

The Halifax Relief Commission and Labour Relations during the Reconstruction of Halifax, 1917-1919

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The Halifax Relief Commission and Labour Relations during the Reconstruction of Halifax, 1917-1919

ON 6 DECEMBER 1917, an explosion ripped through the north end of Halifax killing nearly 2,000, injuring even more, and rendering approximately 10,000 people homeless. The immediate task which lay before the city was to identify and bury the dead and to treat the injured; the daunting longer term task was to reconstruct the large residential section levelled by the explosion. The rebuilding of a large section of the city required a vast industrial army of labour, which in 1918 would number over 10,000 men, and a central agency capable of organizing and directing the reconstruction operations. At first responsibility for reconstruction was placed in the hands of an *ad hoc* citizen's committee but in late January 1918, the federal government established under an Order-in-Council a three man commission consisting of two Halifax judges, the chairman T. Sherman Rogers and William B. Wallace, and Frederick Luther Fowkes, a former mayor of Oshawa, Ontario.¹ In the spring of 1918 the Halifax Relief Commission (HRC) Act was passed in the Nova Scotia legislature. Under the Act the Commission was given responsibility for investigating enquiries regarding losses, damages and injuries and for awarding reasonable compensation. It had the power to enforce attendance at its courts and boards, to set wages for its employees, and to avoid municipal and provincial taxation. Within a defined region it also had the right to expropriate land, create zoning regulations, rebuild, repair and carry out a town planning scheme.² The HRC was thus responsible for both the physical and financial rehabilitation of the explosion's victims and for the reconstruction of the devastated area. Because of the sweeping nature of Commission's powers, post-explosion Halifax provides a unique situation in which to examine trade unionism as it encountered new forms of state intervention at the end of World War One. Of course, labour across Canada felt excluded from war-time consultation and influence, and the "1919 Labour Revolt" was a national and international phenomena, but in Halifax, labour experienced this isolation more intensely, as it was shut out from decisions regarding the redevelopment of its own city and the predominantly

1 Privy Council Minutes, P.C. 112, 22 January 1918, National Archives of Canada [NAC].

2 See "An Act to incorporate the Halifax Relief Commission", *Statutes of Nova Scotia 1918*, 8-9 Geo. V, Chapter 61; Samuel H. Prince, *Catastrophe and Social Change Based Upon a Sociological Study of the Halifax Disaster* (New York, 1920), p. 105.

working-class neighbourhood which had been destroyed.³ The post-explosion experience of Halifax organized labour cannot therefore be regarded as simply a microcosm of the national experience.

Unfortunately, the subject of labour relations during the reconstruction of Halifax has been virtually ignored by historians.⁴ Urban historians concerned with reconstruction have concentrated on the Hydrostone housing development, Canada's first public housing experiment built to provide homes for dislocated Halifax families under radical town planning legislation. John Weaver, in a 1976 article, explored such important themes as the role of outside experts and the imposition of their decisions on a "client" community.⁵ In 1985 John Bacher discussed the significance of the reconstruction of Halifax in the evolution of Canadian policy toward public housing.⁶ But the experience of the trade unions was peripheral in both studies. Yet the reconstruction efforts of the Commission dramatically affected the Halifax building trade unions and led to a struggle by labour to maintain the pre-war and war-time *status quo*. Moreover, labour in Halifax found that it was ideologically and organizationally incapable of dealing with the powers of the HRC.

Before the explosion, the Federal and Nova Scotian governments had tampered with the operation of the local labour market in three ways. Strikes in Cape Breton had been brought under control by military intervention; protective

- 3 Gregory Kealey, "1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt", *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (Spring 1984), pp. 11-44.
- 4 The refusal of the government to grant restitution to explosion victims meant that Haligonians were largely dependent on private donations for relief. In order to sustain these contributions, relief efforts required a good public image. It is impossible to determine the extent to which the attempts to project this image and the role of war-time propaganda and censorship affected the reporting of reconstruction activities. What Russell Hann has described as an "artificial void in the record" can certainly be applied to Halifax. Advertisements for labour needed in Halifax appeared in the region's daily press but the labour press was remarkably silent about the massive reconstruction efforts in Halifax. The only mention of reconstruction in Sydney's *Canadian Labor Leader* was a campaign to donate a day's pay to relief efforts. This silence was primarily a result of the absence of a local labour paper in Halifax. Government labour documents are also lacking as the Department of Labour left most reconstruction efforts to the Department of Militia and Defence. Therefore, this study will depend too heavily on the available sources: the records of the Halifax Relief Commission and the local press. As a result the thousands of migrant workers will remain as faceless to the reader as they were to contemporary Haligonians. Russell Hann, "Introduction" in Daphne Read, ed., *The Great War and Canadian Society: An Oral History* (Toronto, 1978), p. 29; *The Daily Times* (Moncton), 23 December 1917; *Canadian Labor Leader* (Sydney), 15 December 1917. The importance of press censorship in isolating labour disputes is discussed in Myer Siemiatycki "Munitions and Labour Militancy: The 1916 Hamilton Machinists' Strike", *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 3 (1978), p. 147.
- 5 John Weaver, "Reconstruction of the Richmond District in Halifax: A Canadian Episode in Public Housing and Town Planning, 1918-1921", *Plan Canada*, 6, 1 (March 1976), pp. 36-47.
- 6 John Bacher, "Keeping to the Private Market; The Evolution of Canadian Housing Policies", Ph.D. thesis, McMaster University, 1985.

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legislation had been passed which was designed to acquire the political allegiance of the workman; and government had acted as a mediator, adopting the appearance of an independent arbitrator between the interests of labour and capital.⁷ The pressure of the war and in particular the organizational efforts required to rebuild Halifax created a significant departure from the past. The quest for efficiency, primarily demonstrated by the use of outside expert management, meant that government had its own objectives, quite distinct from those of both local contractors and organized labour. Government began acting on behalf of what it defined as the community's public interest, in ways which did not necessarily coincide with how individual citizens perceived their own interests.⁸ But government regulations aimed at efficiency and rationalization clashed with the interests of Halifax skilled labour.

