

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

COMBINATION AND CONFLICT IN THE U.K. SHIPPING
INDUSTRY DURING THE LATE 19TH CENTURY,
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE PERIOD
1887 TO 1894

being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of

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by

JAMES McCONVILLE Bsc. (Econ.)

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ABBREVIATIONS

A.B.	Able Seaman
Articles	Articles of Agreement under the Merchant Shipping Acts
F.T.L.U.	Federation of Trade and Labour Unions connected with the Shipping, Carrying and other Industries
H.S.M.F.A.A.	Hull Sailors' and Marine Firemen's Amalgamated Association
I.F.S.S.F.	International Federation of Stewards, Seamen and Firemen
N.A.S.F.U.	National Amalgamated Sailors' and Firemen's Union of Great Britain and Ireland
N.S.F.U.	National Sailors' and Firemen's Union
North of England	North of England Sailors' and Seagoing Firemen's Association
P. & I.	Protection and Indemnity Clubs or Associations
Sh. Fed	Shipping Federation Limited

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The period 1887 to 1894 saw the emergence of a new permanent national dimension to the relationship between shipowners and ratings with the establishment of the National Amalgamated Sailors' and Firemen's Union of Great Britain and Ireland (N.A.S.F.U.) founded in 1887, and the Shipping Federation Limited, first registered in 1890. Prior to this the shipowner, as employer, and the seafarer, as employee had undertaken their bargaining over wages and conditions of work, either as individuals through the contract of employment or Articles of Agreement signed at the beginning of a voyage; or less frequently, through collective associations such as local unions and shipowners' organisations.

Combination for the seafarer was more difficult than for other industrial workers. In the first place, the law in the form of the Merchant Shipping Acts precluded any form of industrial action whilst the crew were under the Articles of Agreement, and seafarers were explicitly excluded from the provisions of the 1871 Trade Union Act and the 1875 Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act. The only time, therefore, when a seafarer could legally take action against his employer was after he had been released from his contract of employment (Articles) and was, therefore, unemployed. Even without these legal constraints the establishment and maintenance of trade union organisation at anything but a local level was extremely difficult. The long absences at sea, together with the high labour turnover which characterised seafaring mitigated against continuity of policy and

organisation. Furthermore, when organisations did exist, the peripatetic nature of the labour force made communication, and hence unity of action, virtually impossible. Thus even the local societies, where there was an inherent community of interest, were difficult to maintain.

This is not to say, however, that during the C19th, shipping was without the intermittent development of trade unionism as was witnessed by other industries. This usually took the form of locally based combinations either as a reaction to a fall in wages or in an effort to take advantage of the industry's good economic circumstances.⁽¹⁾ Although the combinations invariably retained their local impetus, there are examples of a more widely, often regional, federated organisation developing. The events of the early 1850's epitomise this tradition. In 1851 there was agitation against the new Merchant Shipping Act linked with a demand for increased wages. The only existing society, the Seamen's Loyal Standard Association, did not participate, but several new local organisations sprang up, particularly on the North East coast.⁽²⁾ In the main these were local unions that formed branches of a loose federation that may have had as

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1. See for examples Aspinall A. Early English Trade Unions Batchworth Press (1949) p.9-18, 187-89, 192-211, 221-229 and 384-85, and Jones S. 'Community and Organisation - Early Seamen's Trade Unionism on the North East Coast, 1768-1899' Maritime History Vol.3 No.1 1973
 2. The Times Feb. 22nd, 1851 and Hodgson G.B. The Borough of South Shields, published by the author Newcastle-on-Tyne (1903), p.45 and 46.
See also Appendix 1

many as 30,000 members at its height.⁽³⁾ However, once the immediate issues had been resolved, these movements lost their cohesion, which was only regained when similar circumstances recurred. There are examples of ports where the community was particularly close knit or there was almost total commitment to one type of trade where a nucleus of, albeit inactive, union organisation remained. This was true of ports such as Sunderland and Hull, and perhaps to a lesser extent Liverpool, where unions had an unusual degree of local permanence, or where organisations emerged simultaneously with disputes suggesting the existence of dormant societies.⁽⁴⁾

The employers responded to this local and often issue specific unionisation from the same local base but with a greater or lesser degree of severity according to the state of trade and the availability of labour.⁽⁵⁾ There was perhaps

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3. Webb S. and B. The History of Trade Unionism 1666-1920 printed by authors (1920), p.405 footnote. For a similar account see Wilson J.H. evidence to Royal Commission on Labour, Group B Vol.1, C6708 (1892) para.9179. Wilson believed there were 30 branches. The Rules of North Shields Seamens United Protection Society 1859 claims 19 branches and correspondence with the British Mariners Association of Liverpool.
 4. Brown R. Waterfront Organisation in Hull 1870-1900 passim University of Hull occasional papers in economic and social history No.5 (1972). Taplin E. Liverpool Dockers and Seamen 1870-1890 passim University of Hull occasional papers in Economic and Social History No.6 (1974)
 5. For example, during the strikes on the North East coast 1853 and 1854, shipowners opened their own shipping offices to supply non-union seamen. Peoples Press Oct.22nd, 1853 The Times Nov.17th, 1853. See also Collection of Hand Bills and Posters in South Shields Public Library Vol.1

less need for the shipowners to combine even at this local level since they were more powerful than the individual seaman and their nineteenth century capitalist ethos of individualism and competition militated against such action.

Alternatively in some ports, there would be one major shipowner who would act on behalf of the other employers in the port. Often such an arrangement encouraged the continued existence of local unions with which the employer developed a special relationship.⁽⁶⁾ When the shipowners did feel the need to act together, they often did so through an organisation which already existed for other purposes such as insurance.

In some respects the formation of the N.A.S.F.U. and the Shipping Federation can be seen as a continuation of this traditional response to short term economic circumstances. However, an analysis of the period of their inception and establishment, that is 1887 and 1894, does not in itself explain their permanence, national character and degree of united action which was unique in the experience of the shipping industry. If the analysis is not limited to these years, the problem arises as to where the line is drawn in attempting to provide an explanation. This dilemma has been

6. Such as in the cases of Lambton Shipping Co., Sunderland and Thomas Wilson Son and Co., Hull.

more than adequately summed up by Professor Walsh

"When we begin to put down those antecedents of a phenomenon which sufficed to bring it about it is by no means plain what circumstances should be included; every factor we add calls for the addition of further co-operating factors, so that we are threatened with having to say that the causes of any historical event must be all the events which preceded it. To produce a list of causes for any given historical happening which is at once complete and limited is at the lowest estimate a task of some difficulty."(7)

The resolution of this problem has to be an individual, and to some extent, an arbitrary one.

In making any such decision in the context of this research cognisance must, of course, be taken of the fact that the establishment of the N.A.S.F.U. and the Shipping Federation was influenced by, and indeed was an important part of the history of the labour movement of the time, and in particular New Unionism. However, the social and political events of that period have been well documented and the concern here is to examine the specific experience of the shipping industry. In this respect it is essential to take account of the fact that the shipping industry did not undergo its own 'industrial revolution' until the second half of the nineteenth century, furthermore the economic climate in which it operated was often dissimilar to other industries. The formation of the N.A.S.F.U. and the Shipping Federation must, therefore, be analysed as much in terms of the long run trends within the industry as a manifestation of specific grievances at a particular moment in time.

7. Walsh W.H. An Introduction to the Philosophy of History
Hutchinson University Library London (1970), p.191

CHAPTER II
THE INDUSTRIAL CONTEXT

The shipping industry was revolutionised during the second half of the nineteenth century, the most fundamental changes taking place during the two decades after 1870, with the transition from sail to a predominance of steel/steam tonnage.

The transformation of the industry was a response to the demands of the industrialisation of Europe and the opening up of increasingly distant markets of the Americas, Australasia and the Far East. The implications for the growth of international trade were such that it has been calculated to have expanded in value terms from £800m in 1850 to £3,900m in 1899.⁽¹⁾

In response to this demand, the world fleet, during the period 1850 to 1890, more than doubled in net tonnage terms with the United Kingdom continuing to retain between 30% and 40% of that total. Such growth necessitated the use of existing sail technology to its limits and also resulted in the application of steel and steam to shipping.

This is illustrated in Table 1 together with the fact that the growth of the U.K. fleet resulted in a 50% increase in the employment of seafarers.

1. Imlah A.H. Economic Elements in Pax Britannica
Harvard University Press Cambridge Mass. (1958), p.189

TABLE II:1 PROGRESS OF UK AND WORLD SHIPPING 1850-1890

YEAR	WORLD NET REG TONNAGE TOTAL (MILLIONS)	UK TOTAL AS % OF WORLD TONNAGE	U.K. SAIL			U.K. STEAM			NO.OF BRITISH SEAFARERS
			NO.OF VESSELS (000)	NET REG TONNAGE (MILLIONS)	% OF WORLD TONNAGE	NO.OF VESSELS (000)	NET REG TONNAGE (MILLIONS)	% OF WORLD TONNAGE	
1850	9.03	39.47	24.8	3.40	40.9	1.2	0.17	23.0	159,563
1860	13.3	34.80	25.7	4.20	35.49	2.0	0.45	31.32	171,592
1870	16.8	33.94	23.2	4.57	32.44	3.2	1.11	41.93	195,962
1880	19.99	32.88	19.9	3.85	26.48	5.2	2.72	49.97	192,975
1890	22.26	35.83	14.2	2.93	24.43	7.4	5.04	49.20	236,109 (1)

(1) Including 'Lascus'

Source:- Report of Select Committee on Merchant Shipping (53) 1860. Parl.Papers xiii

Parl.Papers 1899. Vol.ixiii

Parl.Papers 1901. Vol.ixviii

The table also shows that the U.K. fleet was going through a transition from sail to steam technology, the crucial two decades being between 1870 and 1890. The exact nature and ramifications of this transition is a subject of academic debate.⁽²⁾ However, the growth is not evenly reflected in the different sectors of the industry. For example, during the decade 1860 to 1870, U.K. sailing tonnage reached its absolute maximum of nearly 5m tons, a peak followed by a long decline. Moreover, as a percentage of the world sailing tonnage throughout the period, it was steadily contracting.

On the other hand, steam, in tonnage terms, was approximately doubling each decade, although it did not overtake sail until 1882 in net tonnage terms, and 1885 in gross tonnage terms, and it did not equal the peak of sail until 1890. By the time Britain's percentage of world steam tonnage began to stabilise in the 1880's it represented one half.

The principle of steam propulsion had, of course, been established early in the nineteenth century, but to make it economically viable as an alternative to sail, major technological problems had to be overcome. Of fundamental importance

2. E.G., Graham G.S. 'The Ascendancy of the Sailing Ship, 1850-85'. Economic History Review Vol. ix (1956-7), Hughes J.R.T & Reiter S. 'The First 1945 British Steamships', The Journal of American Statistical Association liii (1958) & Harley C.K. 'The Shift from Sailing Ships to Steamships, 1885-1890: A Study in Technological Change and its Diffusion' in Essays on a Mature Economy: Britain after 1840 Ed. McCloskey D.N. Harvard University Press (1971)

was the inefficiency of fuel consumption; in the early stages of development for example, the coal bunkers utilised much of the vessel's carrying capacity. This problem was not adequately solved until the 1880's with the introduction of triple expansion and the high pressure boiler. Therefore, throughout much of the second half of the 19th, whilst steam ships were increasingly being used, they were restricted to the shorter and subsidised routes with sail continuing to predominate over the longer distances and in the tramp trade. Even where steam is stated as the motive power, none, except for a few coasters built before the 1880's, were pure steamers; they were rather combinations of sail and steam with steam becoming increasingly the dominant motive power.

The adoption of metal ship construction, an important feature of the industry in the second half of the 19th was similarly sluggish. This was in part due to the need for a totally new set of construction criteria but also to the imperfections of the iron used. The lack of uniformity in the quality of iron plates was not completely overcome until the late 1850's, but the more persistent problem was that of corrosion and the fouling of iron hulls. This not only seriously reduced vessel speed and shortened life but it created substantial direct costs for cleaning and the like.⁽³⁾ This was one of the main reasons for the production of

3. Ibid. Graham G.S.

composition built vessels, that is having iron frames and a wooden shell or skin, usually teak, coppered to further prevent fouling, which was popular from 1860 to 1880.

Steamships were in the vanguard of the conversion of the U.K. fleet to metal construction. Sail moved only slowly into metal vessels, but took comparatively rapid advantage of composition building.

The substitution of steel for iron was even more gradual. The expense of steel construction was not compensated for by an increase in deadweight capacity and hence higher freight earning ability as was the conversion from wood to iron.

"As with wooden construction, limits were imposed on the iron ships by the difficulties of rendering in iron structures items of the required strength and weight beyond a certain size. Faced with this problem, shipbuilders investigated the possibility of using steel for constructing the hull, and the first steel ship was built in 1858. But the steel available at the time, Bessemer steel, lacked uniformity of quality and was thus technically unsuitable for shipbuilding. Moreover it was six times as expensive per ton as iron. For these reasons steel was rarely used and between 1866 and 1876 only three small vessels were registered at Lloyds as built of steel." (4)

Encouraged by the Admiralty, steel of a high quality and in larger quantities began to be produced, and in 1877 Lloyds introduced rules for construction, survey and rating of steel vessels. The cost disparity between iron and steel was only gradually eroded and the transfer was fairly slow.

