shorten my life very materially." <sup>8</sup> Closely linked with his capacity for work and physical endurance was his great appeal to the fishermen. In this respect he has seldom been equalled. He not only won them as members of his union and as political supporters, but also succeeded in persuading many to trust him with their savings. Many who had hoarded their savings in preference to trusting a bank invested all in union-sponsored commercial undertakings. This success can be explained in two ways. In the first place, Coaker was a hard worker and the untiring energy he displayed as a farmer and when organizing the F.P.U., created a kinship between him and the northern fishermen. He proved himself a doer and the unlettered fishermen with a culture which particularly permitted the appreciation of physical exploits found him an admirable candidate for idolization. Secondly, he possessed a great understanding of the fishermen. He had lived among them for more than twenty years and during that time he had made it his business to study them. He knew their way of life, how and what they thought, their likes and dislikes, and above all he knew that poverty, dependence on merchants, and mistreatment by public servants had destroyed their confidence in themselves. His every action was calculated to restore their economic freedom and make them proud that they were fishermen. By his fearless behavior from the be-

ginning, he proved that he was man enough to champion their cause against the merchant and the St. John's politicians. Every means calculated to appeal to the fishermen's desire for economic and political freedom was attempted and publicized by means of Local Councils. The Trading Company would eliminate their dependence on merchants, the Union Party would champion their cause in the House. He warned them against buying from peddlers. He advised them to watch weights because merchants were robbing them. Because of his knowledge of foreign markets and commercial practices he knew the price the merchants could afford to pay and used this knowledge to set a price for fish, (always higher than that which the merchants offered), and advised his followers to hold their fish until this price was reached. The fishermen had unlimited faith in their leader and held their catch until the price reached this level. Fortunately for Coaker, the period from 1908 to 1918 was one of rising prices and his fishermen followers gave him full credit for the steady improvement in their economic position. He knew a great number of his followers personally and in turn was regarded by all as a personal friend. Thus, Coaker, to the fishermen, was not only a leader, but a time-tested member of their toiling fraternity.

In spite of his verbosity, Coaker was a man of action. When there was work to be done he did it himself rather than trust to a subordinate. He wasted no time in lamenting the lack of necessary equipment but used whatever was at hand. During the formative years of the F.P.U. when it was necessary for him to

9. The Fishermen's Advocate, June 11, 1910, p. 1.

10. Ibid, Aug. 1, 1912, p. 1. A part of h's policy of "Eternal Vigilance" was a glaring headline in Advocate as follows: "Test your scales [the merchant's scales] before selling your fish" (The inference was that the merchants were de-liberately cheating fishermen.)

travel extensively, he allowed nothing to delay or deter him. If he could ride, he did so, but he often walked long distances over the ice or through the northern wilderness. However, on many occasions he was overhasty in putting his ideas into practice. This was in keeping with his own philosophy. On one occasion he wrote: "Give me a man who will do things even if he makes mistakes rather than be damned with the impotency of those who stand still, who know nothing of the joys of success or the worries of failure."<sup>11</sup>

The ability to face any problem or situation and make a decision in a relatively short time enabled him to accomplish an extraordinary amount of work during his career, but it also led to mistakes that could have been easily avoided and on several occasions resulted in wearisome libel suits.<sup>12</sup> Fortunately, he also possessed the ability to admit his mistakes and to take measures to remedy them.

Hand in hand with his decisive action went a fearlessness seldom witnessed in a politician. He allowed nothing or no one to prevent him from doing what he thought should be done. He condemned everyone, regardless of position, who opposed his plans - the Governor,<sup>13</sup> Premier,<sup>14</sup> the Upper House, (to which he gave the suggestive title of "Dumping Chamber")<sup>15</sup> or anyone else. He criticized and threatened them all in turn. He showed the same independence of his own friends and supporters. For example, in 1918, he gave

11. Coaker, W.F., Notes of a Journey to the West Indies, Union Publishing Co. Ltd., 1922, p. 43.
12. The Fishermen's Advocate, Jan. 27, 1912, p. 1. (The Government took 18 libel suits against The Fishermen's Advocate before the date of this issue).
13. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 19.
14. The Mail and Advocate, Oct. 12, 1914, p. 6.
15. Ibid, Dec. 12, 1914, p. 7.

~~he gave~~ all his support to the Military Service Bill<sup>16</sup> although he had received numerous telegrams from Local Councils asking him to use his influence to defeat this Bill.<sup>17</sup> Again, in his New Year's message of 1930, at a time when he himself was a member of the Cabinet, he stated that the class of men in the Government, to a certain extent, ~~was~~<sup>18</sup> not a desirable type.

The accomplishments of the F.P.U. leader show that he was not only extremely capable himself but also possessed the ability to select efficient subordinates. Several commercial ventures were undertaken simultaneously, which left him no time to train people for responsible positions. Consequently, they had to be enticed from other business concerns. Even under these conditions he succeeded in acquiring able and efficient workers. A greater task<sup>19</sup> was the finding of managers for the many Union cash stores. But formidable as this task was, he succeeded in a surprising number of cases in finding honest, loyal and efficient workers.

Although the Union members of the Assembly, with whom he associated, were in theory selected by the District Councils, he was responsible, to a great extent for their selection. Here again, although the field of his choice was limited, he chose well. In general, the men he selected, although unschooled, were men of principle, honest, hard working and took their work in the Assembly in the nature of a crusade. They also had absolute faith in their leader. In spite of enticements from merchants and political op-

16. Journal of the Assembly, Newfoundland, 1918, p

17. The Weekly Advocate, Jan. 29, 1918, p. 5. See also, Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 125.

18. The Evening Telegram, Jan. 17, 1930.

19. See above, ch. 5, p. 84 for growth of cash stores.

ponents, only one (John Stone, a member for the three member District of Trinity, 1913-1919). of the many Union members deserted for an enemy camp.<sup>20</sup>

In the field of finance, Coaker's greatest battle was acquiring the necessary funds. The fishermen were proverbially tight-fisted<sup>21</sup> and, since the bank crash of 1894, even more reluctant to entrust their savings to any financial institution. Besides, a great number of his fishermen followers had nothing to invest. The first move in his campaign to raise funds was to make arrangements for fishermen to buy supplies through Local Councils.<sup>22</sup> The councils were supplied with certain staple articles of diet at wholesale prices which were considerably lower than those of the local merchants. In this manner, the value of co-operative buying was made obvious. The next move was to inform the fishermen that in order to supply a branch store, the Trading Company must have funds, and only those settlements that bought sufficient shares would be supplied with such a branch. Coaker tried to encourage the fishermen to buy shares by permitting only members to buy at Union cash stores,<sup>23</sup> by selling shares in Union sponsored companies<sup>24</sup> only to fishermen, and by paying a bonus on all fish sold to the Union Export Company by fishermen shareholders. These measures were

20. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 171.

21. Smallwood, J.R., Coaker of Newfoundland, p. 32.

22. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 15. See also, The Fishermen's Advocate, Oct. 19, 1912, p. 6.

23. The Fishermen's Advocate, Oct. 19, 1912, p. 6.

24. Ibid, Oct. 11, 1911, p. 2.

expected to make the fishermen feel that the various commercial interests of the F.P.U. were created solely for their benefit.

Regarding the purpose to which these funds were put, it can be said without fear of overstatement that during the years from 1911 to 1919, the F.P.U. under the leadership of Coaker, undertook a programme of commercial and industrial development that involved almost every field of economic endeavour capable of being carried out in the country. In most cases funds were used wisely and well. When it is considered that the principal commercial undertakings survived the depression and are still in operation today, we have evidence of the soundness of the structure which the F.P.U. leader built. Detailed attention <sup>25</sup> to this development can be found in an earlier chapter.