In 1918, organized labour in Halifax was primarily composed of skilled craft unionists, who had a perception of their own importance and a definite understanding of their place in the wider local community. Members of the building trades generally adhered to the vague political philosophy of labourism. They saw the liberal democratic state as a viable political and economic system and believed that skilled labour played a central and essential role in the operation of the community.⁹ Their worldview was moulded by craft exclusivity and, while they accepted the hierarchical nature of society, they saw themselves firmly in the middle, below the capitalists and above the mass of unskilled workers. Craig Heron has pointed out that labourites held a "liberal view of the state" and saw government as "a neutral apparatus which could serve an undefined common good".¹⁰ This view of the state was increasingly at odds with war-time realities. The commitment of labourites to libertarian and egalitarian democracy conflicted with a government characterized by authoritarian rule. Moreover, skilled labour was always most vulnerable from the bottom and the

7 Desmond Morton, "Aid to the Civil Power: the Canadian Militia in Support of the Social Order, 1867-1914", *Canadian Historical Review*, 51, 4 (December 1970), pp. 407-25. Examples of protective legislation include the Nova Scotia Factory Act of 1901 and the Nova Scotia Workmen's Compensation Act of 1910. The Industrial Disputes Investigation Act of 1907 gave the government the authority to act as mediator.

8 According to John English the growth of war-time patriotism fostered "a real or imagined sense of solidarity". John English, *The Decline of Politics: The Conservatives and the Party System 1901-20* (Toronto, 1977), pp. 110, 106.

9 Suzanne Morton, "Labourism and Independent Labour Politics in Halifax, 1919-1926", M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1986; Suzanne Morton, "Labourism and Economic Action: The Halifax Shipyards Strike of 1920," *Labour/Le Travail*, 22 (Fall 1988), forthcoming; James Naylor, "Ontario Workers and the Decline of Labourism", in Roger Hall, William Westfall and Laurel Sefton MacDowell, eds., *Patterns of the Past: Interpreting Ontario's History* (Toronto, 1988), pp. 278-300.

10 Craig Heron, "Labourism and the Canadian Working Class", *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (Spring 1984), pp. 54, 59.

tremendous influx of unskilled and unorganized workers into Halifax wreaked chaos in the operation of the local trades by jeopardizing craft exclusivity.

Labour problems grew serious in late January 1918 when the Commission took over from the *ad hoc* citizen's organization which had been in place since the explosion. The immediate post-explosion housing needs were met by the construction of temporary apartments on the Commons and Exhibition Ground but the most lasting evidence of the Commission's work would be the 70 wooden houses and the 326 row houses that composed the Hydrostone housing district in the north end of the city.¹¹ The construction of the Hydrostone district and the Commission's decision that long-term pensions would be financed by the development's rental revenue meant that the HRC had contact with organized labour not only as an employer, but also as a landlord, community planner, and claims court. The government appointed body, reflecting the approach of the federal Unionist Government, outraged unionized labour with its military style and undemocratic methods, as it sought, with the use of outside professionals, to rebuild Halifax as quickly and as efficiently as possible.

The HRC, like the Unionist Government, was criticized for simultaneously lacking direction and arbitrary decisiveness. In his biography of Prime Minister Borden, R. Craig Brown has described the war-time government as "trying to maintain the tenets of non-intervention in a situation where compulsion was increasingly necessary".¹² This strain was demonstrated in Halifax by the federal government's refusal to compensate victims of the explosion, although it was willing to regulate the local labour market and the reconstruction in the devastated area.¹³ In May 1917, the Trades and Labour Congress accused the Imperial Munitions Board of lowering established wage schedules, eliminating the eight hour day, diluting skill, substituting "cheap semi-skilled labor from rural districts for construction work because of their willingness to accept less than Trade Union rates", and finally refusing to recognize trade union leadership.¹⁴ These charges would be mirrored in Halifax.

The building trades formed the core of organized craft unionism in Halifax. Although no single construction union reached the size of the longshoremen, collectively the building trades exerted considerable influence and their leadership was prominent in the Halifax Trades and Labour Council and in the

11 Graham Metson, *The Halifax Explosion: December 6, 1917* (Toronto, 1978), p. 158.

12 Robert Craig Brown, *Robert Laird Borden: A Biography* (Toronto, 1975), p. 94; John Herd Thompson, *Harvest of War: The Prairie West, 1914-1918* (Toronto, 1978), pp. 164-5.

13 *Statutes of Nova Scotia 1918*, 8-9 Geo. V, Chapter 61, Sections 8, 11, 28.

14 Report of Proceedings of Thirty-Third Annual Convention of Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, 17-22 September 1917, p. 32; See also Myer Siemiatycki "Munitions", pp. 131-51; David Bercuson "Organized Labour and the Imperial Munitions Board", *Industrial Relations*, 28 (July 1973), pp. 602-16.

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pre-war Labour Party.¹⁵ In *The Craft Transformed*, Ian McKay argues that by 1914, in response to changing economic conditions, the construction unions had adopted a new approach to industrial action and had united under one umbrella organization known as the Building Trades Council.¹⁶ In May 1914, the secretary of the Building Trades Council notified employers that “no union man in the following trades — carpenters, painters, plumbers, electrical workers, steamfitters or plasterers — will work on any job unless all workmen in those trades working on the job are furnished with building trades cards for the then current quarter”.¹⁷ The implementation of a closed shop on all city building sites reflected and encouraged a growing militancy within the construction trades. In 1910 and 1914 Halifax plumbers struck, in 1913 carpenters went out, and in 1917 electricians left their jobs. A strike in 1914 encompassed all of the building trades.¹⁸ The employers responded to the creation of the Building Trades Council by forming the Constructive Mechanical Trades Exchange in June 1914.¹⁹ Since both sides were organized and met on terms of near equality, the construction industry was normally able to negotiate annual city-wide contracts, lending some stability to a volatile situation. But the Commission’s refusal to adhere to rates approved by the Exchange and the Building Trades Council deprived the Halifax building trades, during their busiest period in history, of their traditional means of affecting minimum wages and conditions of employment.

The influx of a new group of largely unskilled and unorganized workers compounded the sense of crisis among the building trades.²⁰ Migrant labour

15 In the *Seventh Annual Report on Labor Organizations in Canada, 1917* (Ottawa, 1918), the Halifax Longshoremen reported 1,000 members, composing nearly half of the city’s reported union membership (p. 207). See also Ian McKay “Class Struggle and Mercantile Capitalism: Craftsmen and Labourers on the Halifax Waterfront, 1850-1902”, in Rosemary Ommers and Gerald Panting, eds., *Working Men Who Got Wet: Proceedings of the Fourth Conference of the Atlantic Shipping Project* (St. John’s, 1980); Ian McKay, “The Working Class of Metro Halifax 1850-1889”, Honours essay, Dalhousie University, 1975; Catherine Waite, “The Longshoremen of Halifax 1900-1930: Their Lives and Working Conditions”, M.A. thesis, Dalhousie University, 1977.