4. Jones L. Shipbuilding in Britain: Mainly between The Two World Wars University of Wales Press Cardiff (1957) p.22

TABLE II:2 SOME INDICATORS OF TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE
IN UK FLEET SELECTED YEARS (1850-1895) (NET TONS)

YEAR	SIZE OF VESSELS 7 YEAR MOVING AVERAGE				AVERAGE SIZE ALL VESSELS USING SUEZ CANAL (5)	% OF TOTAL TONNAGE STEAM (6)
	ALL SAIL (1)	METAL BUILT SAIL (2)	ALL STEAM (3)	METAL BUILT STEAM (4)		
1850	138.27	508.32 (1855)	149.94	387.17 (1855)	-	4.7
1860	169.24	550.98	236.66	391.56	-	9.7
1870	192.42	777.46	362.24	597.35	898	19.6
1875	196.01	982.55	457.73	679.86	1,345	31.6
1880	195.33	945.29	526.01	787.11	1,509	41.4
1885	200.69	983.16	600.97	741.78	1,748	53.5
1890	214.77	1088.92	669.25	885.91	2,033	63.2
1895	223.02	501.54	726.95	932.7955	2,460	68.1

Source:- Columns 1 to 4: based on Mitchell B.R. and Dean D. Abstract of British Historical Statistics (1963) Cambridge University Press.

Column 5: Kirkaldy A.W. British Shipping; its History, Organisation and Importance (1914) Appendix IV, Kegan Paul Trench Trubner & Co.Ltd.

Column 6: Deakin B.M. and Seward T. Shipping Conferences: A Study of their Origins, Development and Economic Practice. (1973) Cambridge University Press. p.19

The importance of the substitution of iron for steel lies in the potential it offered for the increase of vessel size. Even as late as 1869, 83% of U.K. vessels were under 1,200 net tons, the modal group (45%) were between 420 tons and 1,200 tons. Of the remaining, 17% over 1200 net tons only 1.2% were over 2,000 tons, with 0.3% over 4,000 tons. (This was constituted by Brunel's 'Great Eastern' of 18,914 net tons; in the present context this must be looked upon as a freak, her size was not surpassed until 1900.)

Table II:2 confirms the small average size of vessels. The seven year moving average of vessel size shows sail overall to be confined to the smaller vessels. Nevertheless they were involved in the technological change, since in the category, "metal built", sail remained the larger average vessel until after 1890. However, vessels in the category "all steam" may be seen to be larger than those contained in "all sail" and were expanding gradually throughout the period. This table is only concerned with averages and does not give an indication of the differing rates of growth in vessel size in various trades which would be difficult to illustrate. Also, whilst the table does confirm the small average size of vessels, it does include small coasters, home trade and short sea vessels thus underestimating the increasing size of vessels in the foreign going fleet, which in tonnage terms would constitute in the region of 70% of the total U.K. fleet. The underestimation is, to some extent, rectified by column 5 which shows the average size of all vessels passing through the Suez canal, which increased by some 27% between 1870 and 1890, and approximately 70% of these vessels were on the U.K. register.

TABLE II:3

PERCENTAGE OF WORLD SHIPPING OWNED BY MAJOR MARITIME NATIONS
AND TOTAL WORLD TONNAGE -- 1850-1900
(MILLION TONS NET - SAIL AND STEAM)

COUNTRY	1850 %	1860 %	1870 %	1880 %	1890 %
U.K.	39.47	34.80	33.94	32.88	35.83
U.S.A. (1)	17.55 (38.58)	19.15 (39.51)	9.04 (25.02)	6.76 (20.38)	4.25 (19.87)
GERMAN EMPIRE	-	-	5.85	5.91	6.43
FRANCE	7.61	7.49	6.39	4.59	4.23
NORWAY	3.30	4.20	6.10	7.59	7.66
ITALY	-	-	6.03	4.99	3.32
SWEDEN	-	-	2.08	2.51	2.29
JAPAN	-	-	-	0.20	0.63
WORLD'S TOTAL NET MILLION TONS	9,032	13,295	16,765	19,991	22,265

(1) Bracket = Total U.S.A. tonnage - ocean, river and lake.

SOURCE:-- Progress of Merchant Shipping. Cd. 6180. 1912

Whilst the U.K. was in the forefront of these technological advances, it by no means had a monopoly, operating as it did in the international market which is peculiar to shipping. This was an increasingly competitive market with the growth of other fleets which were reflecting their own economic development and taking advantage of the concomitant increase in international seaborne trade. Table II:3 gives an indication of the growth of major maritime fleets in the period 1850 to 1890 and also indicates the tremendous growth in supply since international tonnage increased nearly two and a half times.

Britain's only serious rival was the U.S.A. who with its lake and river tonnage surpassed that of Britain in the 1850's and 1860's. However, the American Civil War marked the end of United States aspirations, because what capital was available was being used for opening up the interior. In any event, the underdeveloped and high cost nature of her engineering and metal industries inhibited benefit from the technological innovations.⁽⁵⁾

The later decades of the century witnessed the emergence of competitors with immense potential, such as Norway and Germany. In a general examination, their totals are insignificant compared to that of the U.K., but as competitors in particular trades they were of major importance. Some measure of the growing rivalry in respect of steam tonnage can be seen in Table II:4.

5. See *ibid.*, p.7

TABLE II:4

THE PROPORTION OF BRITISH STEAM TONNAGE ENTERED AND CLEARED (with cargoes/in ballast)
FOREIGN TRADE OF PRINCIPAL MARITIME COUNTRIES, BRITISH COLONIES AND THE U.K.

COUNTRY	1860 %	1870 %	1875 %	1880 %	1885 %	1890 %	1895 %	PEAK YEAR
NORWAY		53.0	27.0	26.6	22.6	21.4	19.2	1870
SWEDEN			18.5	23.3	27.1	27.8	27.2	1890
DENMARK				16.3	17.9	13.7	13.8	1885
GERMANY				49.2	39.2	38.3	41.1	1880
HOLLAND	68.1	77.9	71.2	61.6	56.7	55.0	55.5	1870
BELGIUM	68.6	78.9	74.0	65.8	61.6	53.4	51.3	1870
PORTUGAL		86.9	75.8	72.5	65.8	56.7	55.6	1870
SPAIN						34.9	32.6	1890
ITALY		36.0	41.0	43.3	53.6	55.9	46.7	1890
U.S.A.		47.1	53.2	66.7	60.2	59.0	56.1	1880
CHILE			79.8	89.7	47.1	41.3	48.0	1880
ARGENTINE				44.2	28.8	45.6	29.3	1880) 1890)
<u>BRITISH AND COLONIAL TONNAGE</u>								
DOMINION OF CANADA				61.3	61.0	53.1	57.5	1880
NEWFOUNDLAND				89.7	99.6	96.4	96.0*	1890
CAPE OF GOOD HOPE					98.4	96.4	96.6	1890
NATAL					99.9	99.9	95.9	1890
NEW ZEALAND						88.0	93.4	1895
BRITISH INDIA				92.6	87.0	89.9	86.8	1880
U.K.	84.3	88.5	83.3	83.2	80.4	79.5	78.1	1870
ALL BRITISH SHIPPING as % SUEZ CANAL TRAFFIC			74.16	79.33	76.77	77.37	71.76	1880 (1881)

* 1896

SOURCE:- Parliamentary Papers 1899 LXXXVII, 1907 Vol.LXXV, 1913 Vol.LX

In virtually all major maritime countries' trade, including that of the U.K., the British steam fleet participation reached its zenith before 1890. This is particularly so where nations were busily engaged in building up their own fleets, the obvious example being Norway. All the industrialising nations included in the table seem to combine this with some maritime ambition to the detriment of U.K. steam tonnage.

In some trades there is evidence of extremely rigorous competition causing a substantial and swift contraction in U.K. participation. Chile is the obvious example, and to a lesser extent the Argentine, the figure given for the latter in 1890 is a non-representative exception.

The trades in which U.K. activity did not suffer quite so severely were those of the Empire, and here the majority are firmly in U.K. bottoms, with a peak in the 1890's. The following contraction was gradual and marginal, apart from British India and Newfoundland, and remarkably the U.K. herself, where the peak was considerably earlier. This group contains the single example of continued expansion, that of New Zealand.

The final column indicates the use British tonnage, as a whole, made of the Suez Canal. The vast majority here was steam, due to the navigation problems of sail. In many respects, this column can be said to mirror the competition experienced in most trades, the peak being reached in 1881.

Although a strong challenge was developing towards the end of the century, Britain was able to maintain her maritime supremacy. She was able to do this in the main by taking

advantage, indeed being in the vanguard, of the steam/steel technology, but also by being prepared to respond to the expansion and diversification of international trade. For the individual shipowner, however, it was the specific effect of foreign competition, often very serious in particular trades, that would have been most important.

The technological advances and growth of foreign competition in the second half of the 19th had a profound impact on both the shipowners and seafarer in both influencing their actions and redefining their relationships.

CHAPTER III

THE SHIPOWNER

The transformation of world shipping and the fact that the international position of the U.K. fleet was increasingly being called into question during the last quarter of the C19th necessitated considerable adaptation on the part of the British shipowner. Adaptation which, of course, interacted with, as well as resulted from, the changes the industry was undergoing. However, to see the actions of the shipowners in this period merely in the context of increasing international competition is too simplistic since it masks many of the problems which the individual owner had to face. The dynamics of change intensified competition within the national fleet, thus undermining the community of interest of those engaged in the maritime industry, and making consideration of the level of investment, the control of variable costs and reaction to long and short term economic trends vital management decisions.

Perhaps the most obvious example and progenitor of both international and national competition was the development of steam as a commercially viable motive power in shipping. This meant that sail was increasingly placed in a vulnerable competitive position. The advantages of steam strengthened the already existing movement towards specialisation and away from the general purpose tramp.⁽¹⁾ The liner company⁽²⁾

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1. e.g., generally a dry cargo 'tween deck vessel, which is provided on time or voyage charter for the carriage of bulk cargo, not confined to one particular trade or route.
 2. e.g., companies with ships providing regular scheduled service between a number of ports available for the transportation of parcels of cargo and/or passengers and mail.

prospered with the advent of steam, although first established under sail when the day of first sailing was stipulated, steam propulsion gave greater regularity for it became possible to establish a regular itinerary of arrival and departure all along the route.

The creation and provision of such services required not only high class tonnage, but substantial shore establishments capable of servicing and marshalling heterogeneous cargoes. Therefore, to the increased capital investment was added the organisational needs of the liner companies, demanding larger amounts of capital than that required by the general purpose tramp, especially under sail, and also of a different quality directed to long term, rather than to speculative, investment, aimed at procuring a steady regular dividend.

An important reason for the availability of adequate capital for the changing technology and restructuring of the fleet was the concurrent emergence of a more diverse and, in some cases, new type of ownership.⁽³⁾

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3. See Neal F. 'Liverpool Shipping in the Early Nineteenth Century' in Liverpool and Merseyside. ed. Harris J.R. Frank Cass and Co.Ltd., London (1969), p.161-162 and Paget-Tomlinson E.W. The History of the Bibby Line Bibby Line Ltd., Liverpool (1969)

By the 1860's there existed a continuum of types of ownership, with the owner/operator, who in some trades lasted until the end of the century⁽⁴⁾ at one end, and the massive companies which became household words, such as P & O at the other. In between there were a range of family firms and small partnerships. But increasingly, the larger operating groups with names such as Alfred Jones, Owen Phillips, Thomas Ismay, the Booths, Bibbys, Brocklebanks and Ellermans, must be seen as dynastic rather than simply family concerns.

With the development of a modern organisational and industrial structure, what had originally appeared to be the paramount difference between steam and sail became much less significant with the general acceptance of the inevitable demise of the latter. The major divisions lay in the amount of capital employed, the most obvious being that between liner and tramp companies, but within these broad groupings further sub-divisions were becoming increasingly important. At the apex of this capital structure stood the large liner companies, usually concentrating on passenger transportation. These were among the first to reject the traditional methods of financing and were busily transforming themselves, often through amalgamations, into oligopolies, typical more of the C20th than the late C19th. Commenting on this process, Dyos

4. See Villiers A. 'Evidence from the Logs' in Problems of Ships Management and Operation 1870-1900 National Maritime Museum Monograph No.5 London (1972)

and Aldcroft state :

"But as the size and capital cost of ships increased such primitive forms of organisation eventually became obsolete. The advantage to be derived from incorporation encouraged many concerns to convert their businesses into limited liability companies from the 1860s onwards. This was particularly true of the liner companies who were anxious to secure more money for expansion. By 1885, 19 companies with a total loan and share capital of £15 million controlled about one third of the total steam tonnage of the United Kingdom." (5)

This national experience is confirmed by developments in a major port,

"In 1870 the ten principal shipping companies in Liverpool had an employed as distinct from nominal capital of £3.5 million. By 1875 this had increased to £4.8 million and by 1880 to £5.6 million." (6)

Below the giants lay the medium or small liner companies whose business was concentrated on the movement of parcels of cargo entailing less capital commitment, although it was by no means insignificant. The employed capital of six of these medium sized companies sailing from Liverpool expanded from £1.45 million in 1870 to £14.38 million in 1914. These figures are at current prices.