In all commercial undertakings, Coaker showed that he possessed one of the necessary characteristics of the progressive businessman, the ability to introduce new ideas. The building of Port Union, Trinity North, in itself was a new idea. There was no precedent for such a centre. He originated the idea, selected the location and planned the town. The dry fish premises were not a duplication of some St. John's firm but original and contained several innovations. He also introduced changes in the fishing industry in the form of an artificial drier and a boneless fish plant. <sup>26</sup> In the inspection, <sup>27</sup> culling and marketing of fish, he proved to be two decades ahead of his time when he attempted to introduce in the early twenties,

25. See Ch. 5.

26. The Mail and Advocate, Aug. 5, 1916, p. 5.

27. Smallwood, Coaker of Newfoundland, p. 41. See also above Ch. 6. P114



many of the measures accepted by the Commission Government in the late thirties.

Another outstanding quality very much apparent in the Union leader was his ability to get to the roots of the problems with which he dealt. Consider his action previous to drafting the Logger's Bill or the equally important Sealer's Bill. He was not satisfied with information from participants but covered the ground himself. He visited the lumber camps, examined the sleeping quarters and the meals served and questioned the men to find out their complaints and demands. He went to the seal fishery in the spring of 1914<sup>29</sup> and during the trip had ample opportunity to study the working and living conditions of the crews. This background study actually served two purposes, for it not only permitted him to make these acts effective but left him better informed than anyone else in the House when they were debated. In the same manner he travelled extensively throughout European fish-buying countries before introducing the Fishery Regulations of 1920.

Many people are still living (1958), who have heard Coaker make a political speech and much that was written about his oratory still exists. All who heard him were impressed and even his enemies grudgingly gave praise to his eloquence. Morine, who was probably one of his greatest critics wrote: "He talked brightly in the presence of men whose intelligence he respected..."<sup>30</sup>

28. Smallwood, J. R., Coaker of Newfoundland, p. 41.

29. The Daily Mail, St. John's, April 11, 1914, p. 4.

30. "Second Draft of Morine's History of Newfoundland", Ch. 10, p. 28.



The Fishermen's Advocate of 1910, carried the following tribute to his oratory:

The words and sentences came from him like water from a fountain...his tongue gave utterances to a flow of language that spellbound his audience. He speaks fast, distinct and his words are simple...He makes it plain; he knows his hearers; he understands what they require ...His voice is clear,...he becomes earnest and his voice grows higher and full of fire and spirit... every word went home to the hearts of his hearers. 31

It is significant that the writer says "hearts" of his hearers rather than "heads", for although he quoted facts and figures and appealed to their reason, his primary appeal was to their emotion.

The following description of Coaker's oratory as made by J. R. Smallwood, who had heard him speak on many occasions, will indicate the respect paid him as a speaker by his associates:

Coaker is a powerfully built man of great physical strength, and every ounce of his physical strength went into his speech. You could hear his voice booming before you got to the chamber. There was no finesse, no polish, in his speaking. He spoke the same there as when addressing the fishermen around the bays. It was hammer, hit, pound. The aroused indignation and discontent of thousands of fishermen poured from his lips, and he spoke by the hour. 32

In respect to Coaker's oratory, <sup>Mr.</sup> Smallwood, in the same book, said: "It was a thing of elemental passion and rough eloquence. It stirred those plegmatic<sup>3</sup> fishermen as they had never been before, even at revival meetings.<sup>33</sup>"

In spite of the lack of "finesse and polish", his speech was flavored with Newfoundland's own peculiar idioms, rich in figures

31. The Fishermen's Advocate, Dec. 17, 1912, p. 1.
32. Smallwood, Coaker of Newfoundland, p. 37.
33. Ibid, p. 30. See appendices for song which indicates Coaker's appeal to the fishermen.

of speech, and particularly rich in words and phrases which he coined to suit some particular situation. The following indicate his ability in this respect; his reference to the Upper House as "The Dumping Chamber"<sup>34</sup> the merchants and politicians as "The Long-coated Chaps"<sup>35</sup>, to his fishermen followers as the "Sons of Toil"<sup>36</sup>, to the Board of Trade as the "Merchant's Union"<sup>37</sup>, and to the non-union members of the Assembly as "Arm-chair Producers"<sup>38</sup>, and as "Grab-alls"<sup>39</sup>. He called the Upper House "...that useless ornament of the Legislature"<sup>40</sup> and referred to the Union Party as "...in the cold shades of the opposition"<sup>41</sup>.

Sir William was an ardent Anglican. As a young man he took great interest in his church<sup>42</sup> and continued to have such interest until his death. However, he did cross swords frequently with ministers of various denominations. He claimed that opposition of clergymen was one of the reasons for diminishing interest in the F.P.U.<sup>43</sup> In describing his years at Herring Neck, he claimed that he was continually in hot water with merchants, politicians and parsons.<sup>44</sup> Again, in 1932 he severely criticized Rev. Godfrey,

34. See above, Ch. 7, p.123.

35. The Fishermen's Advocate, May 14, 1910, p. 1.

36. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., pp. 49,50.

37. Ibid, p. 4.

38. Mail and Advocate, Weekly edition, Feb. 6, 1915, p. 5.

39. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., pp. 51,65,71.

40. Ibid, p. 80.

41. The Evening Advocate, Jan. 18, 1917, p. 5.

42. (Clouter), "The F.P.U. and its Leader", (The History of the F.P.U., W. F. Coaker, ed.), p. 182.

43. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 7.

44. The Evening Advocate, Dec. 22, 1917, p. 1. p.123

an Anglican minister, for his role in the "Majestic Meeting" (a public meeting held in the Majestic Theatre, which preceded the riots of 1932.). He wrote, "Had I been Minister of Justice....I would have arrested Mr. Godfrey for making such utterances, which were capable of creating civil commotion..."<sup>45</sup> In his dealings with other denominations, he proved that he had none of the prejudice common to his time, but criticized or praised as circumstances warranted. In fact, he endeavoured, through the F.P.U., to cut out sectarianism and to bring the "toilers" of all denominations together. He showed his interest in religion in a practical manner in his plan for Port Union. The Union town, when completed, contained an Anglican Church, "The Church of the Holy Martyrs", dedicated to the Coaker recruits, who gave their lives in World War I.<sup>46</sup>

In early manhood, he became a member of the Loyal Orange Lodge.<sup>47</sup> He was responsible for introducing this society to Herring Neck and is reputed to have cut the sills for the Herring Neck Orange Hall<sup>48</sup> from his farm and to have towed them to Herring Neck in a rowboat. He enjoyed these lodge meetings and they were probably responsible for providing him with the inspiration to establish the F.P.U. His association with the Orange Lodge proved a great advantage to him

45. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 43.

46. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 171. See also, Coaker, W. F., "F.P.U. Progress, 1909 to 1919" (The History of the F.P.U., ed., W. F. Coaker) p. 192.

47. Walkins, H., Personal interview, Aug. 4, 1958, Herring Neck, Notre Dame Bay.

48. Ibid.

during the formative years of his union, for he was given the use of the Orange Hall in every community which had one. He also could claim the kinship of brother members in almost every northern community. On the other hand, his association with the Orange Lodge partly explains his failure to unionize Roman Catholic regions.