16 The timing of the formation of the Building Trades Council is not entirely clear. The *Halifax District Trades and Labor Council Journal 1928* (Halifax, 1928) claims that the Building Trades Council was formed on 27 June 1913 (p. 43).

17 Quoted in Ian McKay, *The Craft Transformed: An Essay on the Carpenters of Halifax, 1885-1985* (Halifax, 1985), p. 62.

18 Government of Canada, *Labour Gazette* (June 1910), p. 1441; (May 1913), p. 1301; (June 1913), p. 1416; (June 1914), p. 1463; (August 1917), p. 613; McKay, *The Craft Transformed*, pp. 56-8.

19 McKay, *The Craft Transformed*, p. 61. The Constructive Mechanical Trades Exchange was incorporated on 10 June 1914. *Statues of Nova Scotia, 1914*, 4 Geo V, Chapter 173, p. 354.

20 While most of the migrant labour was unskilled, skilled, unionized workers also came to Halifax. Striking plumbers from Saint John were able to use excellent employment conditions created by

broke down the closed union shop in Halifax and thereby curtailed the chief means which Halifax labour had used to control the local labour market. In April 1918, the HRC estimated that since the disaster, it had daily employed between 2,000 and 3,000 men and had registered a total of 9,124 names, excluding those employed by local contractors.²¹ Since most local union men worked for city contractors, over 10,000 workers connected with the building trades must have passed through the city. The instability and high turnover associated with construction explains the extraordinary number of men employed by the HRC.²²

Although the vast amount of labour recruited to Halifax may appear remarkable in light of the national labour shortage in 1918, the war-time labour shortage in Canada did not protect all workers from the irregularities of the labour market. Seasonal production, technological change, and local factors such as fires, war-time shortages and strikes created unemployment at various times and places among both the skilled and unskilled. The building trades were particularly vulnerable as construction projects by their nature were dependent on good weather and non-military construction was often postponed until the war's end. As a result, the building trades seem to have been excluded, to some extent, from the tight labour market and many men were available to come to Halifax. In February 1918 an Ontario labour paper, the *Industrial Banner*, referred to a group of Chinese labourers who had frozen to death *en route* to Halifax and criticized the injustice of employing foreign labour when "Hardly a day passes but news comes of men and women being notified that their services are no longer required".²³ In fact, the national crisis of available labour did not affect operations in Halifax until the late spring and summer of 1918. Even then, the industry, characterized by uneven construction techniques and a dependence on fair weather for outside work, required a tremendous pool of manpower because of the large daily fluctuations in the number of labourers employed.²⁴

Halifax labour leaders were quick to blame migrant workers for their problems. Antagonism against migrant workers was encouraged by newspaper reports of their fights in construction camps, thefts in which they refused to

the explosion to prolong a strike against employers. *American Federationist* (Washington D.C.), February 1918, p. 155.

21 *Morning Chronicle* (Halifax), 13 April 1918; *Daily Echo* (Halifax), 13 December 1918.

22 In a contemporary examination of life and conditions on railway and lumber camps, Edmund Bradwin described the tendency of migrant workers to "jump" or move on. In one extreme example Bradwin points to a turnover of 160 men in a three month period to maintain a work force of 25. Edmund Bradwin, *The Bunkhouse Man: A Study of Work and Pay in the Camps of Canada, 1903-14* (Toronto, 1972 [1928]), pp. 79, 226.

23 *Industrial Banner* (London), 15 February 1918.

24 "Summaries of Daily Labour Reports", Halifax Relief Commission, MG 36, Series R, 1731, Public Archives of Nova Scotia [PANS].

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come to the assistance of their bunkmates, and cases of fraud.²⁵ The housing crisis was also magnified by the presence of migrants, for while many of those employed by the HRC were housed in special construction camps, others successfully competed with native Haligonians for housing.²⁶ The high concentration of native-born Nova Scotians in Halifax probably made local workers particularly susceptible to xenophobia. Cavicchi and Pegano, a railroad contracting firm which employed 1,250 unskilled largely foreign-born and alien labourers recruited in Montreal, came under particular criticism. Their men represented a significant number of those employed in the reconstruction of Halifax, but there was little evidence of their presence.²⁷ Not only were they separated in housing from other workers, in shacks erected on Longard Road known as "Cavicchiville"; they were also isolated by language and culture. Local union members also played upon racism and war-time hostility by emphasizing the number of French-Canadians in the city. Prejudices aroused during the conscription debates outside Quebec saw French-Canadians labelled as "slackers" and their visible presence in Halifax probably reinforced the idea that their non-participation in the war was self-serving.²⁸

There was some justification for the resentment directed against the outsiders. The world of the migrant worker was exclusively male. Married men left their families behind as they found work where it was available. The financial burden of supporting two households in two different locations made the offer of unlimited working hours difficult to decline, despite established craft practices which defined the number of working hours in a day without overtime. Moreover, hard feelings by native Haligonians were not unrequited and occasionally the usually silent migrant labour voice spoke out in the press:

On Monday last, while working on Water street, I heard a Halifax bricklayer speak of the men from Montreal as a lot of "hoboes" and the sooner they were back home the better it would be for the city. Now if it were not for the strangers here, would this work have been done? What have the bricklayers of Halifax done to help in this distress for I believe that not more than two members of the Halifax union have worked on the reconstruction job, preferring to work for local contractors because of a few cents an hour increase in pay.²⁹

25 *Acadian Recorder* (Halifax), 5 June, 2 October 1918; *Evening Mail* (Halifax), 24 August 1918. This type of behaviour seems characteristic of migrant or temporary construction workers and is discussed by Rex Lucas in *Minetown, Milltown, Railtown: Life in Canadian Communities of Single Industry* (Toronto, 1971), pp. 40-1.

26 *Evening Mail*, 15 March 1918.

27 *Acadian Recorder*, 8 January 1918; *Morning Chronicle*, 13 April 1918.

28 Thompson, *Harvest of War*, p. 148.

29 *Evening Mail*, 20 March 1918.