"If a constant price index is applied, capital growth shows a ninefold increase; if also this increase is given the additional support of a fivefold growth in tonnage, a trebling of imports, and a quadrupling of exports, by value, one can judge this achievement, largely self-financed, as dynamic and highly profitable." (7)

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5. Dyos H.J. and Aldcroft D.H. British Transport: An Economic Survey from the Seventeenth Century to the Twentieth. Leicester University Press. Leicester (1969) p.264
 6. Hyde F.E. Liverpool and the Mersey: An Economic History of a Port 1700-1970 David and Charles Newton Abbot (1971) p.63
 7. Ibid. taken from table p.114

Tramps represented a wide spectrum of capital involvement. By the 1880's the general purpose tramp section contained virtually all the sailing tonnage in the U.K. fleet, and much of the older steam tonnage. But serious inroads were being made into their trade with the appearance of steam tonnage built for a specific and often limited function, such as the conveyance of oil, ⁽⁸⁾ timber, ore, cattle on the hoof and frozen meat from the Southern Hemisphere, which began in 1880 and by 1893 had grown to nearly 4 million carcasses annually. ⁽⁹⁾ Developments of this kind were confined to the bigger tramp owning companies, for it necessitated large capital commitment to specialised and limited trading. At the other end of the tramp section lay the one ship company owned by a single individual; these were often master owned vessels, usually sail or obsolete steam tonnage, completely depreciated and operating on a shoestring, but, like all tramp owners, eager to compete in any and all possible trades.

There is not, as yet, a statistical break down of the fleet into these categories for this period of the 19th. The first was produced by Isserlis for 1914, on which the following table is based.

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8. Lloyds Register of Shipping 1911 London (1911). Records 282 bulk oil carriers of which 48 were sailing vessels.
 9. Kirkaldy A.W. British Shipping: Its History, Organisation and Importance. Kegan, Paul, Trench, Trubner and Co. Ltd. London (1914) Appendix III.

TABLE III:1 PERCENTAGE OF TYPES OF TONNAGE IN U.K. FOREIGN GOING FLEET IN 1914 (JUNE)
(EXCLUDING TRADE BETWEEN ELBE AND BREST LIMITS)

TRADE TYPES	(1) TRAMPS	(2) TANKERS	(A) CARGO LINERS	(B) PASSENGER LINERS	(C) MIXED CARGO & PASSENGER LINERS	TOTAL TRAMPS & TANKERS (1&2) Cols	TOTAL LINERS (A&B&C) Cols	TOTAL IN REAL TERMS	% OF TOTAL OF ALL U.K. TRADES AND TONNAGE
NUMBER OF VESSELS	32.90	4.28	40.36	1.70	20.64	37.28	62.70	2,465	71.44
NET TONNAGE	24.21	4.50	37.51	5.70	28.05	28.71	71.26	7.35 (million)	93.13
GROSS TONNAGE	24.01	4.40	36.77	6.32	28.46	28.41	71.55	11.8 (million)	92.23

ESTIMATES BASED ON:- ISSERLIS L. Tramp Shipping Cargo and Freights. Royal Statistical Society. Vol.C.1. May, 1938

It is difficult to assess how far the process of sectionalisation had proceeded over the previous three decades; possibly the liner sections had expanded at the expense of the tramp section in percentage terms.⁽¹⁰⁾ Nevertheless it is certainly true that the last quarter of the nineteenth century saw the decline of the 'traditional' homogeneity of the patterns of U.K. ship ownership.

This restructuring of the U.K. industry was taking place against a background of increasing international competition which emphasised the problems faced by the individual shipowner. In addition to which he had to be more sensitive to world trends because of the improved methods of communication due to the expansion of the cable and postal services. The effects of the increasingly competitive market may be traced in the growing instability of the freight rates. Freight rates are, of course, the price of shipping services which are created in an international competitive market where demand and supply interact. In periods of an excess of supply in relation to derived demand for the service, all

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10. N.B. Many pre-war and post 1914-18 war writers estimate the size of tramp fleet substantially higher i.e., "tramp vessels constituted some 60% of the total tonnage of shipping under the British flag prior to the war ..."
James C.S. Cyclical Fluctuations in the Shipping and Shipbuilding Industries. University of Pennsylvania Press. Philadelphia (1927) p.33

other things being equal, price, (freight rates,) will contract; similarly when there is an excess demand, freights will rise.

The violently fluctuating rates experienced by ship-owners in the last quarter of the 19th were in fact, part of a long run trend of falling freights. Analysing rate movements for the period following Waterloo, North estimates

"from 1815 to the end of the first decade of the 20th freight rates declined. Actually this decline was interrupted after the middle of the century, so that there were really two periods of decline, 1815 to 1851, and 1870 to 1873 (various turning dates on different routes) to 1908 to 1909." (11)

For the shipowner, the early 1870's boom, associated with the opening of the Suez Canal and the Franco-German War, marked the end of a period of comparatively stable freight rates and the beginning of a long term cyclical decline. A decline broken only by short cycle booms, whose peaks never reached the height of their predecessors.

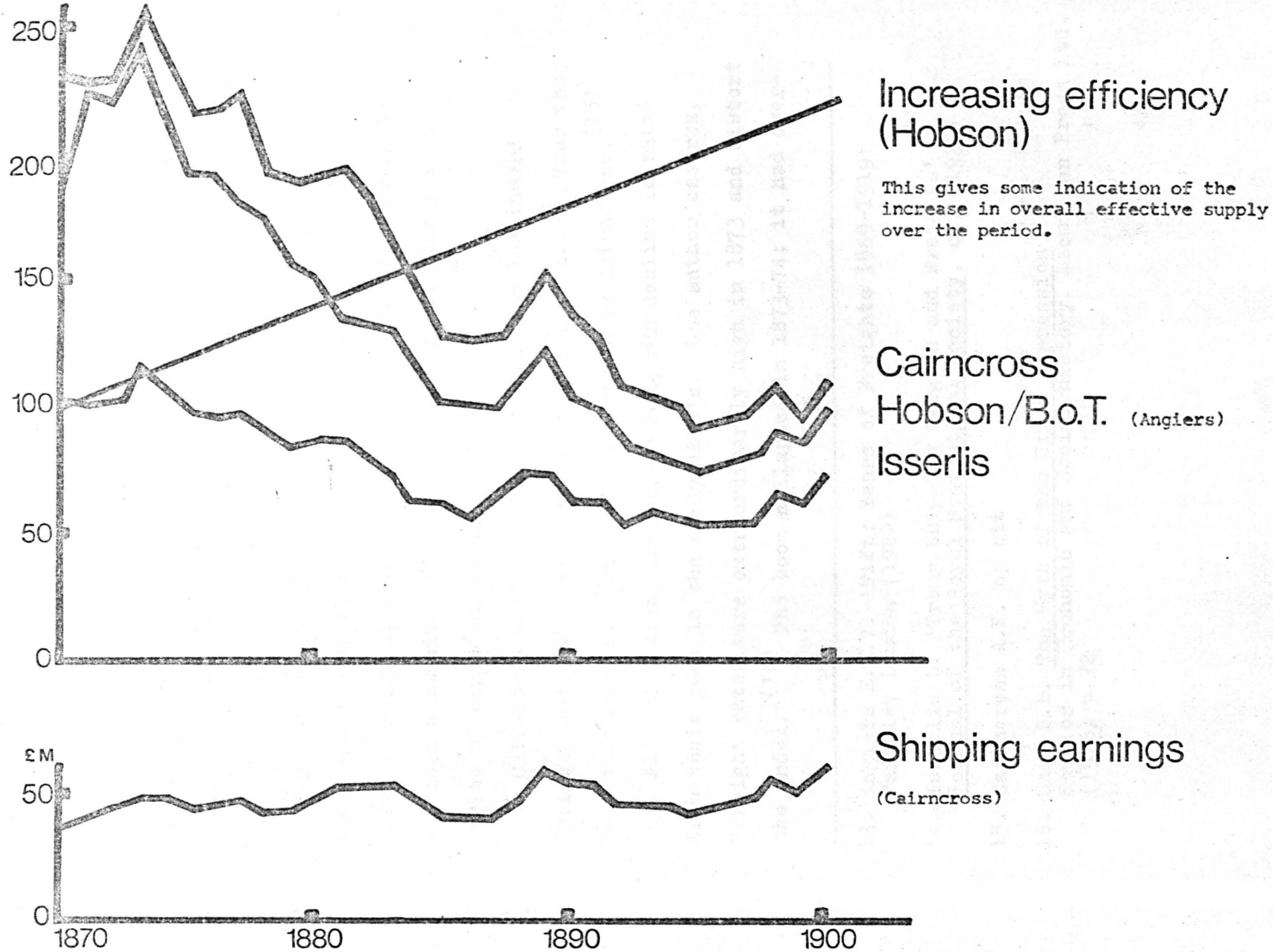
Freight rates are the most easily available indicators of the level of shipping prosperity. Graph III:1 gives various estimates of the freight index during the period.

These indices use different base years, but this detracts little from the general impression and similarity of trends. The Hobson index prior to 1884 relies heavily on tramp freights in particular the coal freight outward; it has been criticised for using only a small number of quotations of inward freights. (12)

11. North D. 'Ocean Freight Rates and Economic Development 1750-1913' Journal of Economic History Vol.18. 1958 p.542

12. Cairncross A.K. Home and Foreign Investment 1870-1919 Cambridge University Press. (1953) p.175

Hobson C.K. The Export of Capital. Constable. London (1914) Chapter VII.



From 1884 onwards it is based on the Board of Trade index built on data collected in 1904; it includes liner freights, this differs only marginally from the index produced by E.A.V. Angier.⁽¹³⁾ This latter index represents a weighted average of freights for the whole year, as a result they do not give a complete picture of those years in which freights were very active. Isserlis tramp rates are based on a fairly narrow unweighted average chain index.⁽¹⁴⁾ All the above had the problem of giving equal weight to inward and outward freights; this creates a bias since coal freights are such a massive influence outward, particularly in a period of expanding coal exports.

Cairncross used Angiers' index but doubled inward freights and took some cognisance of liner rates. Thus the best indicator appears to be that given by Cairncross.⁽¹⁵⁾

All the indices indicate a long run decline in rates from their peak in the early 1870's. One author asserts, "Freight rates were extraordinarily high in 1873 and distort the index."⁽¹⁶⁾ The boom collapsed in 1873-74; it had over-

13. Angiers E.A.V. 'Fifty Years of Freights 1869-1919' Fairplay London (1920)

14. Isserlis L. 'Tramp Shipping Cargoes and Freights' Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, ci, (1938)

15. Cairncross A.K. op cit

16. Saul S.B. The Myth of the Great Depression Studies in Economic and Social History. Macmillan Press Ltd. (1976) p.22

reached itself with a huge output of tonnage ordered and constructed, flooding onto the market. D. Marx sees this slump as vital in understanding the modern economic history of shipping, for it is here that the oversupply of tonnage which has characterised the freight market since begins.⁽¹⁷⁾ Rates remained low until some stability returned in the late 1870s, assisted by the Russo-Turkish war. This stability lasted until 1880-81, when rates began to contract seriously. A depression of considerable depth developed in the mid 1880s reaching its nadir in 1886 and early 1887. This was followed by the freight rates rising unexpectedly and by August 1888, the view was

"The revival in freights, which commenced in the second half of last year has at length reached a stage where fair profits are realisable, and where hopes of still further improvement are warranted."⁽¹⁸⁾

The peak was reached in 1889. This substantial rise in freights induced an expansion in shipbuilding, the increase in supply and a slowing down in the growth of business activity brought the inevitable fall in 1890. A decline which continued with only minor interruption until the late 1890s. The Board of Trade, commenting on the index

17. Marx D. International Shipping Cartels : A Study of Industrial Self-Regulation by Shipping Conferences. Greenwood Press Publishers. New York (1953) p.31

18. Fairplay, 17 August, 1888

for the period states,

"That subject to minor fluctuations, due doubtless to the special conditions prevailing in particular trades from time to time, the trends of inward and outward freight rates as a whole has been generally similar. In both cases the maximum year of the period was 1889, a time of great commercial activity throughout the world. Thence freight rates declined until the year 1895 and 1896 after which they recovered until a second maximum point was reached in 1900, a year when trade was very good, and when the South African War made great demands on shipping for transport purposes. It will be seen that inward freight rates showed an intermediate maximum point in 1898, the year of the Spanish American War." (19)

There were similar fluctuations in Isserlis tramp rates but with some slight differences in peaks, these occurred in 1873, 1881, 1888 and 1900, with progressively lower cyclical levels reached in 1879, 1886 and 1892, and in addition there was a long trough from 1895 to 1897.