He was a life-long abstainer from all alcoholic beverages and lost no opportunity to campaign against the drink habit.<sup>49</sup> Several years before the Government attempted to introduce prohibition, he wrote: "Intemperance is an awful evil, and the men who are labouring for temperance reforms are a blessing to their country."<sup>50</sup> He campaigned actively for the Prohibition Bill of 1916 and brought the weight of union membership into effect when a plebiscite was taken on this question. After the advent of prohibition, he continued his fight against intemperance by warning his followers against the dangers of drinking "moonshine".<sup>51</sup> There was no hypocrisy associated with his abhorrence of strong drink. He saw it as a destroyer of men's working efficiency. In this light, he abstained himself and tried to encourage his followers to do the same.

There is every indication that Coaker had strong sentiments about the Empire. In 1900, while on a visit to Montreal, he attempted to enlist in the Canadian Army which at that time was about to participate in the Boer War.<sup>52</sup> During World War I, when he was persuaded

49. The Mail and Advocate, weekly edition, Sept. 25, 1915, p. 8.

50. Coaker, "F.P.U. Progress, 1909 to 1919", (The History of the F.P.U., ed. by F.W. Coaker), p. 196.

51. The Fishermen's Advocate, April 9, 1910, p. 1.

52. Bailey, A., (present manager of the Union Light and Power Co.), personal interview, Port Union, July 7, 1958.

by his union followers to remain at his post, he asked for fifty<sup>53</sup> young union men to enlist in his place. Seventy-eight responded and of this number, twelve paid the supreme sacrifice, one of whom was his nephew, William Coaker Christian.<sup>54</sup> Though the company, which he headed, lost large sums thereby, he supported the Surplus Profits Bill of 1917<sup>55</sup> and later supported the Conscription Bill, in spite of the opposition of many of his followers.<sup>56</sup> Before the introduction of conscription he called on his followers to volunteer so that this measure would be unnecessary,<sup>57</sup> and he and other members of the Union Party undertook to speed up recruiting in union districts.

In his capacity as leader of the F.P.U. and as a member of the House of Assembly, he proved to be a strong advocate of conservation. He waged a ceaseless battle to preserve the forests, in particular the "three-mile limit" reserved for the use of fishermen.<sup>58</sup> He also tried to prevent the practice of rinding.<sup>59</sup> He saw that the seal herds were in danger of extermination and attempted to conserve this valuable resource by legislation.<sup>60</sup> On other occasions he attempted to prevent the destruction of the lobsters in the in-shore waters by a closed season,<sup>61</sup> and also urged the protection of the Bay seals

53. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 109.
54. Coaker, "F.P.U. Progress, 1909 to 1919", (The History of the F.P.U., (ed.) by W. F. Coaker), p. 190.
55. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 127.
56. Ibid, p. 125.
57. Ibid, p. 118.
58. Ibid, p. 52.
59. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1915, p. 58.
60. The Fishermen's Advocate, Feb. 27, 1914., p. 7.
61. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1914, pp. 168 - 170.

which were becoming more and more scarce. Finally, in every possible manner he endeavoured to conserve the human resources of the country. Before his day the loss of a man engaged in the cod fishery or the seal fishery was taken too lightly. Accidents resulting in serious loss of life were regarded as "acts of God" when in reality they were the results of human carelessness. Spurred on by the serious loss of life in the spring of 1914, when more than 250 men perished while engaged in the seal fishery, he endeavoured with the backing of his followers, to bring about through legislation, 1. compensation for loss of life at the seal fishery and, 2. safety measures that would prevent a recurrence of the disasters of 1914.

In following the political career of Coaker from 1913 to 1932, one cannot but note the ease with which he changed his ideas towards other politicians with whom he associated. His opinion of Sir Robert Bond changed appreciably from the pre-election period (in 1913) to Bond's resignation in 1914. In 1917, he joined ranks with his opponents to form a National Government. His associates were the very people he had vilified since 1913. In 1914, he supported A. B. Morine as a candidate for Bonavista; in 1919, he cursed the same man as a traitor and the word "Morineism" was coined to designate anyone corrupt or unfaithful. Before 1919, R. A. Squires was

62. Ibid, 1916, p. 35.

63. The Fishermen's Advocate, May, 27, 1913.

64. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 51.

65. Proceedings of the House of Assembly, Newfoundland, 1915, pp. 339, 342.

66. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F. P. U., pp. 170, 195.



branded as the arch-enemy of the F.P.U. movement; during the 1919 election, Coaker and the Union Party backed Squires as leader of the Liberal-Reform Party.

Coaker has reaped much criticism through this propensity for changing his mind concerning his associates. There are two possible explanations. In the first place, he did what was expedient at any particular time and if later events made it necessary to adopt a different plan he did so without fear of criticism. The following extract from the writings of Morine, his one-time friend, and later his bitter enemy, helps to explain this tendency. In comparing Coaker to Bond he wrote, "Coaker was the abler man, more vital, more daring and more reckless" In the second place, Coaker won the backing of the fishermen because he proved that he was a fighter and feared neither merchant nor politician. He realized that to maintain the same support he had to be constantly at war with someone or something, and he chose whoever and whatever was conveniently at hand. His character was such that there were always "enemies" to fill this role, and if political expediency made it necessary to join forces with a previous "enemy" he then was just as lavish with his praise as he had previously been with his sneering criticism.

During the quarter century (1908-32), in which Coaker played a prominent role in the commercial and political life of the country, it is to be expected that not only would his exertions effect changes in the life of the country but that these same changes would exert a profound change in him. In the first place, age and success

67. Ibid, pp. 126, 135.

68. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 14.

69. "Second Draft of Morine's History of Newfoundland", Ch. 10, p.



made him much more conservative than he was earlier in his career. In the second place, he could not keep up the tremendous pace of the early years of the movement and avoided difficulties and side-stepped issues that in the early years would have delighted him. In the third place, the practices of the business and political world, coupled with his betrayal by some of his friends and associates, left him sadly disillusioned. In 1932, he wrote:

Party politics are no worse here than elsewhere, but they are so bad here that a self-respecting man who enters the game cannot continue in it long, before he is ashamed to look at himself in a mirror. Not five per cent of those seeking the support of the electorate are animated by patriotic intentions two years after they enter the race. Their first intention is to be the saviors of their country, but soon they see where easy money might be procured, where unearned fees and commissions can be obtained, and when obtained by others so easily they are soon intent on travelling in the same footsteps. It is a cursed game ...Politics is not a clean game... 70

This account of the effects of party politics on the representative of the people, can probably be regarded as auto-biographical.

The activity of the F.P.U. leader in the commercial field also left its mark. The extent of this change is apparent in his attitude towards the credit system. In 1911 he wrote: "The Union cash stores will sell for cash, and it won't be many years before the credit system will disappear..."<sup>71</sup> In 1927, a circular letter to the managers of cash stores, sent by Coaker, contained the following instructions: "...never take it [codfish] if you have to pay cash for it..."<sup>72</sup> In a similar letter in 1930, he wrote:

70. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, pp. 45-46.