The issue of skill was always central in discussions surrounding wages. Halifax workers, in an attempt to defend their established practices, criticized and condemned the quality of work performed by outsiders.³⁰ The Building Trades Council and the Trades and Labour Council claimed that “The man who knew his work was worth three times as much as the unskilled man and it was the skilled mechanic who would be wanted by the people of the north end”.³¹ While Halifax workmen stressed the importance of skill and economy, the HRC undertook a public education campaign on the ways and means of modern building. In announcing the plans for the development of new permanent housing, the HRC explained that “The public will also understand how important it is that a large amount of work be carried on at one time, so that materials can be purchased more cheaply, and houses — particularly those of the less expensive class — be standardized and money saved”.³² It was becoming increasingly evident, in a world of mass production, speed, and standardization, that the value placed on skill had indeed changed.³³

In this new, unfamiliar environment characterized by migrant unskilled labourers and the interference of a third party between labour and capital, Halifax organized labour made a number of challenges to the act which gave the HRC its power. The fight was led by the Halifax Trades and Labour Council, an umbrella organization which represented most Halifax trade unions. The president of the Council and of the carpenters’ union, Ralph Eisnor, criticized the power given to the HRC which permitted it to set wages, claiming that wages should be a matter of negotiation between the employer and employee. Another prominent Council man, Joseph Garnett, argued that, if the Commission set the wage scale, it could “secure labor from Montreal, laborers of foreign element who could work for wages which the ordinary workman could not live on”.³⁴ The non-assessment of employees of the HRC was also considered unfair to local workmen. While local plumbers were required to pay a municipal license fee, the outside workmen under the employ of the HRC were exempt. Although the Council unsuccessfully lobbied for the establishment of a head tax, it did secure an amendment to the HRC Act which provided that all workmen engaged in work for the HRC were exempted from any special taxes, rates, or levies.³⁵ Although this section continued to benefit outsiders, this change prevented the

30 *Acadian Recorder*, 15 March 1918.

31 *Morning Chronicle*, 4 June 1918.

32 *Acadian Recorder*, 7 May 1918.

33 For changes in construction see Michael J. Doucet and John C. Weaver, “Material Culture and the North American House: The Era of the Common Man, 1870-1920”, *Journal of American History*, 72, 3 (December 1985), pp. 560-87.

34 *Morning Chronicle*, 6 April 1918.

35 *Morning Chronicle*, 26 April 1918.

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direct discrimination of the initial draft against local craftsmen who were required to pay for special licenses.

The greatest public outcry was aroused by the attempt of the HRC to exclude itself and those injured during the explosion from falling under the terms of the Nova Scotia Workmen's Compensation Act. This decision seems to have been the result of the dire financial condition of the Workmen's Compensation Board at the time of the explosion. In January 1918, W.C. Urluier wrote to Prime Minister Borden that "Mr. Premier Murray has rather burned his fingers in his manipulation of the Labor vote through the Workmen's Compensation Act. The Institution has \$100,000 in the treasury with liability estimated at \$150,000 when adjusted. Mr. Paton, the Chairman of the Board, declared the whole thing utterly bankrupt".³⁶ Unionized labour regarded tampering with workmen's compensation awards as a direct assault on the rights of the workingman. The Halifax Typographical Union unanimously condemned the HRC's power "as employers of labor to fix wages of employees, yet desire to escape responsibility in cases of accident or fatal injury to workmen in the course of their employment". It warned that any exceptions made to the operation of the Workmen's Compensation Board "establishes a precedent which cannot fail but to seriously endanger the future working out of the Compensation Act".³⁷ In this case, Labour successfully persuaded the Nova Scotia Government to amend the Halifax Relief Commission Act so that any person who after 10 June 1918 was entitled to Workmen's Compensation benefits and did not receive equivalent benefits from the HRC would be provided for under the Compensation Act.³⁸

Through intense united opposition Halifax organized labour thus brought about minor amendments to the original act, but it did not succeed in altering the HRC's right to set wages. From its creation, the HRC refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Building Trades Council and the Exchange. It refused to comply with the Exchange standards, recognize unions, or enter into collective bargaining, although it frequently met with the union's leadership in appealing for labour's cooperation.³⁹

The single most influential person in reconstruction operations was Colonel Robert S. Low, the general manager of a prominent Ottawa construction company. Born in Michigan, Low was educated in Halifax where he also entered his father's contracting company. Responsible for many major projects in Cape

36 W.C. Urluier to Borden, 7 January 1918, Borden Papers, MG 26H, Vol. 90, OC 445 (2) (A), p. 46753, NAC.

37 *Acadian Recorder*, 8 April 1918.

38 *Morning Chronicle*, 26 April 1918; *Acadian Recorder*, 26 April 1918.

39 One of the Reconstruction Committee's initial actions was to arrange a meeting with local labour leaders "pointing out to them the great necessity of everyone 'putting his shoulder to the wheel', and bespeaking their kind co-operation". HRC Minutes, 10 December 1917, PANS.

Breton, he attained national fame as the military builder responsible for Valcartier, Camp Borden, Camp Hughes, and Sacree Camp. In 1914, Low was appointed Honourary Lieutenant-Colonel Officer Commanding the 4th Pioneers Canadian Expeditionary Force and in 1916 was promoted to full Honourary Colonel.⁴⁰ The day after the explosion, Low was called by the military to Halifax "to organize and superintend the work of emergency repairs and to provide temporary accommodation for the homeless as quickly as possible".⁴¹ On 9 December 1917, only three days after the explosion, a contract was negotiated with Colonel Low's Ottawa firm Bate, McMahan and Company to begin building on the Halifax South Commons at a 7 1/2 per cent commission.⁴² After being awarded the initial contract, Low was named director of all reconstruction operations efforts in Halifax, a relationship which continued after the HRC was established in January 1918. The close association between Low, the manager of reconstruction, and his company, Bate, McMahan and Company, the recipient of a large contract under the jurisdiction of the Commission, established a precedent for unusual business practices. The HRC followed Public Works procedures and issued most contracts on a commission basis. Under this system, contractors hired all the labour and the HRC paid the wage bill and the salary of one overseer. The contractor received a set percentage of the wage bill which ran very high when thousands of labourers were battling difficult winter conditions.⁴³ This system placed contractors in a dilemma. High wages were in their interest after the contract was awarded but their reputation and good relations with government were important if they wanted to be awarded another project.