This analysis is based on the rates paid to British shipping, but freight rates are an international price, and it seems that this experience was reflected in the U.S. freight rates, a market in which British shipping operated extensively, North estimates these as follows⁽²⁰⁾:-

19. Quoted in Johnson E.J. Ocean and Inland Water Transportation. London (1906) p.186

20. North D.C. The Role of Transportation in the Economic Development of North America. Quoted in Saul S.B. op cit p.22

TABLE III:2

INDEX OF AVERAGE ANNUAL U.S. FREIGHT RATES (1830=100)

1865 - 9	47.7 (42.2)	1885 - 9	30.8 (33.5)
1870 - 4	54.4 (42.5)	1890 - 4	29.4 (34.5)
1875 - 9	50.4 (43.3)	1895 - 9	27.9 (35.9)
1880 - 4	38.6 (33.4)		

The figures in the brackets

"Show the deflated index or an index of the 'real' price of shipping obtained by eliminating the general price movement from actual freight rates paid. This shows little change from 1850 to the end of the 1870s and further reductions after 1900." (21)

The table emphasises the heights of the 1873 boom and "shows no downward trend until the 1880s" when there is a sharp fall. The decline continues at a reduced rate for the remainder of the century, however "the 1880s are the crucial decade." (22)

Quite apart from the commercial problems presented by a violently fluctuating market, there was also the problem of attracting investment, particularly at a time of rapid technological diversification, and with the long run decline in freight rates resulting in an expectation that the profits of shipping companies would also decline. Annual reports of shipping companies at this time indicate that this was so.

21. Saul S.B. *ibid.* p.23

22. *ibid.* p.22

"Other factors will, of course, affect the profitability of companies and no definite relationship can be established between the fall in freight rates and the profitability of shipping companies. We put it forward however, as one of the possible reasons why shipping companies should have been induced in the 1870's to form combinations among themselves to raise prices (freight rates) and to regenerate the trade." (23)

It seems that following the comparatively halcyon days of the mid-decades of the century and the boom of the early 1870's a long run contraction in profits per ton began, which was to continue as the underlying trend at least until the late 1890's. Although there has as yet been no adequate research this presumably means a contraction in profits or returns as a percentage of capital employed.

This contraction was reflected in a decline in the value of investment in shipping. This occurred in a period when its magnitude in net and gross tonnage terms doubled. Dean and Cole comment on the value of new construction that

"it was still growing faster than national income in the 1860's and 1870's but it slumped sharply - in absolute as well as in relative terms - in the late 1880's." (24)

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23. Deakin B.M. in collaboration with Seward T. Shipping Conferences: A Study of Their Origins, Development and Economic Practices. University of Cambridge Department of Applied Economics. Occasional Paper 37. Cambridge University Press (1973) p.21
24. Deane P. and Cole W.A. British Economic Growth 1688-1959 Cambridge University Press (1964) p.235

Maywald made estimates of the value of the British fleet during the period which he summarised in the following table.

TABLE III: 3
FIRST COST VALUE AT (£M)

<u>Years</u>	<u>Historical Price</u>	<u>Current Price</u>
1870-74	144	169
1875-79	185	187
1880-84	214	187
1885-89	203	185
1890-94	249	180
1895-99	244	181

Source: Maywald K. 'The Construction Costs and the Value of the British Merchant Fleet, 1850-1938.' The Scottish Journal of Political Economy Vol.III, 1956.

In terms of his historical price a peak is reached in 1880-1884 followed by a decline in the next half decade. In current price terms, values remained static for the decade 1875-1884, then fell for a decade, recovering only marginally by the end of the century. Shipowners were well aware of the deterioration in the value of their investment. For example, in his evidence to a Royal Commission in the spring of 1886, E.P. Bates, a Liverpool shipowner, when asked,

"Has the fall in shipping been very great in late years?"

replied

"In the past 3 or 4 years it has been heavier than I ever remember it before. Take the Kistna, a ship that we built in 1883 for which we paid £26,500, I could build her today for about £19,500."

"Are these sailing ships?"

"Yes. In steam depreciation has been much heavier." (25)

25. Final Report of the Royal Commission on Loss of Life at Sea. C.5227. Parl.Papers Vol.XIII 1887, para. 16,573 and 4

The feeling about the value of investment in shipping was summed up by another contemporary shipowner, Joseph Hoult, when he wrote

"No industry shows such a deplorable state of affairs ... Twenty years ago shipping was a favourable investment, both to the capitalist and the small investor; now the capitalist and the small investor shun shipping ... The liabilities of a shareholder in shipping are enormous - far greater and more numerous than is the case with any other industry in the country, and this, with the loss of capital is naturally a deterrent to investment in such securities." (26)

The liner companies with their extremely large investment were particularly susceptible to the effects of the cyclical freight rate and they were assiduously seeking stable freights. They sought protection for their vast capital commitment, for the operation of any service necessitates substantial overhead costs, making them vulnerable to what became known as 'cut throat competition'. This emanated from the lower cost steam tramps and the increasingly more efficient sailing tonnage capable of quoting rates far below those of liners. For, apart from boom periods,

"cost is the bedrock of freight rates. In a competitive market freight rates will be driven down to the level of costs. The tramp market is substantially competitive, and the rates probably are explained almost entirely by the cost of operation." (27)

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25. (cont.) For similar statistics see *ibid* Yeoman F. para.7457-67. Anderson F. para.11,552-55, Brown D. para.12,937-57. Dixon J. para.14,292-95.
 26. Report of the Committee Appointed by the Board of Trade to Inquire into the Manning of British Ships. I-Report c.8127. Parl.Paper Vol.XL. 1896. p.51
 27. Bennathan E. and Walters A.A. The Economics of Ocean Freight Rates. F.A. Praeger. New York (1969) p.4

The solution to the liners' problem came with the establishment of the conference system to protect their interest.

Conferences has since become a generic term covering a wide variety of common services and obligations. They may be briefly defined so:

"A shipping conference is an incorporated association of mutually competitive liner operators, maintained for the purpose of a) controlling competition among its members and b) strengthening the members through co-operative action in the competitive freights against non-member carriers." (28)

Their purpose is essentially anti-competitive, in creating a stable price/freight system removing cyclical fluctuations and uncertainties.

Whilst they were undoubtedly created to combat outside competition, (section b) of the definition) the historical impetus came largely from the first section a) for vigorous competition had developed in the Far East trade among the U.K. liner companies. This was a result of the opening of the Suez Canal which brought immense changes to international seaborne trade. It removed much of the prohibitive cost of steamers operating in the East trade and in addition, its advantages were almost totally denied to sailing tonnage.

This was not due to the canal's construction but because of the difficulties in navigating the shallow and narrow gulf of Suez and the Red Sea with its persistent southerly winds.

28. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)
The Liner Conference System U.N.C.T.A.D. Secretariat.
U.N. New York (1970) para.12

The Canal opened in 1869 and initiated a vigorous boom in steam shipping.

"The years 1870 and 1871 brought enormous returns for steamship owners having large, first class steamers able to take the new route to the East via the Suez Canal. Their profits ran from 25% to 45% per year. With such profits it is understandable that steamship building was stimulated to the greatest activity. Even before the end of 1871 the editor of Mitchells Maritime Register estimated that £3.7 million had been laid out in vessels, engineers, equipment and stores for the Suez route." (29)

An increase in the supply of liner tonnage of this magnitude brought about an inevitable collapse in rates, and some liner operators perceived that the setting up of a conference might bring about some amelioration of the situation. Short term liner conferences had existed in the North Atlantic, Brazilian, Levant and China Trade,⁽³⁰⁾ but it is generally accepted that the one set up among the Calcutta trade marks the beginning of the permanent schemes.

29. Fletcher M.E. 'The Suez Canal and World Shipping 1869-1914' Journal of Economic History Vol.18 1958 p.561

30. For discussion of these, see Smith R.J. 'Ocean Freight Rates' Political Science Quarterly Vol.xxi No.2 1906
Marriner S. and Hyde F.E. The Senior John Samuel Swine, 1825-98 Liverpool University Press (1967) p.69
Hyde F.E. op cit (1971) p.104.

"In 1875 ... the seven British shipowners agreed among themselves (a) to regulate the number of sailings which each would make and (b) to fix equal minimum rates from all ports in the U.K. to Calcutta and from Calcutta to U.K. ports regardless of the size of the consignment or of the shipper. With the formation of the Conference the members undertook to sail on a given date regardless of whether they had a full cargo and the fixing of equal minimum rates of freight was meant to compensate for this." (31)

A system differing little from its predecessors and doing nothing to deter traders (shippers) from using competitors' liner or tramp tonnage offered at lower rates.

"To combat competition from outsiders, and in response to requests from shippers, it was agreed in 1887 to introduce a 'deferred rebate system' for shippers, in order to conserve the Conference's tariff system. The practice of offering rebates to exporters who had been a line's loyal customer for a given period of time was nothing new. It arose, no doubt, from the old custom of giving primage to the captain or shipper. The new, and significant, feature is the effort to combine the interest of owners and exporters, was the actual deferment of the rebate." (32)

It was in the use of these 'Loyalty' or Deferred Rebates that the strength of the new system lay, for the shipper had to demonstrate his loyalty, not only by giving all his business during the period of the contract, but to the end of a subsequent contract, only after which the rebate on the first contract was payable.

The rebate innovation tied the shipper firmly to the conferences and was the main reason the system spread, from

31. Deakin B.M. and Seward T. op cit p.24

32. Svendsen A.S. Sea Transport and Shipping Economics
Institut für Schiffahrtsforschung Bremen (1958) p.339

routes operating through Suez to China in 1879, Australasia in 1884, South Africa in 1895; other routes such as West Africa were covered in 1886, Brazil and the River Plate in 1895-6 and South America in 1904. By 1908 almost all U.K. outward cargoes except coal, special shipments and the North Atlantic trade were covered by agreements. Once established, conferences rapidly developed into complex and highly sophisticated institutions but they did not lessen the competitive pressure on the liner shipowners, rather they modified its direction.

"It is true that the conferences aimed at limiting competition and at forcing a greater share of trade into conference ships at the expense of outsiders. But as we shall see although conference agreements raised freights and net earnings and reduced outside competition to some extent, the 'increased' competition between the conference members themselves leading them into large new building programmes both to increase their tonnage and modernise their fleet." (33)

Foreign liner competition persisted and this tonnage was often in receipt of subsidies even larger than those given to U.K. operators.⁽³⁴⁾ This competition was often internalised with foreign liners being invited, for a variety of reasons, to join U.K. dominated conferences. In these early years there were frequent bitter and expensive recurring rate wars,

33. Marriner S. and Hyde F.E. op cit (1967) p.135

34. See Select Committee on Steamship Subsidies H.C. 385, 1902 and Report on Bounties and Subsidies in Respect of Shipbuilding, Shipping and Navigation in Foreign Countries. Cd 6899 1913

for example in 1882 between T.J. Harrison and Brocklebanks,⁽³⁵⁾ and later in the decade in the Far East and Straits' Conference trades.⁽³⁶⁾ In addition there were companies such as R.P. Houston of Liverpool, who challenged Conferences with rate cutting until they were also accepted as members. This competition within the liner trades was accompanied by the persistent pressure from other sail and steam trades.

"If piece cargo rates on liners are raised widely above the general level, soon a dingy freighter will be announced on berth to take cargo over the same route as or under those of the more pretentious vessels." ⁽³⁷⁾

This was a very real threat since relatively few commodities can, in any strict sense, claim to be transported only by liner or only by tramp.⁽³⁸⁾ This does not deny that conferences have managed to secure much of the prime trade as their cost and price structure illustrated in the following

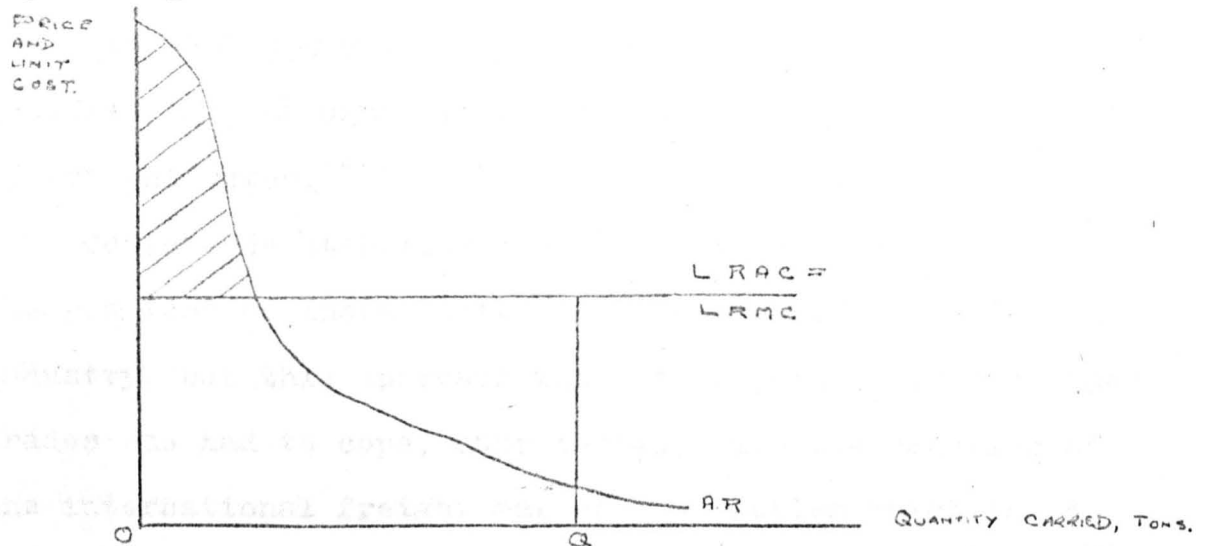
35. Hyde F.E. op cit (1971) p.101

36. Marriner S. and Hyde F.E. op cit (1967) Chapter 9

37. Gregg E.S. 'Vicissitude in the Shipping Trade 1870-1920' Quarterly Journal of Economics Vol.xxxv. 1921

38. See: Ferguson, Learner, McGee, Oi, Rapping and Sobotra The Economic Value of the United States Merchant Marine North Western University Press. Evanston U.S.A. (1961)

simple diagram shows:-



The long run average, and marginal cost curve (L.R.A.C. & L.R.M.C.) is horizontal and constant, because of the inability of conferences to take advantage of economies of scale.⁽³⁹⁾ The average revenue curve is somewhat similar to general tramp freight, the objective is to recoup as much potential profit (shaded area) as possible. But research has shown that this profit maximisation aim is often overshadowed by one of maximisation of utilisation or revenue.⁽⁴⁰⁾ All or any cargo must reduce costs, a statement termed the Conference Paradox. The 'paradox' of liner shipping is that far reaching price discrimination does not, in the absence of any economies of scale to speak of, and any appreciable

39. See Deakin B.M. and Seward T. op cit (1973) Chapter 4 and Jansson J.O. Costs and Price for the Carriage and Port Handling of General Cargo by Sea. I.C.H.C.A. U.S.A. (1971) Chapters 1, 6 and 7.