71. Coaker, (ed), The History of the F.P.U., p. 33.

72. Circular Letter Number 2 to Stores, Port Union, March 30, 1927

"take no codfish except to pay accounts or in full trade...you are now strictly instructed not to buy fish..."<sup>73</sup> In fact, by the mid-twenties, Coaker had become just another merchant-politician and his utopian dreams of earlier years had disappeared. Instead of destroying the credit system, he and the company he managed became its greatest supporter. He, who in his younger days painted verbally such vivid pictures of fishermen standing before merchants with their caps in their hands begging for supplies, in 1927 issued the following instruction to his clerks: "Say 'no' and don't hesitate when 'no' should be said."<sup>74</sup> But it must be remembered that he was caught between two fires. He was obliged to protect the fishermen's investments which could not be done if every down-and-out credit seeker were supplied. In 1926 there was a loss of \$19,000 on outport stores alone.<sup>75</sup> It was annual losses of this nature which prevented the payment of dividends after 1919 on shares held by the fishermen.<sup>76</sup>

Thus Coaker had become the victim of his own skill and hard work, which made him a successful merchant. In this field, success forced him to compete with other merchants and, in spite of his aims, he was forced to adopt their methods. The name which he gave to the Union stores is suggestive, "Cash stores", which signified his wish to avoid the credit system. But this system was grounded too

- 73. Circular Letter Number 2, Port Union, June 17, 1930.
- 74. Circular Letter Number 2, to Stores, Port Union, Mar. 30, 1927.
- 75. Circular Letter to Clerks, Port Union, Feb. 11, 1929.
- 76. Coaker, (ed.), Twenty Years of the F.P.U., p. 387. See also, Coaker, Past, Present and Future, p. 8, where Coaker claimed that dividends were paid until 1921.

deep to be uprooted and in a short while the F.P.U. ceased to fight what it could not destroy. The conditions of the late twenties were the inevitable results - there was nothing that Coaker could have done to change the outcome in any way. Morine expressed the same feeling in these words: "...the supplying system had the same effect upon the F.P.U. that it had on the merchants..."<sup>77</sup>

This account of the man whom J. R. Smallwood called "Newfoundland's Greatest Son"<sup>78</sup> is an attempt to give an accurate picture of probably the most controversial figure of the country's history. His most outstanding characteristic was certainly his versatility, for he achieved great success in three separate fields - union organization, business and politics. He achieved this multiple success simultaneously, which attests to his phenomenal labours. There was nothing passive about him; what he began, he backed to the hilt. He behaved in a similar manner in respect to his associates. He either praised lavishly or condemned entirely. Everyone was either his friend or his enemy. He was inherently honest and motivated by sincere aims, but probably not sufficiently strong in character to overcome the many temptations that his political and business associates brought his way. His constant appeal for all followers and leaders who were strong in character<sup>79</sup>

77. "Second draft of Morine's History of Newfoundland", Ch. 10, p. 1.

78. [Smallwood], A Sincere Appreciation of Newfoundland's Greatest Son.

79. Coaker, Past Present and Future, p. 46.

was probably the effect of his realization of his own weakness. In conclusion, it can be said without fear of overstatement that he was the most dynamic figure of his age and that no other man during the quarter century from 1908 to 1932 left so great a mark on the commercial, political and social life of this period.

extent filled the role of a municipal government. Shortly after its formation it began to take on the work of a consumer co-operative (1910), and later, with the formation of the Union Export Company (1917), branched out into a producer co-operative. It also played an important role in politics, having sponsored the Union Party in the elections of 1913, 1918, 1923, 1927 and 1932.

Probably it is least known as a union though this was one of its initial purposes. In the period from 1908 to 1919 it aimed to benefit the fisherman economically by establishing a central market for cod and advising its members to hold their cod until the price was reached. On several occasions it used the vote as a threat to persuade the owners of sailing ships to pay a higher price for cod.<sup>1</sup> The F.F.U. also attempted to help its members in times of ill-fortune by establishing a disaster fund to which all members contributed.<sup>2</sup> These were the only activities of the F.F.U. which

1. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.F.U., pp. 15, 30, 42, 53. See also, Bellwood, Coaker of Newfoundland, p. 58.
2. The Evening Advocate, March 29, 1917, p. 4.
3. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.F.U., p. 90.

## Conclusion

Though the Fishermen's Protective Union had some of the characteristics of a labour union, it also adopted during its quarter century of prominence several other functions as well. It had many of the distinct marks of a fraternal society and to some extent filled the role of a municipal government. Shortly after its formation it began to take on the work of a consumer's co-operative (1910), and later, with the formation of the Union Export Company (1917), branched out into a producer's co-operative. It also played an important role in politics, having sponsored the Union Party in the elections of 1913, 1919, 1923, 1924 and 1928.

Probably it is least known as a union though this was its initial purpose. In the period from 1908 to 1919 it aimed to benefit the fishermen economically by establishing<sup>a</sup> a certain price for cod and advising its members to hold their catch until this price was reached.<sup>1</sup> On several occasions it used the same method to persuade the owners of sealing ships to pay a higher price for seals.<sup>2</sup> The F.P.U. also attempted to help its members in time of ill-fortune by establishing a disaster fund to which all members contributed.<sup>3</sup> These were the only activities of the F.P.U. which

1. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., pp. 15, 30, 47, 83.  
See also, Smallwood, Coaker of Newfoundland, p. 48.
2. The Evening Advocate, March 29, 1917, p. 4.
3. Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 98.

can be regarded as typical of a union. However, it was conceived and organized as a union and its structure continued to be that of a union in spite of its varied activity.

Coaker endeavoured to make the F.P.U. an organization that would appeal to the fishermen by giving it many of the characteristics of a fraternal society. Meetings were held in secret, pass-words were used and buttons and special articles of clothing were worn. However, the local council meetings were somewhat different from those of fraternal societies in that their principal aim was to uplift the members themselves, their class and their country. They discussed and debated pertinent topics of their day and in this respect functioned as a study group whose principal aim was self-education. The importance of this activity was further enhanced by the complete absence of local government throughout the union districts.

*no* The F.P.U. during the years immediately following its creation also functioned as a co-operative society. It supplied each Local Council and through it the fishermen members with certain staple consumer goods. The head office of the F.P.U. in St. John's bought the goods at wholesale prices and supplied each local on demand. The formation of the Union Trading Co. and its many dependent cash stores made this method unnecessary. However, since this company had only a limited number of shareholders, its activity was less

4. See above, Ch. 11, p. 29

5. See above, Ch. 1, p. 3

6. See above, Ch. V., p. 83



co-operative. The shareholders of this company were fishermen but the dividends which they were paid represented profit made on goods sold to many who were not shareholders. In this sense it was a corporation with a limited number of fishermen shareholders and not a co-operative.

Thus the F.P.U. was intended by its founder to function as a co-operative as well as a labour union. J. R. Smallwood, who had close associations with the movement as a young man wrote: "Sir William Coaker...launched a great organized movement...which was co-operative in intention, even if it was never so in technique or method."<sup>7</sup> Margaret Digby, who was sent by the Horace Plunkett Foundation to investigate and report upon the possibilities of the co-operative movement in Newfoundland(1934), wrote: "It [the F.P.U.] attracted as members a large number of fishermen of the east and north-east coasts and combined some of the functions of a trade union with co-operative supply and the marketing of fish."<sup>9</sup> In the same report she stipulated that the F.P.U. functioned as a co-operative for only a short period.<sup>10</sup> This seems to be a valid observation. (At first, when the fishermen were supplied direct through their locals on a non-profit basis, with all local members benefiting, the F.P.U. functioned as a co-operative. The formation of the Union Trading Co., which gave benefits only to

7. Smallwood, The Book of Newfoundland.

8. MacKay, Newfoundland, Economic, Diplomatic and Strategic Studies, p. 185.

9. Digby, Margaret, Report on the Opportunities for Co-operative Organization in Newfoundland and Labrador, (London, P.S. King and Son, Ltd., 1934), p. 19.

10. Ibid, p. 3.



its shareholders made the F.P.U. less co-operative. The founding of the Union Export Co. (1917) with its non-fishermen shareholders ended any earlier tendency the F.P.U. had towards co-operative activity.