With its head office in Ottawa, Bate McMahan maintained its connections with government and the ear of the Department of Labour over disputes which arose over issues such as the fair wage clause.⁴⁴ Newspapers and local

40 Upon Low's death in January 1919, his estate was valued at \$68,599 independent of his interests in Bate, McMahan and Company which were thought to exceed the value of the estate. *Acadian Recorder*, 16 and 19 January 1919; *Daily Echo*, 19 January 1919; *Evening Mail*, 16 January 1919.

41 The plan provided for the construction of tenements which could be used by the Relief Committee until the spring when they would be taken over by the military during demobilization. Thomas Benson to Secretary Militia Council Ottawa, 15 December 1917, Department of Militia and Defence, RG 24, Vol. 6359, File HQ, 7126.99.11, NAC; W. Hallick, Director of Stores, to R.T. MacIreith, Halifax, 16 December 1917, Department of Militia and Defence, RG 24, Vol. 6358, File 7126.99, Vol 2, NAC; HRC Minutes, 7 December 1917, PANS.

42 District General Staff memo to Militia General Officer, 17 December 1917, Department of Militia and Defence, RG 24, Vol. 6358, File 7126.99, Vol 2, NAC.

43 Cynics would later question whether the desire to clean up before spring emanated from the advice of health professionals and their fear of an epidemic or was an opportunity for contractors to increase the labour bill as labourers continually shovelled snow and ice before getting to their work. *Herald*, 20 February 1918.

44 The fair wage clause, included in all federal government contracts since 1900, was designed to

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contractors also continually complained that no tenders were publicly issued for the temporary housing or the clearing of the devastated area and on 15 March 1918, the *Evening Mail* complained that "large amounts of work, particularly in painting, plumbing and wiring, are said to be going otherwise than by tender".⁴⁵ These claims were supported by the absence of tender notices appearing in local papers. Resentment also arose as outside contractors who were given large projects completed all of their hiring out of town.⁴⁶ One of these large outside contracting companies, with admittedly a local connection, was the Montreal firm of Cavicchi and Pegano, which in July 1918 became known as the Bedford Construction Company. It received the lucrative contract to clear the debris from Richmond on the commission of 6 1/2 per cent.⁴⁷

Many of the conflicts which emerged between the HRC and the Building Trades Council can be traced to the conflict between Low and the unions. In 1917, the Trades and Labour Congress convention heard complaints about Low's activities when building Camp Borden in Ontario which were similar to those later expressed in Halifax; construction work had been based on 10 to 16 hour days, seven days a week, with no recognition of overtime rates.⁴⁸ The Halifax president of the carpenters' union, Ralph Eisnor, informed the Commission in February 1918 that Low had "been a thorn in our flesh for a year, or more back. This is not the first time we have had trouble with the Colonel". In the same meeting with the HRC, the president of the Canadian Trades and Labour Congress, J.C. Watters, supported the local carpenters, stating that Low had a "reputation that did not meet with the approval of the Labor Congress and the treatment accorded organized workers by Col[onel] Low is not calculated to bring out the best results".⁴⁹ Both Watters and John W. Bruce, president of the Canadian Plumbers and Steamfitters Union, commented on the large number of complaints they had received during their visits to Halifax.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, Low

prevent abuses in sub-letting by contractors and to ensure that employees on government contracts received the going rate "for competent workmen in the district". Government of Canada, *Labour Gazette* (September 1900), p. 15; Bradwin, *Bunkhouse*, p. 207.

45 *Evening Mail*, 5 February 1918; *Morning Chronicle*, 9 April 1918.

46 *Morning Chronicle*, 22 July 1918.

47 *Herald*, 15 February 1918; *Acadian Recorder*, 5 July 1918. Vincent J. Cavicchi appears to have been associated with some dubious practices since evidence was presented at the Nova Scotia Highway Inquiry of 1921 that he had attempted to bribe the chief engineer of the Highways Board. *Evening Mail*, 21 February 1921. See Gregory Cooper, "Politics and Fraud in Nova Scotia Road Policy: The Highways Scandal of 1920-21", Honours Essay, Dalhousie University, 1983.

48 *Report of Proceedings of Thirty-Third Annual Convention of Trades and Labor Congress of Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, September 17-22, 1917*, p. 33.

49 HRC Minutes, 20 February 1918, PANS.

50 *Ibid.*

remained the undisputed master of Halifax reconstruction until June 1918 when he returned to his regular position at the Bate, McMahon Ottawa office.

Although the problems between the Commission and the local unions were magnified by the involvement of a non-cooperative manager such as Low and by large contractors such as Cavicchi with his foreign work-force, the central issue in the conflict was organized labour's desire to sustain past union victories. Hard fought battles over wages and hours were placed in jeopardy as the Commission claimed that emergency conditions should override past agreements. The issue of wages arose even before Christmas 1917 with the carpenters, who had the least control over the skill level of their craft. But wages were not the only issue at stake. Plumbers, bricklayers, and plasterers all quickly realized that the power of the HRC threatened old victories won over the number of hours which constituted a day's work, the principle of overtime, and most importantly the closed shop. In response to attacks by these unions, the Commission repeatedly claimed that its disregard for union rules and regulations was an excusable response to emergency conditions.

In February 1918, when the plumbers approached the HRC over the matter of overtime, the Chairman of the Commission, T.S. Rogers, threatened a campaign of public opinion against the union.⁵¹ Plumbers were portrayed in the *Halifax Herald* as unpatriotic, monopolistic, and tyrannical for defending the practice of an overtime rate for Sunday labour.⁵² While middle-class spokespersons almost consistently sided with the *Herald*, Alderman John E. Godwin, who was not associated with the labour movement but represented the ward most affected by the explosion, pointed to the inconsistency of denying overtime rates while paying the transportation costs and supplying the tool kits of out-of-town workers.⁵³ Ignoring public opinion, the plumbers refused to work overtime without proper compensation and effectively held up construction during the initial two months of construction. Their firm resolve to boycott Sunday work without overtime only weakened in mid February when Colonel Low threatened to bring in "200 Frenchmen".⁵⁴ Since migrant plumbers were permitted to operate without the necessary municipal license, and rules governing plumbing regulations were suspended, the plumbers faced the prospect of losing all control over the local labour market. The fear of permanent changes after the period of emergency led the plumbers to compromise and work without extra compensation until 1 May 1918.⁵⁵ Halifax plumbers thus sacrificed an important principle

51 *Ibid.*, 23 February 1918.

52 *Evening Mail*, 4 February 1918.

53 *Ibid.*, 23 February 1918.