40. Ibid and Heaver T.D. 'A Theory of Shipping Conference Pricing and Policies.' Maritime Studies and Management Vol.1, No.1 (1973) Heaver T.D. 'The Structure of Liner Conference Rates.' Journal of Industrial Economics Vol.21, No.3 (1973) Abrahamsson 'Model of Liner Price Setting' Journal of Transport Economics and Policy No.2. May 1967

common costs, appear to produce high profits.⁽⁴¹⁾ Such an analysis admits the fact that conference agreements only modified the influence of competition and some stabilisation of freight rates.⁽⁴²⁾

Conference stability may have gone some way to solve the problems of instability for a section of the shipping industry, but this approach was inappropriate for non-liner trades who had to cope, unprotected, with the vagaries of the international freight market. A problem which faced the large majority of shipowners was that of insurance, particularly in view of the larger capital commitment, not only in terms of the vessel, but the cargo it carried. To cope with the need for adequate insurance cover, the shipowner increasingly turned to the locally organised Protection and Indemnity Clubs. These originated in the 18th century and were formed because of the unsatisfactory insurance cover offered in the outports, particularly of the North. Shipowners joined together on a mutual basis to insure their hulls and freights, and the introduction of third party risk and the general increase in the law relating to insurance created a growing need for such clubs. Some relief was granted to shipowners by the 1854 Merchant Shipping Act, yet in the wake of this Act came the first modern Protection and

41. Jansson J.O. op cit (1971) p.11

42. Deakin B.M. and Seward T. op cit Chapter 8.

Indemnity Clubs. Shipowners had to wait until 1874 before their liabilities were covered for cargo. In the same year, J. Stanley Matcalfe founded the Steamship Owners Mutual Protection and Indemnity Association which later, after an amalgamation with the North of England Protection Association (founded in 1860) formed the North of England Protection and Indemnity Association which was to develop into one of the most powerful of the Clubs which were being established and developing throughout the country⁽⁴³⁾ and which were later to play an important part in the formation of the Shipping Federation Limited.

These national and international economic and commercial pressures were not, however, the only ones with which the shipowner had to deal in the second half of the nineteenth century. To them must be added the exasperation they felt with the State's encroachment on what was regarded as their inalienable right to complete freedom of commercial decision-making. Since its inception, under the Merchant Shipping Act of 1850, the Marine Department of the Board of Trade had consistently been accused by the shipowner of interfering to

43. Sources for this summary: Singh N. and Colinvaux R. British Shipping Laws. Vol.13 Stevens (London 1965) and The History and Development of Protecting and Indemnity Clubs. Report of advanced study group No.109 of the Insurance Institute of London. London(Jan.1957)

the detriment of the industry. This was despite the constant affirmation by the Board of Trade of its impartiality and its essentially laissez faire attitude, epitomised in 1866 by Thomas Farrer, the Permanent Secretary of the Marine Department,

"They (shipowners) must look to self-interest and not to government regulations, as the great element of the safety of life on board ship." (44)

Two decades later, Thomas Gray, Assistant Secretary of the Board of Trade told a Royal Commission

"Their (Board of Trade) policy with regard to merchant shipping legislation, was to throw as much responsibility on the shipowner. They were very much averse to any legislative definitions of what safety was and what a shipowner ought to do. The prevailing idea that ran through the whole of their proposals is to throw on the owner the responsibility civil and (45) criminal, and then to interfere as little as possible."

Whilst this may sum up their aspirations, they were increasingly difficult to achieve because of the growing amount of legislation they were called upon to enforce. It has been estimated that in the three decades following the Merchant Shipping Act of 1854, there were no less than 50 Acts of Parliament relating to shipping.

The friction between the Board of Trade and the shipping interest was at its most intense during the period 1880-1885 when Chamberlain was President. His Merchant Shipping Bill

44. Journal of Society of Arts. Vol xix (1865-6)

45. Report on Loss of Life at Sea (1887) op cit para.5220-22

of February 1884, the intention of which was to make the safety of ships and crews "an object of substantial pecuniary interest to the owners" by drastically altering the law of marine insurance by bringing shipowners within the scope of the Liberal government's Employers' Liability Act of 1880, (46) caused the Hartlepool Shipowners Society to proclaim it

"was designed to abolish freedom of contract ...
(and) is one of the rashest measures ever
introduced into Parliament." (47)

The general discontent of the time was summed up by W.M.Roche, representing the British Shipowners Protection Association, in his evidence to a Royal Commission, when after criticising the Board's constitution, he claimed

"the discontent with the administration of the Board of Trade is so general, and all classes of shipowners have united so thoroughly and hostilely against it, that it is quite impossible to believe that all this irritation exists without some just cause." (48)

He went on to enumerate the defects of the Board of Trade, the lack of adequately trained and qualified officials, the habit of the department, during enquiries, to put inquisitorial questions to the shipowners, and finally he believed

46. Alderman G. 'Joseph Chamberlain's Attempted Reform of the British Mercantile Marine' Journal of Transport History. New Series Vol.1, No.3 Feb.1973, p.175

47. The Times Feb.28, 1884

48. Report Loss of Life at Sea (1887) op cit para.19,053

"the existing ill-feeling between the shipowners and the Board of Trade is very largely due to the unfortunate method adopted in this country of 'arousing public opinion' as it is called, passing Acts of Parliament affecting important trades. This system has had an effect of placing the Board of Trade and particularly its President in the position almost of public accuser of the shipowner." (49)

Chamberlain, in his Bill, was taking up the cause of Plimsoll who had been 'arousing public opinion' since 1868. The national campaign organised by Plimsoll faced the shipowner with a new problem which their local associations were inadequate to meet. In these circumstances, the importance of national co-ordination was recognised and during 1876 a Central Committee was formed by northern Protection and Indemnity Clubs, and two years later the Chamber of Shipping of the United Kingdom was established to represent the shipowners' views more effectively to the government and the public.

At this juncture, labour problems and relationships were still considered the province of the individual shipowner or, at most, the local society. Nevertheless attitudes towards labour were becoming of greater importance, the growing and diverse labour force presented new managerial problems, often exacerbated by the impersonalisation of ownership. In addition to which the technological advances

49. Ibid. para. 19,080, for similar comments see ibid Dunlop N. para. 20,511-29. Glover J. para 13,514-22 Horn J. para. 20,011-4 and 20,016-26 and Norwood G.M. para. 17,524-27.

necessitated a larger fixed capital commitment making the control of the labour supply and the minimisation of variable costs increasingly important. This undoubtedly predisposed the shipowner to react strongly to any sign of combination in the labour force.

It is in the light of this importance of labour, in the context of the technological, economic and political pressures of the period that the formation of the Shipping Federation in 1890 and the subsequent confrontation with organised labour, must be seen.

CHAPTER IV

SEAFARERS

The process of industrialisation of the shipping industry obviously had important implications for those employed in it. The changes the industry was undergoing involved a concomitant change in the nature of the labour force, with increased diversification of function, levels of skill and sources of supply. This, together with changes in the workplace environment, resulted in a shift in the balance of relationships both within the labour force and between employer and employed.

The change in the patterns of ownership and management, with the growth of the large oligopoly capitalist organisations and the demise of the small owner, as mentioned in the previous chapter, meant that there was a growing degree of alienation between the employer and his work force, and to some extent the local community. Thus the shipmaster was placed even more firmly in the position of 'employer' as far as the individual rating was concerned.

However, it is an understanding of the changes in the nature of the labour force that is crucial to an appreciation of the pressures the seafarers, and more particularly the ratings, were under during the last quarter of the century. By the 1880's the transition from dominance in the fleet of sail to that of steam propulsion had taken place. This is illustrated in the Table below giving the percentage of the labour force employed in the two types of vessel:

TABLE IV:1

TOTAL SEAMEN EMPLOYED AND PERCENTAGE
IN SAIL AND STEAM 1851 - 1895

	Total Seamen Employed	% in Sail	% in Steam
1851	141,937		
1854	162,415	90.2	9.8
1860	171,592	84.8	15.2
1865	197,643	80.2	19.8
1870	195,962	75.1	24.9
1875	199,867	63.2	36.8
1880	192,972	56.3	43.7
1885	198,781	45.8	54.2
1890	213,374	35.6	64.3
1895	212,409	29.8	70.2

SOURCE:- Statistical Tables and Charts:- British and Foreign Trade and Industry Cd. 4954 (1909)

The movement in the proportion of labour employed from sail into steam began slowly with slightly less than one quarter being employed in steam by 1870. The pace quickened during the next two decades with a 41% changeover; by 1890 nearly two thirds of the labour force were employed in steam.

It may be seen from the Table, however, that the advent of the steam and steel technology did not result in a major increase in the labour force employed in the industry. After some rather rapid expansion in the early 1850's from 141,937 in 1851 to 162,415 in 1854, and again in the early 1860's reaching 197,643 in 1865, the labour force remained, in terms of numbers, relatively stable.

This numerical analysis masks many important changes within the labour force itself. During the period of the Table the growth of steam propulsion increasingly demanded

more diverse functions for labour. The two technologies existed side by side for more than thirty years, both in the sense that there were sail and steam ships in the fleet, but also that in many vessels sail and steam propulsion existed side by side, with little pure steam until the 1880's. Obviously, under these circumstances, the percentage of the labour force working in steam propelled ships was increasing and by 1885, more than half were employed in steam vessels.

The importance of this shift in the balance of employment from sail to steam vessels was that it made the labour force more heterogeneous, particularly with the development of the three departmental structure. The engine room department, exclusive to steam propulsion, was grafted on to the existing structure, particularly during the period when the majority of vessels classed as steamers also relied on sail power. This entailed the creation of a new category of officer, the engineer, who by virtue of the increasing dominance of the new technology became of growing importance in the on-board hierarchy. The Master's function was curtailed since the method of propulsion was no longer directly related to navigational expertise as was the case under sail. For ratings the implications were less direct, but it did mean the emergence of a category of seafarer who required less skill and experience than the traditional sailor and a breaking down of the single group and the community of interest which existed in the sailing ship, and

which were often further undermined by pay differentials.⁽¹⁾

The emergence of the third, catering, department was only in part as a response to technological change. The larger vessels, made possible by the use of steel and steam, did of course imply, as a broad generalisation, larger crews, making formal catering arrangements a necessity. More crucial to the development was the growth of the passenger liner in the last quarter of the 19th. The large scale carrying of passengers obviously required a similar expansion of crews to 'service' them, and it was in this trade that the catering department grew most rapidly.

The effect of the technological changes and the growing break-up of the traditional homogenous labour force into new categories with new and diverse functions is illustrated in Table:IV:2.

Unfortunately, a detailed breakdown is not available before 1891. However, in order to obtain some indication of the earlier development, the official figures have been

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1. A Committee of Inquiry considered for example, 'The rating or A.B. should be 19 years of age or over and have had three years' service as a deck hand' contrasting with 'the work of a trimmer which is easily learnt, whilst that of a fireman requires some judgement and experience ... firemen should be at least 18 years of age and required to show six months of service as trimmer...' Report of the Committee appointed by the Board of Trade to Inquire into the Manning of British Merchant Ships. I-Report. C-8127 Parl.Papers XL (1896) para. 62 and 64.