It is not known whether Coaker was familiar with the principles of co-operation that had been adopted by the "Rochdale Pioneers", but it is significant that many of the initial aims of the F.P.U. were in accord with "Rochdale Principles". The attempts to carry on all business in cash, to be neutral in religion and politics, to pay out surplus savings in dividends, to permit all workmen to become members, to introduce democratic control, to permit any members to examine books of the companies associated with the F.P.U., and to use a portion of the earnings for educational purposes (that is in spreading the co-operative idea), were all in keeping with the Rochdale plan. The F.P.U. failed to follow these initial policies. Five years after it was established it adopted an active role in politics (1913), and in the following election (1919) it coalesced with the predominately Protestant Liberal-Reform Party, which opposed the predominately Roman Catholic Liberal-Progressive Party. About 1920, the companies sponsored by the F.P.U. ceased to pay dividends, and during the following decade it operated one of the largest credit concerns in the

11. Dunfield, B.E., Co-operation in England, Radio address delivered by Mr. Brian Dunfield...over station VONF... on April 16, 1937, St. John's. Co-operative Division, Dept. of Rural Reconstruction, 1937, pamph.

12. See above, Ch. 3.

13. See above, Ch. 6, p. 109.

country. After 1914,<sup>15</sup> no serious effort was made to carry on further organization. Thus the F.P.U. failed as a co-operative mainly because of its failure to follow its initial aims. ?

Labour Unions spread rapidly during the first decade of the twentieth century. The success of the Dockers' Strike in London in 1899 gave a great impetus to the movement throughout the whole British Isles.<sup>16</sup> In the United States union membership increased threefold from 1900 to 1914.<sup>17</sup> The F.P.U. members were mainly self-employed fishermen, but all "toilers" were eligible for membership. Coaker intended that his union should include "fishermen and workingmen".<sup>18</sup> In this sense the F.P.U. was a labour union and as such was a part of the movement that was spreading rapidly throughout Europe and America at the same time.

Co-operative development is usually dated from the establishment of the Rochdale Pioneers Equitable Society (1844). During the following half century, the movement spread throughout the whole of Europe and broadened to embrace almost every field of human endeavour. Co-operatives among fishermen existed as early as 1886 in England.<sup>19</sup> Iceland and the countries of Scandinavia, by the beginning of the century had strong co-operatives designed to handle the curing and marketing as well as the catching of fish. 20

14. See above, Ch. 7, pp. 135, 136.

15. See above, Ch. 2, p. 35.

16. Ferlman, S., "Trade Unions", Encyclopaedia Britannica, Edited by W. Yust. (Chicago, Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc., 1957), P. 375-376., Vol. 22.

17. Ibid, p. 378.

18. Coaker, "F.P.U. Progress, 1909 to 1919", The History of the F.P.U., edited by W.F. Coaker, p. 189.

19. Jones, B., Co-operative Production, (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1844), p. 717.

20. Cole, G.D.H., "Co-operation", Encyclopaedia Britannica, Vol 6, p. 397.

In Canada the only co-operative endeavour similar to that undertaken by the F.P.U. was among the farmers of the prairies. In this region, particularly in Alberta, the Society of Equity and the Partisan League, which had originated south of the border, developed Canadian offshoots.<sup>21</sup> In 1909, the Canadian Society of Equity amalgamated with the Alberta Farmers Association under the name, United Farmers of Alberta (U.F.A.).<sup>22</sup> Under the leadership of Henry Wise Wood, this organization did much to improve the economic position of the Alberta farmers through co-operation. The prairie movement had much in common with the F.P.U. Each advocated direct legislation, prohibition and trust-busting.<sup>23</sup> Each disseminated its propaganda by means of a paper: the F.P.U. through The Fishermen's Advocate, the U.F.A. through The Grain Grower's Guide. In addition, both organizations initially adopted a neutral policy in politics. However, the F.P.U. failed to live up to this policy. The only co-operative movement among Canadian fishermen similar to the F.P.U. took place in the 1920's, as a result of the efforts of the University of St. Francis Xavier, Antigonish, Nova Scotia.<sup>24</sup>

One of the principles laid down by the Rochdale Pioneers was that co-operatives should adopt neutrality in politics.<sup>25</sup> In

21. Rolph, W.K., Henry Wise Wood of Alberta, (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1950), p. 40.
22. Ibid, p. 32.
23. See Rolph, Henry Wise Wood of Alberta, for U.F.A. policy and Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p. 50 for F.P.U. policy.
24. Richardson, G., Co-operation in Nova Scotia, (St. John's, 1937). Pamph.
25. See above, Ch. 8, p. 143

practice, however, until the last decade of the nineteenth century the co-operative leaders were well known Liberals. In England, the Labour Representation Committee succeeded in electing two of its candidates in the election of 1900.<sup>26</sup> In 1906 it accounted for 30 seats and adopted the name "Labour Party".<sup>27</sup> The British Labour Party appealed to the proletariat and in this respect the F.P.U. was somewhat different, for its members were principally self-employed fishermen. The F.P.U. also differed from the British Labour Party in being strongly imperialistic. In 1910, Coaker wrote: "The Union Party will act exactly as the Labour Party in England...except that while the Labour Party in England is not of an imperialistic tone, the Union Party in this colony will be strongly imperialistic. We stand not only for country, but for Empire as well".<sup>28</sup> Though the F.P.U. changed its policy in many ways during the quarter century from 1908 to 1932, it continued to show its strong Empire ties. This was particularly noticeable during the war years.

In Australia, the development of a distinct Labour Party preceded the corresponding movement in England. The parliament of New South Wales had thirty-six labour representatives out of a total of one hundred and twenty in 1891.<sup>29</sup> In Victoria, the Labour Party elected 36 representatives out of 90.<sup>30</sup> Labour returned 16

26. McKenzie, R.T., British Political Parties, (London, William Heinemann, Ltd., 1955), p. 386.
27. Cole, G.D.H., British Working Class Politics 1832-1914, (London, Routledge & Keegan Paul Ltd., 1950) p. 179.
28. The Fishermen's Advocate, Oct. 29, 1910, p. 1.
29. Cadwell, A.A., The Australian Political Party System, (London, Angus and Robertson, 1954) p. 57.
30. Ibid.

representatives and 8 senators to the first Federal Parliament<sup>31</sup> (1901), and by 1910, the Labour Party had control of both the Senate and the House of Representatives.<sup>32</sup> In New Zealand, the trade unionists elected Labour Candidates within the Liberal Party but a break with the Liberals came in 1906 after the death of Seddon.<sup>33</sup> During the first decade of the century no similar development occurred in Canada. Unions were weak and the farm movement of the prairies failed to evolve into a distinct Labour Party.<sup>34</sup>

The F.P.U. of Newfoundland had much in common with the large unions of unskilled workers which was the trend of union development in England in the late eighties. Coaker's action in creating a political party was also typical of the labour development going on at the same time or shortly before in England and other parts of the Empire, particularly in Australia and New Zealand. There are some indications that Coaker molded the Union Party on the Labour Party of Australia. Certainly his method of selecting candidates and exercising control over them after they were elected was almost identical with that of the Australian Labour Party.<sup>35</sup>

From the comparison above, it is noticeable that the F.P.U. activity in Newfoundland was similar in many respects to con-

31. Crisp, L.F., The Australian Federal Labour Party 1901-1951, (London, Longmans, Green and Co., 1955), p. 111.
32. Cadwell, The Australian Political Party System, p. 57.
33. Heaton, H., "Labour Parties in the British Dominions", Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Vol 8, p. 703.
34. Ibid. See also, Rolph, Henry Wise Wood of Alberta, Ch. 1V.
35. Heaton, H., "Labour Parties in the British Dominions", Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, Vol 8, p. 704.

temporary development in other parts of the world. The difference in background undoubtedly brought about some few changes, but in general, the F.P.U., in each of the three fields of its endeavour—unionism, co-operation and politics—had much in common with similar development in other countries at the same time.