54 HRC Minutes, 20 February 1918, PANS.

55 *Ibid.*, 27 February 1918.

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to maintain their local monopoly over the local labour market and some control over the standard of work.

The building trades agreed to postpone any labour disruptions until 1 May, the traditional date for establishing new wage rates in Halifax, which was also to coincide with the commencement of the second stage or permanent building of the Hydrostone housing development. To the disappointment of the unions, however, in May 1918 the *Labour Gazette* published a fair wage schedule approved by the HRC, which was considerably below the existing city union standards.⁵⁶ According to the HRC schedule, carpenters were to receive 40 cents, glaziers and plumbers 45 cents, stone masons and bricklayers 50 cents, and labourers 30 cents an hour. At the time of this notification, the Building Trades Council and the Exchange had entered into a new agreement for 1918, which increased the rate for carpenters to 50 cents an hour for a nine hour day, and time and a half for Saturday afternoons throughout the summer. Painters and bricklayers also received increases to 55 and 60 cents an hour respectively for an eight hour day. The new agreement with the plumbers was more complicated as it gave the plumbers 50 cents an hour for a nine hour day until November when the length of the day would return to eight hours.⁵⁷

The determination of the bricklayers to uphold Building Trades Council union rates may have been a factor in the decision that brick would not be the primary material used in reconstruction efforts. The HRC desired an inexpensive non-combustible building material and selected "hydrostone", a cement block-like material composed of pressurized sand, crushed stone and gravel which did not require the use of skilled bricklayers. The bricklayers were able to place pressure on the Commission because of the high level of expertise involved in their trade and their relative scarcity in Halifax. In early April, they met with the Commission and requested that the HRC scale fall into line with the 60 cents an hour agreed on by local contractors.⁵⁸ A second delegation returned on 30 April and repeated their request for the union rate for HRC employees. Although not a single member of their local union was actually employed by the HRC, the return to a standard wage across the city was regarded as vital in maintaining the strength of labour when the period of emergency had passed. Rogers, who had previously agreed to consider the increase, postponed any decisions until permanent building began. At the beginning of May, no final decision concerning the building material to be used in new construction had been made, for the HRC Chairman asked the delegation "the rate the bricklayers would charge if brick was to be taken into consideration in building the

⁵⁶ *Labour Gazette* (May 1918), p. 354.

⁵⁷ *Acadian Recorder*, 1 May 1918; *Evening Mail*, 1 May 1918.

⁵⁸ HRC Minutes, 8 April 1918, PANS.

houses”.⁵⁹ The bricklayers’ response of the standard union city rate probably decided once and for all that hydrostone, not brick, would be the principal material used in the new houses. Although brick works were not well developed in Nova Scotia, hydrostone had to be manufactured in a factory constructed specifically for that purpose in Eastern Passage and connected to the north end of Halifax by a temporary railway. This factory was owned and managed by the assistant manager of reconstruction, Hamilton Lindsay.⁶⁰

The 1 May deadline given to the Commission by the building trades almost passed without any response. Out-of-town union bricklayers employed by the HRC decided to continue working under existing conditions until 1 June. The plasterers, however, pointed out that another delay gave no assurance that the HRC would come to terms with the unions.⁶¹ From the beginning, the plasterers had willingly worked long hours with no overtime, but on 1 May stopped all work and demanded that the Commission fall in line with union regulations. With the plasterers out on strike and work on reconstruction falling further behind schedule, the Commission met with Low and the architects to discuss the local labour situation. The increasing difficulty in securing sufficient manpower led the HRC to adopt the practice of the Imperial Munitions Board which coordinated agreements among local employers to set wage rates and “avoid wage competition for scarce labor”.⁶² It therefore approached the Exchange to guard their mutual interests and prevent excessive wage demands. Cooperation with the exchange also guaranteed a stable wage until the next contract in May 1919. It was a labour shortage not the power of the unions that led to the signing of an agreement of 4 June to set a uniform standard of wages and hours across the city.⁶³ In fact, as Table One shows the explosion did not affect minimum union wage levels and wages did not rise dramatically until a year and a half later, in June 1919 with the settlement of the building trades strike.

The shortage of men during the summer of 1918 continued to affect wages and delayed the construction of the Hydrostone development.⁶⁴ Unable to find sufficient labour to build its massive housing project, the Commission issued appeals that only emergency repairs to existing buildings be undertaken throughout the rest of the city.⁶⁵ The lack of skilled plasterers put all work behind

59 *Ibid.*, 30 April 1918.

60 Halifax Relief Commission, Second Report to Privy Council, 2 July 1918, NAC; Weaver, “Reconstruction”, p.40.

61 *Evening Mail*, 3 May 1918. The strike by the Plasterers does not appear in the Department of Labour’s Strike and Lockout files.

62 Cited Naylor, “The Canadian State”, p. 37 from D. Carnegie, *The History of Munitions Supply in Canada 1914-1918* (London, 1925), p. 252.

63 HRC Minutes, 4 May 1918, PANS.

64 *Morning Chronicle*, 11 December 1917.

65 *Acadian Recorder*, 12 August 1918.

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Table One

Wages Set for Halifax Building Trades, 1917-19;
Building Trades Council/Constructive Mechanical Trades Exchange
and
Halifax Relief Commission

	May 1917 BTC/EXC	May 1918 HRC	May 1918 BTC/EXC	June 1918 HRC	June 1919 BTC/EXC
carpenters	.40	.40	.50 9hr	.50 9/10hr	.66
painters	.40		.55 8hr	.55 8/10hr	.66
plumbers	.45	.45	.50 9/8hr	.50 9/10hr	.70
electricians				.60 9/10hr	.70
masons	.50	.50	.60 8hr	.60 8/10hr	.65
plasterers	.50			.60 8hr	.75
labourers	.30	.30		.35 9/10hr	
glaziers		.45		.55 8hr	
pipefitters	.45		.50 9/8hr	.50 9/10hr	
bricklayers	.50	.50	.60 8hr	.60 8hr	.65

Source: *Herald*, 29 December 1917; *Evening Mail*, 1 May 1918; *Acadian Recorder*, 23, 27 March, 1 May, 12 June 1918; *The Citizen* (Halifax), 20 June 1919; J.D. Reid, Deputy Minister Railways and Canals to General Mewburn, Minister of Militia and Defence, 4 March 1918 and Benson, Commanding Officer Military District 6 to Secretary Militia Council, 6 May 1918, RG 24, Vol. 6358, File HQ 71-26-99, Vol. 4, NAC; *Labour Gazette* (May 1918), p. 354; (August 1918), p. 639.

schedule and a statement in the *Echo* on 13 August proclaimed that 500 more men could be used in addition to the 2,400 employed.⁶⁶ By the autumn, conditions were critical and the HRC had to find a way around its agreement with the Exchange and pay above the set rate to attract the necessary manpower. With work plentiful, labour was reluctant to engage in particularly heavy work without “some special inducement”.⁶⁷ The Commission therefore needed to find

⁶⁶ *Evening Mail*, 11 July 1918.