TABLE IV:2 COMPARISON BY DEPARTMENT AND GRADE OF NUMBER
OF SEAFARERS EMPLOYED IN FOREIGN TRADE 1851-1901

CENSUS YEAR	MASTER	MATES	PETTY OFFICERS	SAILORS	APPRENTICES	BOYS	ENGINEERS	FIREMEN & TRIMMERS	OTHER ENGINE	STEWARD & COOKS	SURGEONS ETC.	CENSUS TOTAL
1851	15,812		-	51,842	11,121	1,574	-	-	-	-	-	81,340
%	20.8			64.0	14	2	(5,810)		31,074	(10,565)	(1522)	100
1871	6,745	10,529	-	60,694	5,847	1,703	(5,810)	(11,342)	(1,988)	(10,565)	(1522)	116,595
%	6	9		52.1	5	1.5	(4.9)	(9.73)	(1.71)	(9.06)	(1.3)	100
1881	6,206	11,424		52,715	4,816	1,455	(8,234)	(16,072)	(2,818)	(14,971)	(1937)	120,649
%	5.1	9.5		42.7	4	1.2	(6.8)	(13.3)	(2.3)	(12.4)	(1.6)	100
1891	4,465	9,620	2,154	37,103	3,619	1,064	8,472	17,258	2,711	15,722	2087	104,275
%	4.3	9.2	2.1	36.0	3.5	1.0	8.1	16.6	2.6	15.1	2.0	100
1896	4,301	9,921	2,540	34,357	4,166	852	9,530	17,727	3,257	16,523	3073	106,247
%	4.0	9.3	2.4	32.3	3.9	0.8	9.0	16.7	3.1	15.6	2.9	100
1901	3,792	9,469	2,991	30,905	2,894	796	10,402	20,393	3,764	19,451	1374	106,231
%	3.6	8.9	2.8	29.1	2.7	0.7	9.8	19.2	3.5	18.3	1.3	100

SOURCE:- Census of Population

extended backwards to 1871. This has been done by taking the total employed in the new department which was given from that date and this has been broken down into separate categories by numbers and percentages on the assumption that the rates of growth of the individual departments was constant throughout the period covered. These estimates are denoted by ().

The table shows that the effects of the change in the nature of the labour force was felt most by the ratings. The Masters and Mates remained relatively stable, with the Engineers being an addition, both numerically and to the organisational structure of the vessel. Whereas the ratings, although employed in different categories and new functions did not expand to employ additional men for the new function, in the main it was a redistribution of labour with the traditional category of sailor declining in both absolute and percentage terms in the 1880's. It is important to appreciate how fundamental the effect of the steam technology was on the employment of ratings; not only were there new categories of work, demanding less skill and experience, but even where the old categories remained, that was in the case of the deck rating, there was considerable change in function and loss of skill. No longer was the deck rating concerned with propulsion as under sail, but rather with carrying out particular tasks in relation to getting the vessel in and out of port and once at sea, employed in steering and maintenance. A more detailed analysis of the breakdown of the ratings in this new and growing departmental structure and

TABLE IV:3 NUMBER OF RATINGS BY DEPARTMENT AND GRADE - 1871-1896

	1871	%	1881	%	1891	%	1896	%
A.B.s	60,694	70.3	52,715	59.9	59,620	47.3	47,215	40.3
Sailors Undefined	-	-	-	-	-	-	5,255	4.5
Ordinary Seamen	-	-	-	-	8,020	6.3	6,488	5.5
Boys	1,703	1.9	1,455	1.6	2,410	1.9	1,975	1.6
Total Deck Dept.	62,397	72.2	54,170	61.5	70,050	55.5	60,933	51.9
Firemen & Trimmers	(11,342) ²	13.1	(16,072)	18.3	27,230	21.6	24,535	20.9
Other Persons ⁽¹⁾	(1,988)	2.3	2,818	3.2	4,050	3.2	7,755	6.6
Total Engine Dept.	13,330	15.4	18,890	21.5	31,280	24.8	32,290	27.5
Stewards	(10,565)	12.2	(14,971)	17.0	22,600	17.9	23,115	19.7
Stewardesses					2,140	1.6	845	0.7
Total Catering Dept.	(10,565)	12.2	(14,971)	17.0	24,740	19.5	23,960	20.4
Grand Total	(86,292)	100	88,031	100	126,070	100	117,183	100

(1) Including Trimmers, Donkeymen, Oilmen and Greasers

(2) Figures in brackets are taken from estimates of Table IV:2 above

Source:- Census of Population

the consequent undermining of the traditional labour force is shown in Table IV:3.

It is not possible to draw direct conclusions about these fundamental changes in the nature of the labour force and its function in relation to the development of unionisation amongst the ratings in the industry. In fact, greater heterogeneity, it might well be argued, would mitigate against united national action by ratings as a group. Indeed there are examples where small local unions did exist of there being separate societies for sailors and firemen.⁽²⁾

The extent to which the impact of the changeover was cushioned by the high labour turnover and the ability of the employer to alter the components of any particular crew to suit particular technological conditions almost at will is difficult to judge.

The high labour turnover in the industry can, to some, extent, be illustrated by the average age of the labour force. Table IV:4 indicates the consistently low average age of ratings in foreign going vessels. Half of all ratings were below 25 years of age and two thirds under 35. It also shows that the deck department ratings tended to be younger than those in the engine room. Unfortunately, there

2. e.g., In Hull, the Hull Sailors Mutual Association and The Hull Marine Firemen's Association existed side by side during the 1880s until they amalgamated in 1887 to form The Hull Seamen's and Marine Firemen's Amalgamated Association. Minutes in possession of National Union of Seamen.

TABLE IV:4 NUMBER OF RATINGS BY DEPARTMENT AND AGE
EMPLOYED IN THE FOREIGN TRADE - 1871-1891

	1871		1881		1891	
AGE GROUPS	ABLE & ORDINARY SEAMEN	FIREMEN TRIMMERS & (ENGINEER * OTHERS)	ABLE & ORDINARY SEAMEN	FIREMEN & TRIMMERS & (ENGINEER)*	ABLE SEAMEN	FIREMEN & TRIMMERS
under 15	0.2	0.15	0.3	0.2	(under 20)	
15 -	12.9	4.46	9.6	4.1	2.9	2.5
20 -	36.3	21.74	33.9	19.1	29.4	25.3
25 -	24.7 (741)	26.0 (52.4)	26.4 (70.2)	24.9 (48.3)	23.9 (56.2)	28.6 (56.5)
30 -	12.0 (86.1)	19.38 (71.8)	13.6 (83.8)	19.7 (68)	15.7 (71.9)	19.6 (75.9)
35 -	6.8	12.5	6.7	14.0	10.5	11.8
40 -	3.7	7.7	4.6	9.2	7.7	6.1
45 -	2.2	4.6	2.6	4.5	5.9	3.6
50 -	0.8	2.3	1.5	2.2	2.3	1.2
55 -	0.3	0.9	0.4	1.1	0.9	0.5
60 -	0.1	0.3	0.1	0.4	0.3 (60 upwards)	0.01
65 -	0.02	0.07	0.03	0.11	-	-
70 upwards	-	0.02	0.004	0.02	-	-
Total all ages in group census	60,694	31,074	52,715	44,033	33,672	17,258

* Est. of engineers in 1881 and 1871, no ordinary seamen in 1891.

SOURCE:- Census of Population.

are no statistics available in this period for catering ratings. The movement towards a higher average age by 1890 is in part accounted for by the fact that ordinary seamen are excluded from the figures for that year and these would have been the younger men. Nevertheless it does appear that there was an effective increase in the average age of ratings in foreign going vessels.

The nature of the seafarers contract of employment (Articles) also provided an important flexibility for the employer in times of technological change. The Articles were such that they terminated at the end of every deep sea voyage, therefore new crews with different levels of manning and expertise could be employed. Furthermore, the Articles bound the seafarer to a particular ship through the Master and not directly to the company owning the ship, therefore the movement into steam with specialised crews was facilitated.

The position of the shipowner in relation to the supply of labour was also more flexible during the period. The advent of steam, as has been shown, resulted in a section of the labour force growing up which required less skill and experience than previously, thereby making the use of alternative labour easier. In addition, the shipowner was making greater use of the international pool of labour made available after the repeal of the Navigation Acts in 1853; for example, 7,321 foreign seafarers were employed in British vessels in 1853, but in 1854 that had nearly doubled to 13,200.⁽³⁾

3. See Table IV:5

TABLE IV:5 NUMBER OF U.K. RESIDENTS, FOREIGNERS AND LASCARS
EMPLOYED IN BRITISH VESSELS 1851 TO 1894

YEARS	NO. BRITISH PERSONS (U.K. RESIDENT) EMPLOYED (EXCL. LASCARS)	NO. OF FOREIGN PERSONS EMPLOYED	PROPORTION OF FOREIGN TO 100 BRITISH (EXCL. LASCARS)	NO. OF LASCARS	PROPORTION OF LASCARS TO 100 OTHER BRITISH PERSONS	TOTAL	% OF TOTAL LASCARS & FOREIGN PERSONS
1851-4	151,106	8,003	5.3	-	-	159,110	-
1855-9	160,785	13,050	8.1	(950)	(0.6)	173,811	-
1860-4	163,676	17,808	10.88	-	-	179,579	-
1865-9	176,114	20,630	11.71	-	-	196,669	-
1870-4	181,628	19,425	10.69	-	-	201,053	-
1875-9	174,407	22,393	12.84	-	-	196,800	-
1880-4	170,399	26,040	15.28	-	-	196,439	-
1885-9	171,710	25,709	14.97	18,159	10.57	215,237	20.4
1890-4	185,524	29,799	16.06	24,628	13.27	239,951	22.7

1. Lascars on Asiatic Agreement: Defined by census and registered as "The men included under this head are Asiatics and East Africans employed on vessels trading either from India to this country or entirely in Asiatic or Australian waters, and serving under agreements finally deposited and retained in Asia."

SOURCE:- Register of Seamen and

Report of Select Committee on Merchant Seamen. 1860

"In this connexion it must be remembered that the foreign competition which many owners so greatly fear is a competition to which the British seamen and firemen employed in our ships are already exposed in its acutest form. Since the final repeal of the navigation laws, which required that the master and three-fourths of the crew of every ship should be British subjects, and reserved the coasting trade entirely to British ships and seamen, the whole world has been open as a recruiting ground to British shipowners, who have not been hampered in their selection by any restriction as to colour, language, qualification, age or strength. Consequently the British-born seaman has had to face competition with foreigners of all nationalities, not excepting negroes, and Lascars, a competition more keen because employment on board ships is more accessible to foreigners than is any other description of British industry." (4)

A more detailed analysis of the growth of foreign seamen in employment in British ships is illustrated in Table IV:5.

The table illustrates the increase in the labour force between 1851 and 1885, but this is a marginal underestimation for Lascars were not included in the Register of Seamen figures until 1886. In the mid 1850s some 1,000 were recorded, (5) although this too may have been an underestimation, considering the special consideration given to them in the Merchant Shipping Acts of the 1850s. Presumably their employment gradually expanded, for when next recorded, in 1886, there were no less than 16,673 Lascars. In the next decade, 1886-1896, the total increase was in the order of 18.4%. In the half century, 1851 to 1901, the labour force increased by 75%, and the number of British seamen (excluding Lascars) by 27%, an increase confined in the main to the two decades 1851 - 1871. Hence the expansion in the demand for

4. Manning of British Merchant Ships (1896) op cit para.26

5. Report of Select Committee on Merchant Shipping(53) 1860
Parl.Papers xiii

labour was not, by and large, enjoyed in the U.K. resident seaman, but by the foreigners and lascars. As the table illustrates the number of U.K. resident seamen after the early 1870's is approximately 175,000; the exception being the early 1890's, the average table masking the serious contraction of 1886 and 1887. Foreigners increased fairly constantly after 1874 in both numerical and percentage terms. A similar expansion was experienced by lascars after 1886. In this way a situation was created where, during the last two decades of the century, from more than one fifth to over a quarter of the labour force consisted of non-U.K. residents. The U.K. seafarers found themselves in strenuous competition for employment, under their own flag, in what had become an international job market.

The employment of foreigners in U.K. registered vessels had expanded rapidly since the middle decades of the 19th as the following table indicates:

TABLE IV:6
Percentage of Foreigners Employed in British Ships

Year	%	Year	%
1851 to 1853	4.0	1880 to 1884	15.2
1854 to 1867	7.7	1885 to 1889	14.9
1861 to 1876	10.1	1890 to 1894	16.0
1877 to 1881	12.2	1895 to 1899	19.3

SOURCE:- Report by Mr. Thomas Gray, 22nd March, 1886 to Royal Commission on Loss of Life at Sea.
Cmd. 5226, p.5

General Register of Seamen
increased to 1901, by which time they constituted approximately one quarter of seafarers. It is possible to analyse the foreigners employed further in terms of the particular occupational grades. See Table IV:8

By the 1880's, foreigners constituted over 15% of seafarers in real terms some 26,040 (1880-84). However, the general figures do not give a proper indication of the competitive pressure for employment which foreign seamen constituted since they were by no means evenly distributed between the various trades as the following illustrates:

TABLE IV:7

Percentage of Foreign Seafarers
Employed in British Ships by Trade

Census Years	Home and Coastal Trade		Total	Foreign Trade	
				Sail	Steam
1871	6.6		15.6	-	-
1881			19.3	-	-
1891	2.8		20.1	26.8	17.3
1896			22.5	30.8	19.7
1901	14.9	4.1	26.0	37.0	23.8
1906	13.3	3.5	26.1	38.7	26.1

SOURCE:- Census of Population

The Home and Coastal trade constituted approximately 30% of the total employment in the industry; here foreigners made very little impression during the period. The real impact of the foreign seamen is in the foreign trade; in 1871 they constituted almost 16%, increasing to over 25% of foreign going seamen by the beginning of the 20th century.

This percentage was overshadowed by the percentage in sailing vessels beginning in 1891 at over one quarter it increases to little short of two fifths by 1901, by which time they constituted approximately one quarter of seafarers. It is possible to analyse the foreigners employed further in terms of the particular occupational grades. See Table IV:8.