The F.P.U. failed to accomplish its initial aims. As a union, its strength gradually dwindled during the twenties and was dealt the final blow by the depression of the early thirties. As a co-operative it suffered the fate of many similar attempts in other parts of the world at the same time, and as a political party it was gradually absorbed in the Liberal fold.

There are many reasons for the F.P.U. failure. Coaker after he retired in 1932, wrote:

As the years passed petty jealousies crept into the Councils. A selfishness developed amongst some sections. Leading members sometimes became disgruntled because they were not selected as Candidates for the House of Assembly. Others imagined the clerks in stores favoured some members as against others...

The interest in the Fishermen's Protective Union began to slacken as soon as the promoters grew old or passed away.. Enthusiasm such as existed during the first ten years, when it was possible for the President to visit many Councils and Stores each year, meet members, adjust little troubles and disputes, was no longer observable... 36

It is significant that Coaker referred to the enthusiasm of the first ten years, for during this period the F.P.U. functioned as a part of the Opposition. Its political activity had a retarding effect only after it became a part of the Government in 1917.

36. Coaker, Past, Present and Future, pp. 7-8.



Its subsequent failure to live up to its initial aims, and its tendency to adopt some of the "questionable" practices of its predecessors, resulted in a gradual loss of popularity. The F.P.U. failed to expand beyond the east and north-east coasts.<sup>37</sup> Certainly its political activity contributed to this failure. Other factors which tended to restrict its development to this area, in time might have been overcome had it remained politically neutral. Once the decision to undertake an active political programme was made, it destroyed the F.P.U. possibilities of expanding to embrace other areas. Coaker planned to unite fishermen of all denominations, and in this respect had some success before the election of 1913. The oppositon to the People's Party during this election which was strongly supported by the Roman Catholic people brought the early success to an untimely end. In additon the F.P.U., until the formation of the National Government in 1917, was an active, militant agitator.<sup>38</sup> Its constant activity kept all members active. Petitions demands and criticisms all gave a purpose to its existence and a zest to the lives of its members. Once the Union Party became a part of the Government, all this activity ceased and F.P.U. popularity dwindled. x

The F.P.U. was planned and created by Coaker. Though in theory it was under democratic control, in practice he himself made all worthwhile decisions. He decided to establish the various union

37. See above, Ch. 11, p. 37.

38. See above, Ch. VI, p. 102.



commercial concerns and directed their policies after their creation. He decided to establish the Union Party. He selected the various candidates for that party and directed their action after they entered the House of Assembly. He made the decision to coalesce with the Liberal Party during the various elections from 1913 to 1928. Thus the F.P.U. in each of its three fields of endeavour was completely dependent upon Coaker for leadership. Undoubtedly, he selected able subordinates but they were followers, not leaders. During the early years, before the F.P.U. activities became extensive and diversified, Coaker could by superhuman effort supervise all work and make all important decisions himself. The organization he built up depended upon his leadership. His official duties after 1919 when he became Minister of Marine and Fisheries, in particular his tremendous effort in connection with the "Fishery Regulations", placed a further strain upon him. By 1922 he was forced to slacken the pace and leave more work to his subordinates, who were trained to follow, not to lead. Coaker's inability to share authority with his subordinates can perhaps be regarded as one of the principal reasons for the F.P.U. failure.

One of the principal factors which contributed to the F.P.U. popularity during the first decade of its existence was the economic benefits which it brought its members. In the first place Coaker, in the opinion of the fishermen, was directly responsible for causing the price of fish and seals to increase in several consecutive years. This benefited all fishermen, union and non-union. In the second place, several thousand of his most ardent

followers had invested their savings in union-sponsored companies. Their shares paid high dividends until about 1920. When the Union Export Co. began operation, Coaker as the president of this Company, no longer had any interest in causing the price of fish to rise and consequently, there was no longer any economic reason for the fishermen to support the F.P.U. The three thousand shareholders of the union-sponsored companies became bitter critics of the F.P.U. leader when their shares no longer brought dividends. Some of these same shareholders are the greatest detractors of Coaker today. Thus, Coaker, by creating the Union Export Company, placed himself in a position where he could no longer command the allegiance of the fishermen by bringing them economic benefits, and one of the principal reasons for his early popularity vanished. In addition, his early success in persuading his fishermen followers to invest their savings in union sponsored companies contributed to the F.P.U. downfall, for when these companies no longer paid dividends many of the most dedicated members became its greatest enemies. X

It can be noted that the causes of the F.P.U. failure cannot be found in its initial plan. Each cause is centered around some point where Coaker diverged from the original plan and purpose laid down in the constitution before the movement began.

It is to be expected that a movement of this nature, that embraced three major fields of endeavour, playing an important role in each for a period of nearly a quarter of a century, would have a number of detrimental as well as beneficial effects. The F.P.U. exerted considerable influence on the behaviour of the fishermen.

They had always been loath to invest their savings in any way and the disillusionment caused by the loss of their investment in the various F.P.U. companies made them all the more loath to participate in future investment. Indeed, the whole commercial venture of the F.P.U. may be regarded as a retarding factor, for in the long run instead of destroying the "credit system" as was its initial plan, it was guilty of encouraging it. In addition, its abortive attempt to introduce co-operatives among the fishermen can be blamed, to some extent, for the failure of the more recent attempt to introduce the co-operative movement to the east and north-east coasts. (Margaret Digby, who studied the co-operative possibilities of Newfoundland and Labrador in 1934, wrote: "the whole episode has left painful memories and will probably make the organization of a satisfactory form of co-operation difficult in the more heavily implicated district."<sup>39</sup>) Certainly, there is very little co-operative activity in Newfoundland today, and the few societies that have been established, are in areas that the F.P.U. failed to organize.

The decade from 1908 to 1918 was a time when the F.P.U. held out great hopes to the people of northern Newfoundland. It had honestly tried to improve the working conditions of the fishermen, sealers, and loggers, and had achieved some success in its efforts. It had declared itself the enemy of political corruption, waste and inefficiency, and had sincerely attempted to destroy the

39. Digby, Report on the Opportunities for Co-operative Organization in Newfoundland and Labrador, p. 19.

sectarianism which had plagued the colony since the inception of Responsible Government. It was unfortunate, however, for the movement and for the country that these early ideas were soon forgotten after the Union Party became a part of the Government in 1917.. From this time forward, the administration of which the Union members were a part, helped to perpetuate the same type of "corruption" and waste it had so vociferously condemned during the previous years. In addition the Union members as allies of the Liberal-Reform Party contested the various districts during the election of 1919 on strict denominational lines, thus abetting the sectarianism it had earlier attempted to destroy. The F.P.U. leader and his political associates were probably sincere in their attempt to oust "corruption", but not sufficiently strong to avoid the many temptations that came their way. In addressing the fourteenth Annual Convention of the Supreme Council, Coaker stated: "The country knows very little of the methods practiced by unprincipled men to lead clean men into pitfalls and political corruption".<sup>40</sup> Whatever the cause might have been there is little doubt that the Union Party failed to live up to its early aims.

The absence of municipal institutions caused a tendency on the part of the Newfoundland electorate to place a strong faith in their political leaders. (Coaker, in establishing the F.P.U., created a situation whereby this same appeal could be spread over several districts, and thus instead of destroying the ill effects of the lack of local government, the F.P.U. accentuated it.) In

this respect, it can probably be blamed for creating the great dependence which the northern fishermen place on their political leaders today.

—The F.P.U., in addition to the ill-effects described above, also left permanent marks on the life of the country. Perhaps the most obvious was the spirit of unity it developed among the northern fishermen. It was also directly responsible for creating an era of reform that did much to improve the working conditions in the country's major industries.