⁶⁷ HRC Minutes, 30 October 1918, PANS.

a way of attracting masons and labourers without actually violating its agreement with the Exchange, for to do so could increase the wage levels of all other trades. The HRC therefore evaded the intent of the agreement by sub-contracting stone setting to an outside contractor “who would bring in his own masons or stone setters and laborers, paying them whatever he pleased; the rate, however, not to be known to the Commission”.⁶⁸ By this plan, the HRC was able to turn a blind eye to wages which exceeded the agreement and at the same time obtain the necessary labour. Another way of circumventing the “flat Rate” was by reclassifying stone setters, helpers, and labourers on the Hydrostone project under a separate and higher wage category from regular bricklayers and masons. If the intention of the Commission in its decision to use hydrostone blocks had been to keep wages low and avoid labour trouble by not being held hostage by the craft knowledge of the Bricklayers’ Union, the commission was unsuccessful. Ironically, a situation was created where the need for labour was so great that demand was able to dictate wages more effectively than skill.

This change in the availability of labour and the use of a sub-contractor in the Hydrostone development encouraged the Commission to rid itself of the labour problem altogether. In January 1919, the reconstruction department of the HRC closed and all work completed thereafter was through a contractor.⁶⁹ The departure of the Commission from direct involvement in labour relations signalled a return to pre-explosion local conditions in which the Building Trades Council and the Exchange regulated labour standards. Organized labour, however, had changed since the explosion. While the Carpenters’ business agent complained that not 60 per cent of the carpenters employed on the Hydrostone project were union members, the size of the Carpenters union had increased by nearly 425 per cent between the explosion and June 1919.⁷⁰ This new strength which was felt, though less dramatically, in other building unions would last until the economic collapse of 1920.

As the unions had changed, so had the consciousness of many of their members. The neighborhood most affected by the disaster had been the working-class suburb of Richmond, home to many of the city’s skilled workers, railwaymen and shipyard employees.⁷¹ The destruction of their homes, the loss of property, and the personal tragedy which resulted from the explosion created a shared experience. This shared loss was accompanied by the frustration that the skilled and semi-skilled working class were not receiving what they perceived as a fair deal. John Bacher, in his study of the state and housing, suggests that the

68 *Ibid.*, 30 October 1918.

69 *Echo*, 22 January 1919.

70 HRC Minutes, 26 August 1919, PANS; *The Citizen*, 6 June 1919.

71 Archibald MacMeehan, “The Halifax Disaster” in Metson, *Halifax Explosion*, p. 18; Waite, “Longshoremen”.

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explosion intensified “class conflict around housing”.⁷² Citing Halifax Trades and Labor Council pressure which secured rent controls in the HRC Act, Bacher concludes that the housing crisis galvanized “labour’s class consciousness and political action”.⁷³ The perceived injustice in the distribution of compensation by the HRC also encouraged the development of a collective consciousness among many of the city’s skilled and semi-skilled workers. When the Commission classified pianos as luxury items and excluded them from any settlements, a “mechanic” from the north end saw the class bias in the decision and complained to the *Evening Mail* that

Now most of us north end people managing to get pianos out of our hard earned savings feel such a necessity in cases where there are children to educate. Yet they [HRC] estimate the damage done to autos which are a luxury we mechanics cannot afford. Indeed they are a luxury of the rich. If they pay for an auto, why not pay for a piano? I ask this question because, I would like to know where we ring in.⁷⁴

The demand for fair treatment was a prevalent theme as housing placements, reimbursements for tools, and the distribution of used clothing enraged north end residents.⁷⁵ HRC compensation policy created a sense of injustice as two different standards seemed to be used for the rich and the poor.

Frustration caused by perceived injustice in the dispersement of material compensation was augmented by the exclusion of labour from all community political participation. The absence of a working-class voice from the voluntary *ad hoc* Relief Committee seems highly unusual, not simply an oversight in the confusion. Precedent held that labour participated on municipal committees, occasionally sponsored political candidates, and was actively courted by both the Liberal and Conservative parties. Under these circumstances, it made little sense that labour should be forgotten when it was widely acknowledged that the geographic area most affected was inhabited by its constituents. There were people on the Relief Committee sensitive to the fact that the body should represent the entire community. After the initial organization was struck, there was an amendment that the Relief Committee be expanded to include some “ladies”.⁷⁶ The exclusion of labour from participation in the post-explosion organizations which directly shaped the future of their community further

72 Bacher, “Keeping to the Private Market”, p. 95.

73 *Ibid.*, p. 97.

74 *Evening Mail*, 19 February 1918.

75 *Evening Mail*, 5 January and 20 February 1918; *Acadian Recorder*, 15 March 1918; HRC Minutes, 14 January 1918, PANS.

76 HRC Minutes, 8 December 1917, PANS.

alienated labour from the Commission.

Finally, labour was frustrated by the inconsistency of the Commission's actions which waived union regulations during the emergency for the sake of expense and yet spent extravagantly on other non-labour items. The discrepancies between what was said and what was seen made it difficult for labour to accept restraint when \$18,500,000 was spent in 1918 alone.⁷⁷ Aldermanic candidate James Rudge in 1919 questioned how government could borrow by the million for the war effort "but could not borrow enough to replace the houses destroyed in the explosion".⁷⁸ Examples of wasteful expenditures on building material, such as the extravagant use of pine for the framing of the temporary houses, and exorbitant contract commissions were contrasted with the unwillingness of the Commission to pay for quality workmanship.⁷⁹ This frustration, articulated in a letter to the editor of the *Evening Mail*, stated that since it was a mechanics' district that had been wiped out by the explosion and since the working-class had suffered the most from war-time inflation, it was only just that labour should somehow benefit from the catastrophe.⁸⁰