TABLE IV:8 % OF FOREIGN SEAFARERS
IN U.K. FOREIGN GOING VESSELS 1871 TO 1901

CAPACITIES	1871	1881	1891	1896	1901
	<u>ALL VESSELS</u>		<u>SAIL</u>		
MASTERS	2.5	3.2	3.5	2.6	2.5
MATES	3.5	3.1	4.4	4.3	4.1
PETTY OFFICERS)		-	29.0	35.3	46.9
SAILORS ¹)	24.0	37.4	39.0	45.5	52.3
BOYS	3.3	6.6	8.9	17.5	23.7
STEWARDS, COOKS ETC.	-	-	22.4	25.4	29.0
			<u>STEAM</u>		
MASTERS	-	-	3.5	3.8	2.2
MATES	-	-	4.6	4.2	2.8
PETTY OFFICERS	-	-	26.1	28.8	37.3
SAILORS ¹	-	-	29.5	34.5	39.6
BOYS	-	-	10.9	17.4	9.3
STEWARDS, COOKS ETC.	-	-	11.3	12.4	14.4
ENGINEERS, FIREMEN AND TRIMMERS	9.2	6.4	2.8 18.7	2.2 23.5	2.5 34.6
NUMBER ENUMERATED	18,159	23,236	25,884	27,446	32,614

¹ ABS, ORDINARY SEAMEN AND SAILORS

SOURCE:- Census of Population

Foreign-going British officers, i.e., Masters, Mates and Engineers, in both sail and steam, are never seriously challenged; in all cases the proportion is well below 5%. It is among ratings that the incursion of foreigners was most evident. In steam vessels they constituted not less than 30% of deck ratings by 1891, and 40% a decade later.

Firemen and Trimmers experienced a similar expansion; from a lower base they made up over one third of engine room ratings by 1901, whilst over 10% of cooks and stewards were foreign after 1890.

It is among ratings in sail that by the late 1890's foreigners had become the dominant grouping and among petty officers and sailors that they made the most headway. These were, in fact, the same group of men, for promotion and demotion are largely due to age, experience and luck. Sail as a proportion of total employment in the industry was, of course, contracting, but it still constituted 56.3% of total employment in 1880, 35.6% in 1890 and 20.3% in 1900, a not insubstantial number in real terms.

Thus the general estimates grossly underestimate the impact of foreigners on certain groups, especially ratings on foreign-going vessels, with those in sailing ships under most competitive pressure with the loss of job opportunity Gray in his report of 1886, refines this further.

"The returns seem to indicate that few foreigners are carried by the large steamships in regular trade, but in certain classes of steamer and in long voyage and colonial sailing ships, large proportions are often taken. Few foreigners are employed in the home and coasting trade." (6)

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6. Report to the Right Honourable The President of the Board of Trade and to the Royal Commission on Loss of Life at sea by Assistant Secretaries to the Board of Trade. March 1886
C.5226. p.9

TABLE IV:9 PERCENTAGE OF FOREIGN SEAMEN WHO
SIGNED ARTICLES IN SELECTED PORTS DURING 1885.
(EXCLUDING MASTERS AND LASCARS)

<u>PORT</u>	<u>% FOREIGN SEAMEN</u>
ABERDEEN	8.5
CARDIFF	21.5
CARDIFF (PENARTH)	24.1
GLASGOW	7.2
HULL	23.8
LIVERPOOL	9.0
LONDON (POPLAR)	16.2
LONDON (VICTORIA DOCK)	6.2
NEWCASTLE-ON-TYNE	20.7
SHIELDS, NORTH	25.3
SHIELDS, SOUTH	23.4
SOUTHAMPTON	2.9
AVERAGE ALL PORTS IN SURVEY (30)	1.4

SOURCE:- Loss of Life at Sea. Appendix B. p.25

This is confirmed when the proportion of foreigners shipping in certain ports is compared. High levels are evident in those ports with a concentration of tramp tonnage, as Table IV:9 for 1886 indicates. It can be seen that, in tramp ports like the Tyne, Cardiff and Hull, the percentage is in excess of 21%, whilst in mainly liner ports like Southampton it is only 2%, in Glasgow 7% and Liverpool 9%. The Board of Trade issued a circular in 1885 in connection with the above enquiry to gather particulars which engaged the highest proportion of foreigners during the year in the major ports mentioned above.

"These showed that out of 276 cases

23 ships had over 80% of foreigners

33 between 70 and 80%

60 between 60 and 70%

53 between 50 and 60%

37 between 40 and 50%

29 between 30 and 40%

18 between 20 and 30%

23 had under 20% (7)

In other words, among these selected vessels, 60% had in excess of 50% of their crews made up of foreigners.

Commenting on these figures, the Report on the Manning of British Merchant Shipping (1896) said

"Remembering that the percentage of foreigners amongst Masters, officers, apprentices and boys is very low, it may be assumed that a larger proportion of the A.B.'s employed in these 276 selected were foreigners." (8)

7. Ibid p.5.

8. Report on the Manning of British Merchant Shipping 1896
op cit. para.28

A statement no less true for the port table above, which only excludes Masters, seamen being defined as every other crew member.

The situation was such that an individual British rating could find himself alone or in the minority on board a British vessel.

"With a heterogeneous collection of nationalities comprising her crew a vessel must be a very undesirable place for British seamen of good training and repute to work in." (9)

In general, foreigners were not employed at lower levels of pay or conditions, although, of course, the steam ship and in particular, liners, paid higher wages than the sailing vessels in which the foreigners were concentrated.

Gray writes,

"I find they are not paid less wages than British seamen and that British and foreign seamen are fed alike." (10)

The exception in the evidence on which this generalisation is based is of some interest. For example, during the wage agitation in Aberdeen in April, 1885, foreigners were brought in by Milne and Co., shipowners, who stated,

"as the Aberdeen seamen would not ship at the current rate of wages they sent to Norway for crews. They found foreign seamen as suitable in the timber trade and less troublesome." (11)

A similar exception seems to have been at Cork where the

9. Ibid para.35

10. Report to the Right Honourable the President of the Board of Trade 1896. op cit p.6.

11. Ibid Appendix C. p.26

Mercantile Marine Superintendent wrote in 1886,

"Almost none of the trained British seamen in the port are able to obtain employment owing to the great and general depression in the shipping trade, which favours foreigners, who are better clothed, and more likely to engage on easier terms and will submit to harsher treatment." (12)

A survey for the same report, of 13 ports employing substantial numbers of foreigners in February, 1886, set out to discover whether they took less wages or accepted inferior dietary scales, concluded on wages in Middlesborough, 'occasionally' and in three other ports 'not as a rule'. On diet all ports said there was no difference. Newport, one of the 'not as a rule' ports, commented, "No, but if diet is inferior British seamen complain more readily than foreigners." (13)

The other, and important element in the challenge from the international pool of labour was the Lascars and, to a lesser extent, colonial seamen. Lascars have served in U.K. registered vessels since at least the latter part of the 18th, but their numbers had increased rapidly during the third quarter of the 19th when, in 1886, they were included in the figures of the General Registrar they numbered some 16,673 or 9.3% of U.K. seamen (see Table IV:5). Such general figures again tend to underestimate the complexity of the situation; Table IV:10 attempts to clarify some of the problems.

12. Ibid Appendix F. p.31

13. Ibid Appendix D. p.30

TABLE IV:10 NUMBER OF LASCARS EMPLOYED IN BRITISH SHIPS -- 1891-1906

CENSUS YEAR	TOTAL	NUMBER EMPLOYED IN VESSELS TRADING ENTIRELY ABROAD	NUMBER EMPLOYED IN VESSELS TRADING WITH UK (% OF TOTAL)	% OF TOTAL SEAMEN IN ALL VESSELS	% OF SEAMEN IN STEAM FOREIGN TRADE VESSELS
1891	21,322 (4,420)*	10,535	10,787 (50.6%)	15.8	21.8
1896	27,911 (4,621)	13,100	14,811 (53.1%)	15.5	24.4
1901	33,505 (5,893)	14,680	18,930 (56.3%)	18.0	25.8
1906	38,386 (6,664)	14,924	23,501 (61.2%)	19.0	25.5

* These are colonial - seamen - mainly from Hong Kong and Straits settlement and are not included in total or other columns.

SOURCE:- Census of Population

These census figures show that, by 1891, 15.8% of all seamen were Lascars. These were concentrated almost solely on steam vessels. For example, in 1891, 93 seamen shipped as ratings on sailing vessels. When an analysis is made of foreign-going vessels, Lascars constituted no less than one fifth to one quarter of all seamen by the last decade of the century. They had made substantial inroads into employment, but exactly how far and to what effect is difficult to calculate. Over one half of their number were employed in vessels trading with the U.K.; obviously U.K. resident seamen could easily have been employed. The smaller percentage sailing almost exclusively outside U.K. waters present the problem. It has been argued that U.K. resident seamen did not wish to sail in these vessels, which only returned to the U.K. occasionally for dry dock, refit and the like. But what must be remembered is that the Master, all the Deck and Engineer officers, quartermasters, carpenters and storekeepers were U.K. resident seafarers, and apparently quite willing to remain outside the U.K. for considerable periods. It can therefore be argued that a number substantially larger than one half of the jobs occupied by Lascars, if vacated, would have been filled by U.K. seamen.

This applies to all job opportunities; like foreigners, Lascars were not in the market for all occupations. There were very few in sail, and no officers at all; they were competing only for the position of rating.

TABLE IV:11
Lascars as a Percentage of all Ratings*
in Foreign-Going Steam Vessels

Census Year	1891	1896	1901	1906
P.O. in Deck Department	21.0	25.2	28.3	27.1
Sailors	28.4	30.6	31.7	32.7
Firemen and Trimmers	30.2	38.0	39.1	39.3
P.O. Engine and other Departments	33.0	28.8	31.1	30.5
Stewards and Cooks	24.2	28.5	28.8	24.6

* All ratings i.e., U.K. and Foreign

SOURCE:- Census of Population

Their impact amongst ratings had developed until, by the 1890's, they constituted between one quarter and two fifths of all sailors, in U.K. terms A.B.'s and Ordinary Seamen. Amongst firemen and trimmers there were even greater proportions and since the figures include foreign seamen for U.K. residents alone, the proportion would be higher. However, this must be tempered by the fact already discussed that some vessels rarely reached the U.K. and therefore it is difficult to know how far they offered potential job opportunities. If, say, 10% were deducted from these totals to cover these sectors, the figures are still not insubstantial.

What is being argued here is that, while foreigners and Lascars were being introduced into the general employment level within the U.K. fleet during the last three of four decades of the 19th, the figures mask a far more serious incursion for the rating and his job market. An incursion which by the 1880s meant that it was not unusual for the majority of ratings to be of mixed foreign nationality. A

TABLE IV:12 SEAMEN UNEMPLOYED: ESTIMATES BASED ON CENSUS - 1891-1906
(EXCLUDING LASCARS AND FOREIGNERS)

	APRIL 5TH 1891		MARCH 25 1896		MARCH 31 1901		APRIL 4 1906	
DEFINITION	NUMBER	%	NUMBER	%	NUMBER	%	NUMBER	%
MASTER & MATES	6,340	20.8	4,829	16.6	4,410	15.8	4,207	15.2
ENGINEERS	2,941	20.8	2,557	16.6	2,645	15.8	2,968	15.2
PETTY OFFICERS	2,328	20.8	1,887	16.6	3,280	31.5	1,657	15.2
SAILORS	14,591	20.8	10,119	16.7	8,640	15.8	7,727	15.1
FIREMEN	6,509	20.8	10,718	16.6	5,704	15.9	6,240	15.2
STEWARDS	4,875	20.8	3,975	16.6	4,360	16.0	5,093	15.2
OTHERS	1,658	20.7	1,943	8.3	1,133	12.2	1,298	15.2
TOTAL	39,242	20.8	30,345	16.6	28,874	15.9	29,190	15.2
TOTAL CENSUS	188,480	100	182,800	100	181,900	100	192,173	100
CENSUS % UNEMPLOYED		14%		12%		12%		12%
TOTAL REGISTERED SEAMEN. (EXCL. LASCARS)	216,443		212,040		226,424		226,424	

SOURCE:- Census of Population

similar trend being evident in steam by the late 1880's where, among deck ratings, foreigners made up 25%, not including Lascars. If the competition from Lascars is also taken into consideration there can be no doubt that U.K. resident ratings, despite the apparent security of the Home and Coastal trade, were in fierce competition for jobs within their own home fleet during the last quarter of the C19th, and it was a contest that they appear to have been losing irrevocably. The Manning Committee stated:-

"It would appear that in 1891 the whole number of seamen employed in the foreign trade of the United Kingdom was 131,375, of whom 22,052 were foreigners, and 21,322 were Lascars, nearly 33 per cent. in all being non-British. The number of A.B.'s in the foreign trade was 40,625 of whom 12,226 were foreigners, and 6,953 were Lascars, or over 47 per cent. non-British." (14)

The impact of such competition from foreign labour must, of course, also be viewed from the standpoint of the level of demand for labour in shipping, which is to some extent, reflected in the unemployment figures. There is little long or short term statistical evidence of the extent of employment among seafarers in the C19th until the Census of 1891. Table IV:12 illustrates the extent of it in the 1890's and the first decade of the C20th, which is a little beyond the period but it can be utilised as an indicator of previous trends. This table is based on the Census estimates of seamen unemployed on Census day as a percentage of the total number of seamen required and available. The Census estimates are based on the following:

14. Report on Manning of British Merchant Ships (1896)
op cit. para.28

"It is from time to time assumed, in default of any sure basis, that the total number of persons required and available to man the Mercantile Navy of the United Kingdom is fairly represented by the total of the persons engaged for the first crew of each vessel employed during the year and remaining on the register at the end of the year."