From the commercial point of view, although many of the F.P.U. efforts were transient, it did succeed in bringing electricity to the greater part of the Bonavista Peninsula. Although its attempts to recreate the ship building industry were doomed to eventual failure, it did create a great deal of employment for over a decade.

The efforts of the F.P.U. in the field of politics also left permanent effects on the life of the country. As a Union Party its existence was short, but, by coalescing with the Liberal Party, it revitalized it to such an extent that it became the major political force in Newfoundland and remained so for the period from 1919 to 1932. The Liberal Party of today is certainly the direct descendant of that of the twenties and its policy has to some extent been a continuation of the Liberal policy of the period from 1919 to 1932. J. R. Smallwood, the present Liberal Premier of Newfoundland, in a pamphlet which he wrote anonymously in the early twenties in reference to Coaker, stated:

He stands firm and secure on his great platform of two planks: 1. Reform the whole fish business. 2. Bring in an era of industrial development. I make bold to say that not only now, but never in the history of the country did any statesman offer such a great and beneficial platform... These two planks prove W. F. Coaker to be the greatest real statesman the country ever saw. 41

Mr.

Probably Smallwood's reference to Coaker's efforts to which he refers may have influenced him to attempt the substantial industrial programme for which his administration has been so well known.

November 2, 1958, ended the first half-century since the F.P.U. organizer founded the first Local Council, and although this organization has practically ceased to exist for at least half that period, yet the ripples of the many commotions which it made in the life of the country are still being felt on its shores..

41. Smallwood, A sincere appreciation of Newfoundland's Greatest Son, p. 12, (pamph.)

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For Union membership see, Connor, (ed.), The History of the F.F.W., p. 62.

## APPENDIX A

## DENOMINATIONAL DISTRIBUTIONS IN UNION DISTRICTS

District	Pop- ulation	Union Mem- bership	Denomination:		Union Member- ship % of total Population
			Roman Cath.	Protes- tant	
Twillingate	22,705	4,000	2,424	20,281	18
Fogo	8,257	1,700	1,184	7,109	21
Bonavista	22,894	4,000	3,201	19,698	18
Trinity	21,788	3,600	1,525	20,263	16
Bay de Verde	10,213	1,600	2,294	7,919	16
Port de Grave	6,986	800	1,794	5,192	11
St. Barbe	10,481	1,000	2,411	8,070	9
Harbour Grace	11,925	700	2,544	9,381	6
Other Districts		300			

<sup>1</sup>See, Census of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1911, (St. John's, J.W. Withers, 1914), Vol.1, pp. IX, XVII.  
For Union membership see, Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., p.64.

<sup>1</sup>See, Coaker (ed.), The History of the F.P.U. Annual Conventions for the years 1909 to 1919.

APPENDIX BAnnual Conventions of F.P.U. - place, time and number of delegates.<sup>1</sup>

<u>Year</u>	<u>Time of Convention</u>	<u>Place of Convention</u>	<u>No. of Delegates</u>
1909	Nov. 1, 3, 3	Change Island, Notre Dame Bay	9
1910	Dec. 12, 13, 14	Catalina, Trinity Bay	38
1911	Nov. 27, 28, 30, (sic)	Greenspond, Bonavista Bay	60
1912	Dec. 12, 13, 14, 16	Bonavista, Bonavista Bay	160
1913	Dec. 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	St. John's	180
1914	Nov. 16, 17, 18, 19	Catalina, Trinity Bay	200
1915	Nov. 25, 26, 27	St. John's	over 200
1916	Dec. 4	Catalina, Trinity Bay	over 200
1917	Nov. 13	Catalina, Trinity Bay	over 200
1918	Dec. 10	Port Union, Trinity Bay	200

W. F. Coaker

Samuel Miles

John H. H. H.

Samuel Miles

James Kendrick

Charles H. H.

<sup>1</sup> See, Coaker (ed.), The History of the F.P.U. Annual Conventions for the years 1909 to 1919.

Edward Richards

Henry Terraville

Solomon H. H.

Patrick Atkinson

Dorcas Terraville

Adrian H. H.

Thomas Miles

Robert Watkins

John H. H.

Joseph Kearley

John Gillingham

<sup>1</sup> See, St. John's Advocate, April 12, 1913. See also Coaker, Prayer and Praise, p. 4.



APPENDIX CGROWTH OF THE F.P.U. from 1909 to 1914<sup>1</sup>

<u>Year</u>	<u>No. of Locals</u>	<u>No. of Members</u>	<u>No. of District Councils</u>	<u>Councils with District Councils</u>
1909	30		None	
1910	66		2	Fogo, Twillingate
1911	116	12,500	4	Bonavista Bay Trinity Bay
1912	153	15,000	6	Bay de Verde Port de Grave
1913	190	17,700	7	Harbour Grace
1914	206	20,000	7	

<sup>1</sup> See, Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., Annual Conventions for the years 1909 to 1914. No great change occurred after 1914 in either number of members, Locals or District Councils. However, in 1915 the constitution was amended so that the districts of Conception Bay had one District Council (Conception Bay District Council), instead of three.

APPENDIX D

The twenty original members of the first Local Council of the F.P.U. established at Herring Neck, November 3rd. 1908<sup>1</sup>

W.F. Coaker	Kenneth Warren	John Hussey
Samuel Miles	Jesse Reddick	Garfield Woodford
Archibald Miles	Benjamin Torraville	William Kearley
Edward Richards	Henry Torraville	Solomon Reddick
Patrick Atkinson	Dorman Torraville	Edwin Kearley
Thomas Miles	Hubert Watkins	John Kearley
Joseph Kearley	John Gillingham	

<sup>1</sup> See, Fishermen's Advocate, April 12, 1913. See also Coaker Past, Present and Future, p.4.

# APPENDIX E

## The 1913 Elections<sup>1</sup>

<u>District</u>	<u>Member</u>	<u>Party</u>	<u>Approximate ratio of R. Catholic to Protestant</u>	<u>No. of Votes Polled by Successful Candidates</u>	<u>No. of Votes Polled by Unsuccessful Candidates</u>
St.Barbe	W.M. Clapp	Liberal	1 to 4	1253	871
Twillingate	Sir R. Bond	Liberal	1 to 10	3481	887
	J.A. Clift	Liberal			
	W. Jennings	Union	1 to 10	3399	698
Fogo	W.F. Halfyard	Union	1 to 6	1377	594
Bonavista	W.F. Coaker	Union	1 to 6	3473	1624
	R.G. Winsor	Union	1 to 6	3313	1515
	J. Abbott	Union	1 to 6	3308	1427
Trinity	J. Stone	Union	1 to 14	2685	1678
	A. Targett	Union	1 to 14	2608	1510
	W. Lloyd	Liberal	1 to 14	2592	1462
Bay de Verde	A. Hickman	Liberal	1 to 3	1168	1140
	J. Crosbie	People's	1 to 3	1150	1078
Carbonear	J. Goodison	People's	2 to 9	1444	1200

<sup>1</sup>For election results see Year Book of Newfoundland, (St.John's, J.W. Withers, King's Printers, 1914), pp.18-19.  
For denominational distribution see Census of Newfoundland and Labrador 1911, (St.John's, J.W. Withers, 1914).