Armed with the experience of dealing with a government agency which claimed to represent the community at the expense of the interests of some of its members, labour responded with both a series of concrete steps to enlarge its own constituency and a stronger commitment to labourism and political action. In February 1919, the Halifax building trades were central in the organization of the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour.⁸¹ Under the auspices of the Halifax Trades and Labour Council, in May 1919 Halifax trade unionists began publishing a weekly newspaper, significantly named *The Citizen*, capable of presenting labour's case to the public. The desire to be included in community affairs encouraged labour to sponsor two aldermanic candidates in the north end of the city. When the Halifax Labour Party was revived by the Halifax Trades and Labour Council after the war, the invitation for membership was extended to all "workers, whether organized or unorganized, mental or manual regardless of race, sex, creed or vocation".⁸² The most important indication of this notion of an expanded community was the unified action taken by Halifax building trade unions when they closed down all city construction in May 1919. This building trades strike was particularly significant as it demanded a uniform wage across the skilled building trades and appealed for support from the entire

77 *Canadian Annual Review 1918* (Toronto, 1919), p. 651.

78 *The Citizen*, 6 June 1919.

79 *Evening Mail*, 2 February 1918; *Herald*, 9 February 1918.

80 *Evening Mail*, 4 February 1918.

81 *Morning Chronicle*, 1 March 1919.

82 *The Citizen*, 22 January 1920; Morton, "Labourism and Independent Labor Politics", one.

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community, contemplating a General Strike across the city.⁸³

On 1 May 1919, 2,000 men in the city's most active economic sector, the building trades, walked off the job in the largest strike action taken to this point in the city. Although the dispute had originally centred upon the issue of higher wages and the eight-hour day, once on strike the right to negotiate across the trades emerged as the principle issue.⁸⁴ This emphasis, according to Ian McKay, "marked a new unified state in the history of the building craftsmen" for negotiating as a single unit changed "craft unionism into something more like industrial unionism".⁸⁵ This very basic change in approach would not have been possible without both the negative experience of dealing with the HRC and the growth of construction unions which accompanied reconstruction. A departure from tradition in the building trades also appeared at the 14 May meeting of the Halifax Trades and Labour Council, when the Building Trades Council requested that the central organization organize a city-wide sympathetic strike.⁸⁶ Proposed before the Winnipeg and Amherst General Strikes, this decision was not a reaction to external circumstances.⁸⁷ Indeed, this action was possibly the only discussion of a General Strike in Canada in 1919 to be initiated outside the metal trades. While the strike illustrates the radical edge of the Halifax labour movement, its conclusion on 12 June with tripartite arbitration reveals the desire by the unions to reach beyond organized labour for support. The choice of Amherst businessman J.A. MacDonald as the union representative on the tribunal demonstrated labour's new desire to tie into the larger community.⁸⁸

For many Canadian trade unionists, 1918 was a remarkable year of success and growth.⁸⁹ But, while unions in other parts of Canada were experimenting with power, the actions of the HRC left the Halifax labour unions aware of the

83 *Morning Chronicle*, 16 May 1919.

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

85 McKay, *The Craft Transformed*, p. 69.

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

87 Nolan Reilly, "The General Strike in Amherst, Nova Scotia, 1919", *Acadiensis*, 9, 2 (Spring 1980), pp. 56-77.

88 The tribunal granted an increase but was unable to achieve a standardized wage of 75 cents. *Herald*, 12 June 1919.

89 Bryan Palmer, *Working-Class Experience. The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian Labour, 1800-1980* (Toronto, 1983), p. 170.

tenuous position from which they operated. The Halifax building trades had barely been able to weather the pressures brought about by government involvement in post-explosion Halifax. Although membership increased and the HRC was eventually forced to comply with the standard wage because of pressures in the labour market, the actions of the Commission threatened skilled labour's most precious institution, the union. Employer-employee negotiations, which had appeared to be firmly established, were placed in great jeopardy. Trade unionists, excluded from positions of leadership, stood helpless as migrant workers with no commitment to the community or to individual unions swarmed into the city willing to forfeit long-contested restrictions and rights in exchange for making as much money as quickly as possible. The unwillingness of the HRC to recognize union rates and regulations encouraged this chaos. Eisnor reminded the Commission at one meeting that Halifax organized labour had "worked thirty or thirty-five years to complete our organization and to get what we have got, and while we regret as much as anybody in Halifax the calamity which has befallen our City, we cannot see any reason why people are coming in and running slipshod all over our trade regulations".⁹⁰ Rights, privileges, organizations and labour agreements were left untouched by the flying debris and flames of the catastrophe, but the actions of the Commission imperilled these hard won claims which had survived the original destruction only to be threatened in the rebuilding of the city.

The near collapse of organized labour under governmental pressure offered a tremendous boost to the creation of a temporary skilled and semi-skilled class awareness in the immediate post-war period. The attitude of the HRC to unions and the authoritarian methods of its manager, Colonel Low, caused considerable discontent among the skilled workers, who lived in the neighbourhood devastated by the explosion. The frustration over property settlements, disability compensation, and inadequate housing intensified the level of class consciousness in the community. At the same time, while encouraging the growth of a fragile and restricted class consciousness, clearly demonstrated in the building trades strike of 1919, the events of 1918 simultaneously encouraged labour to broaden its support in the wider community. Faced with the growing tendency of government to define and act upon the public interest, Halifax organized labour sought to maintain and increase its influence in the city through direct participation in the politics of the community. Organized labour's need to broaden support placed greater emphasis on the formalization and legitimization of labour's role and offered new importance to labourism. The election of candidates from the revived Labour Party of July 1919 was seen as vitally important.⁹¹ While a labour party had existed before the war, the new face of Halifax labourism was

90 *Herald*, 15 February 1918.

91 *Morning Chronicle*, 10 January, 26 July 1919.

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willing to form political coalitions outside the traditional craft elite to strengthen its electoral constituency. In this defensive effort to combat the encroachment of government, skilled labour's participation in community politics actually reinforced and sanctioned the emerging new role of the state. Furthermore, the temporary revival of labourism was almost anachronistic in the post-war era. As a grass roots movement concerned with egalitarian democracy, it seemed out of place with the increasing techno-corporatism of the 1920s.⁹² Agencies such as the HRC with their expertise, planning, and central control were the real harbingers of things to come.

92 Guy Alchon, *Capitalism, Social Science and the State in the 1920s* (Princeton, 1985), p. 169.