# Appendix E - Cont'd

<u>District</u>	<u>Member</u>	<u>Party</u>	<u>Approximate ratio of R. Catholic to Protestant</u>	<u>No. of Votes Polled by Successful Candidates</u>	<u>No. of Votes Polled by Unsuccessful Candidates</u>
Harbour Grace	A. Piccott	People's	2 to 9	1444	1200
	E. Parsons	People's	2 to 9	1374	1187
	M. Young	People's	2 to 9	1342	1169
Port de Grave	G. Grimes	Union	1 to 3	871	697
Harbour Main	W. Woodford	People's	3 to 1	1178	904
	G. Kennedy	People's	3 to 1	1116	776
St. John's E.	J. M. Kent	Liberal	10 to 9	2835	2533
	W. Higgins	People's	10 to 9	2660	2443
	J. Dwyer	Liberal	10 to 9	2609	2306
St. John's W.	Sir E. Morris	People's	Slight R.C. Majority	2749	1738
	J. Bennett	People's	Slight R.C. Majority	2643	1719
	M. Kennedy	People's	Slight R.C. Majority	2545	1545
Ferryland	Sir M. Cashin	People's	37 to 1	1095	303
	P. F. Moore	People's	37 to 1	918	267
Placentia	R. Devereaux	People's	4 to 1	2023	1544
St. Mary's	F. Morris	People's	4 to 1	1953	1300
	W. Walsh	People's	4 to 1	1758	1254

<u>District</u>	<u>Member</u>	<u>Party</u>	<u>Approximate ratio of R. Catholic to Protestant</u>	<u>No. of Votes Polled by Successful Candidates</u>	<u>No. of Votes Polled by Unsuccessful Candidates</u>
Burib	J.S. Currie	People's	4 to 7	1200	786
	T. LeFeuvre	People's	4 to 7	1174	741
Fortune Bay	C. Emerson	People's	2 to 7	1000	865
Burgeo & LaPoile	R. Moulton	People's	1 to 50	760	728
St. George's	J.F. Downey	People's	7 to 4	1187	770

#### APPENDIX F

#### List of Branch Stores of the Fishermen's Trading Co. May 1917<sup>1</sup>

Kelligrews,	Conception Bay	Joe Batt's Arm,	Notre Dame Bay,
Port de Grave,	" "	Doting Cove,	" " "
Bay Roberts,	" "	Ladle Cove,	" " "
Salmon Cove,	" "	Carmanville,	" " "
Bay de Verde,	" "	Seldom,	" " "
Winterton,	Trinity Bay	Tilting,	" " "
Hant's Harbour	" "	North End Change Islands,	" " "
Port Rexton,	" "	Main Tickle,	" " "
Bonaventure,	" "	Herring Neck,	" " "
Ireland's Eye,	" "	Twillingate,	" " "
Champney's,	" "	Fogo,	" " "
Catalina,	" "	Moreton's Harbour,	" " "
Port Union	" "	Exploits,	" " "
Salvage,	Bonavista Bay	Botwood,	" " "
Bonavista,	" "	Lewisporte,	" " "

<sup>1</sup>The Evening Advocate, May 28, 1917, p.7

Appendix F - Cont'd.

Keels,  
King's Cove,  
Greenspond,  
Valleyfield,  
Newtown,  
Cat Harbour, (Lumsden),

Bonavista Bay

" " "  
" " "  
" " "  
" " "

Pilley's Island,  
Nipper's Harbour,  
LaScie,  
St. Anthony,

Notre Dame Bay

" " "  
White Bay  
" "

## APPENDIX G

"The Bonavista Platform"<sup>1</sup>

1. Standardization of fish; a new system of culling fish; the inspection of fishery produce; and the establishment of a permanent commission to operate the laws to standardize fish, the culling of it and the fixing of the price of fish shipped direct from the Labrador Coast.
2. The appointment of Trade Agents abroad.
3. Weekly reports of prices of fishery produce in the foreign markets.
4. The establishment of night-school system in the out-ports during winter months.
5. Schools for every settlement containing 20 schoolable children from the age of 7 to 14.
6. Free and compulsory education seven months of the year.
7. Reduction of duties upon certain articles used by the masses, such as ready-made clothes, oil clothes, boots, tobacco, guernseys, sugar, tea, etc.
8. Old Age Pensions for all over 70 starting with \$50.00 and increasing to \$100.00 as the Colony's finances permit.
9. Erection of Bait Depots as outlined by the F.F.U.

<sup>1</sup>The Fishermen's Advocate, October 6, 1913, p.4. See also Coaker, (ed.), The History of the F.P.U., Page 50.

Appendix G - Cont'd.

10. No further pensions to civil servants, over what is paid worn out toilers.
11. A long distance telephone to connect every settlement in the Colony which can be reached.
12. The re-organization of the Fishery Department.
13. Single outport electoral districts.
14. Elective School and Municipal Boards - the former on denominational lines, the latter to expend all road, charity and old age pension grants.
15. Amended sealing laws as outlined by the F.P.U. Agreement.
16. The sale of timber areas by public auction and the enforcement of the Fishermen's Timber Limit Laws and the Crown Lands Act re timber grants.
17. The payment of \$500 sessional indemnity for members of the House of Assembly.
18. Laws to make combines in trade punishable by imprisonment only.
19. Law to establish the Referendum and the Recall.
20. Retrenchment in every department of the public service and working hours of officials from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.



Appendix G - Cont'd.

21. The amendment of the Election Act, to permit the counting of votes by each Deputy Returning Officer.
22. Laws to punish any member of the Legislature who receive financial profit or gain directly or indirectly from the public treasury except what is openly voted by the Legislature as salary- sessional indemnity- or in payment of services rendered to the Colony.
23. The utilizing of the cash reserve to the Colony's credit at the banks to purchase fishery supplies and motor engines.
24. The establishment of a Transportation Commission to operate the contracts of Reid, Bowering and Crosbie.
25. The fixing of a minimum wage for labour by a Commission and wages to be paid weekly and in cash.
26. A Royal Commission to investigate public affairs.
27. Bonus for clearing land and encouragement to settlers upon the land and of stock raising.
28. The construction of a harbour on the Strait Shore.
29. The closing down of whale factories.
30. Fishing debts over two years old to be uncollectable by process of the courts of law.
31. The granting of a subsidy to steamers supplying coals to rough outport settlements.

APPENDIX H  
FORTY THOUSAND STRONG<sup>1</sup>

This song of which the author is unknown was quite popular among Union Members during the early years of the F.P.U.

We are coming Mr. Coaker from the East, West, North and South,  
 You have called us and we're coming to put our foes to rout;  
 By Merchants and by Governments too long we've been misruled,  
 We're determined now in future and no longer we'll be fooled.  
 We'll be brothers all and free men and we'll rightify each wrong,  
 We are coming Mr. Coaker and we're forty thousand strong.

We are coming Mr. Coaker, men from Green Bay's rocky shore,  
 Men who stand the snow white billows down on stormy Labrador;  
 They are ready and awaiting, strong and solid, firm and bold,  
 To be led by you like Moses, led the Israelites of old.

They are ready for to sever from the merchant's servile throng  
 We are coming Mr. Coaker and we're forty thousand strong.

We are coming Mr. Coaker, blood of Saxon and of Celt,  
 You arouse a feeling in us that before we never felt;  
 Valiant men from far Placentia whom the angry ocean braves,  
 They are with you heart and spirit, breasting Cape St. Mary's waves,  
 They are with the fight for freedom and its Union is their song,  
 We are coming Mr. Coaker and we're forty thousand strong.

<sup>1</sup>Fishermen's Advocate, September 20th. 1913, page 5.

Appendix H - Cont'd.

We are coming Mr. Coaker, and though sharp shall be the fight,  
Yet we trust in you our leader, and our God will do the right.  
All our beacon fires are lighted and we see them brightly burn;  
With our motto "No Surrender" all our enemies we will spurn,  
Led by you we'll never falter, God shall help our cause along,  
We are coming Mr. Coaker and we're forty thousand strong.





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