"This assumption may or may not be correct, but if it follows that the differences between this total and the total of the men employed at any one time represents the 'Reserve Army' of seamen who may, speaking in general terms, be regarded as 'Unemployed' at any particular moment."

"If the assumption is correct the number of seamen 'unemployed' at any one time should, on average, be just sufficient to man the vessels unemployed at that time (sic) upon this assumption about 14% of the total number of seamen were unemployed ... This is equivalent to seamen being unemployed about seven or eight weeks in the year, and if it is agreed that seamen are, as a matter of fact, unemployed for about this period each year the assumption is to a great extent confirmed." (15)

It is argued below, on official evidence, that 'the total of the persons engaged for the first crew of each vessel' is an overestimation. Hence it can be argued that the figure is somewhat higher, nearer possibly to that in the table, excepting the 20.8% of 1891, which in the conditions of the industry at the time appears to be somewhat high. Yet this is a close approximation to the figure suggested by the seamen's leader, for ratings unemployed or temporarily employed on shore in 1891. He stated,

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15. Population Census: The Number, Age, Nationalities and Capacities of Seamen Serving on the 5th April, 1891, on Vessels Registered in The United Kingdom. (1893) C.7133. p.12. Repeated exactly in all later census until 1911.

"No, they are not Board of Trade figures, I will read the figures again. You must add to that figure at least 20,000 sailors and firemen of British nationality out of employment and temporarily employed on shore. This would bring the total up to 118,342. Then there are cooks and stewards of British nationality numbering 23,148 (that is Board of Trade figures) and out of employment and temporarily employed on shore say 5,000, that is my figure. This would make a total of sailors, cooks, stewards and ordinary seamen of 146,490." (16)

Suggesting an unemployed or temporarily employed ashore level of between 17% and 21% among ratings. The 'educated guess' was largely confirmed by the other side of the industry in the person of the Manager of the Shipping Federation in his evidence to the Royal Commission on Labour,

"We say that at the present day (July 29, 1891) all British seamen could not be employed even if the whole of the foreign seamen were back in their own country." (17)

There were 30,267 or 16.26% of all ranks, excluding Lascars, employed in the fleet in that year.

It can tentatively be suggested that the estimates of the table are nearer the level of seafarers' unemployment. Although from the relentless uniformity of all ranks and

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16. Report of the Committee Appointed by the Board of Trade to Inquire into Certain Questions Affecting the Merchant Marine. ii - Minutes of Evidence. Cd.1609. (1903).
Evidence Mr. J.H. Wilson. 10 April, 1902. para.5326.
 17. Royal Commission on Labour. Minutes of Evidence.
Group 'B' Volume 1 (C.6708) Evidence Mr. G.A. Laws,
29 July, 1892. Q5420.

TABLE IV:13 PERCENTAGE ESTIMATES OF UNEMPLOYED

Source	1891	1896	1901	1906	1911
Seamen Mathematical Census Estimates	20.8	16.6	15.9	15.2	14.7
Seamen Census Estimates	14.0	12.0	12.0	12.0	-
Beveridge Estimates	3.5	3.3	3.3	3.6	-
Hobson Index - Number of Employment (1900 = 100)	99.4	99.3	99.0	98.7	99.3
British Labour Annual Statistics	3.5	3.3	3.3	3.6	3.0
British Labour Month of Census	-	3.3	3.4	3.2	2.8
Mitchell & Dean. All Trade Union Returns	3.5	3.3	3.3	3.6	3.0
Mitchell & Dean. Engineering, Metal and Shipbuilding Unions	4.1	4.2	3.8	4.1	3.4

Mitchell B.R. and Dean P. Abstract of British Historical Statistics (Cambridge University Press 1962)

British Labour Statistical Historical Abstract 1886 - 1968 H.M.S.O. 1976

ratings levels it would seem that some general valuation was made to which all groups were then mathematically related. Hence, while agreeing broadly with the general figure it is implausible for each group to have achieved the same level of employment or unemployment.

Such a crude analysis takes no account of seasonal variations, the lack of economic activity, conditions in different trades and ports, employment in sail, steam, liner, tramp or coasting tonnage. Seafarers were, of course, one of the extreme examples of itinerant, or peripatetic casual labour. They oscillated between steam and sail, trade and trade, obeying the dictates of circumstance, deck ratings being the obvious example.

In Table IV:13, the unemployment levels of seamen are compared with the general level of unemployment and those of other groups.

The table highlights the extremely high level of unemployment among seafarers, on both criteria compared with the general figures and those of the skilled trades. The movement in the general figures bears little relation to those of seamen, but this may be due to the long gap between census figures.

As with all casual labour, unemployment for seafarers was an inescapable phenomenon during the period. According to the 1891 census, quoted above, the annual average was seven to eight weeks, in later census it was assessed at six or seven weeks. This is an annual average and as it was by no means unusual in tramps, and particularly sailing tramps, for voyages to last considerably longer than a year

this average, as has already been argued, may be an under-estimation. But even on this basis, seafarers would have to serve regular and often long periods of unemployment. Like British seamen, excluding Lascars where levels of unemployment are completely unknown, foreigners sailing in U.K.

vessels were unemployed in similar proportions.

"It is assumed that the proportion of Foreigners is the same among the 'unemployed' as among the employed. So far, however, as the 'unemployed' ashore in the United Kingdom are concerned it is probable that the proportion of Foreigners is somewhat less than among the 'employed', for it is not unlikely that a certain number of them will spend their time ashore in their own country; moreover, foreigners in crews shipped and discharged abroad, whilst increasing the number of employed foreigners, do not swell the number of the 'unemployed' in the U.K." (18)

The presence of strong competition in the job market is often accompanied by an intensification of the workload particularly where an industry is undergoing major technological change and labour is unorganised. The construction of an even vaguely acceptable gauge of workload of seamen during the late C19th presents as yet unsurmountable problems. Attempts to make a partial productivity measure which requires the ratio of two indexes, an output index and an input index, failed for lack of adequate information on production of sail and steam in terms of ton miles. The magnitude of these difficulties increases in an industry like shipping where capital is being substituted for labour in both sail and steam, and the growth of efficiency in all sectors is evident in the declining costs of ocean trans-

TABLE IV: 14 TOTAL SEAMEN EMPLOYED: % EMPLOYED, RATIO MEN PER 100 TONS IN STEAM AND SAIL
1854 - 1895

YEAR	SAIL		STEAM		NUMBER	RATIO
	% OF TOTAL EMPLOYED LABOUR	RATIO	% OF TOTAL EMPLOYED LABOUR	RATIO		
1854	90.2	4.2	9.8	7.5	162,415	4.4
1860	84.8	3.8	15.2	6.5	171,592	4.0
1865	80.2	3.4	19.8	5.6	197,643	3.7
1870	75.1	3.3	24.9	4.7	195,962	3.5
1875	63.2	3.1	36.8	3.9	199,667	3.4
1880	56.3	2.9	43.7	3.3	192,972	3.0
1885	45.8	2.7	54.2	2.8	198,781	2.8
1890	35.6	2.9	64.3	3.0	213,374	2.9
1895	29.8	2.6	70.2	2.8	212,409	2.7

SOURCE:- General Register of Shipping - Parl.Papers

portation after the mid 1870s shown by falling freight rates.⁽¹⁹⁾ The lack of any estimates as to the intensification of seafarers' workloads necessitates turning to contemporary reports of Commissions and Committees, the literature as well as to Board of Trade estimates of the ratio of men employed per hundred tons. Table IV:14 highlights two inter-related trends, the movement in the proportion of labour employed from sail to steam and the fall in the number of men per 100 tons. Beginning slowly, with slightly less than one quarter being employed in steam by 1870, the pace quickens during the next two decades with a 41% changeover with nearly two thirds of labour in steam by 1890. In general terms, there is also a steady fall in the number of men employed per ton throughout the period. The break in the trend in 1890 is due to statistical changes, the inclusion of Lascars, masters and others in the figures post 1886, and can therefore be ignored. The ratio figures can be criticised for under-estimating the actual extent of the downward trend, for they were based on register figures usually provided when a vessel was new, and in virtually all cases they were shown to be lower in practice. This was to some extent confirmed by the principal clerk to the Marine Department of the Board of Trade in 1894. Examining the returns of the Court of Inquiry

19. Deakin B.M. and Seward T. Productivity in Transport: A Study of Employment Capital, Output Productivity and Technical Change. University of Cambridge, Department of Applied Economics. Occasional Papers: 17. Cambridge University Press. 1969.
Knauerhase R. The Compound Steam Engine and Productivity Changes in the German Merchant Fleet, 1871-1887. Journal of Economic History Vol.28 1968 and (Cont/...)

TABLE IV:15 SEAMEN EMPLOYED IN SAIL
% EMPLOYED AND RATIO MEN PER 100 TONS IN DIFFERENT TRADES
1854 - 1900

	HOME TRADE		HOME TRADE & PARTICULAR FOREIGN TRADES		FOREIGN TRADE		
YEAR	% OF TOTAL EMPLOYED LABOUR	RATIO	% OF TOTAL EMPLOYED LABOUR	RATIO	% OF TOTAL EMPLOYED LABOUR	RATIO	% OF TOTAL LABOUR EMPLOYED IN SAILING VESSELS
1854	21.2	5.0	5.0	4.0	64.0	4.0	71.0
1860	22.8	4.8	5.0	3.8	56.9	3.5	67.1
1865	19.0	4.7	5.3	3.7	55.9	3.0	69.7
1870	20.5	5.3	5.2	3.4	49.5	2.8	65.9
1875	18.7	5.2	3.8	3.7	40.7	2.6	64.2
1880	18.6	5.2	2.9	3.8	35.2	2.3	62.4
1885	17.2	5.2	0.6	3.8	27.3	2.1	59.6
1890	15.9	6.5	0.9	4.4	18.8	1.9	52.9
1895	13.2	6.6	0.5	4.5	16.1	1.7	53.9
1900	9.6	6.3	0.3	4.5	10.4	1.6	51.3

SOURCE:- Register General of Seamen

into casualties since 1877, he declared,

"that 45 steamships and 24 sailing ships were undermanned and 35 steamships and 41 sailing ships were not undermanned; that is to say that the court either said they were not undermanned or would not say that they were undermanned." (20)

This was due to the lack of any legal or other definition of levels of manning. When the results of 40 courts of inquiry were translated into a table⁽²¹⁾ it revealed discrepancies between actual levels of manning and those provided by the Registrar, in virtually all cases and not only those accused of undermanning. Other evidence discussed below tends to confirm this.

Keeping this inaccuracy in mind, the individual sectors of the industry must be examined separately since the effects were by no means uniform. Table IV:15 shows the position in relation to sail. Home Trade and Partial Foreign Trade is of only marginal importance, as the table indicates, and for present purposes can be included with the Home Trade. Here the percentage of the total employed labour force declined steadily and rapidly after 1880. The ratio of men per 100 tons is in contradiction to other groups and this can presumably be attributed to two factors. In the small vessel used on the coast there was little or no opportunity to take advantage of economies of scale during this period. Older small deep sea vessels would be transferred to the coast and

19. Cont. Walton G.M. Productivity Change in Ocean Shipping after 1870: A Comment. Journal of Economic History Vol.30 1970.

20. Manning of British Merchant Ships (1896) op cit para.65

21. Ibid. Appendix ACE) No.4 p.887

the decline in coastal sailing tonnage meant that there was little new building. In terms of manpower in sail coasting constituted only some 30% in 1854, and by 1890 well over 45% of the sailing labour force was on the coast. This meant that deep sea sailing seamen would be forced increasingly either into coastal sail or steam.

During the 1850's foreign going sail employed over 60% of all seafarers and all sail employed 70% of all seafarers. During the two decades, 1870 to 1890, there is a fall of over 30% in total employment and over 16% in the 1880's. In other words, the proportion employed in foreign-going sail was halved. Of the total seamen employed in sail the percentage contracted only mildly until 1885, then there was half a decade of rapid contraction, the severity of which is underestimated by the statistical changes of 1886.

It is in the ratio of men per 100 ton of vessel that the contraction is remarkably consistent, despite 1886, which seems to confirm that few Lascars served in sail. Mention should be made here of the contemporary argument that ratio of men to sail area was a more relevant standard on which to judge manning. It is impossible to consider the validity of this criteria for lack of information. The contraction in the ratio of men is due to some extent to labour saving devices, in particular the steam windlass, pumps and steering, and reefing gear such as the Cunningham, which allowed reefing from the deck with few hands aloft. Of greater importance was the growth in the size of vessels and the modification or changes in rigs. At the beginning of the period, large crews were required to work the vast

square sails, extending to the full height of each mast section. Progressively, these sails became smaller; for example, topsails and top gallents, some with fewer reefs, were divided into two parts, respectively upper and lower topsails and top gallents. Studding and sky sails gradually disappeared after 1875 and spar lengths were also shortened. A Liverpool shipowner, J.E. Anderson, stated in 1886

"A few years ago some cases of undermanning came to his knowledge where the owners increased the size of the spars and masts of their ships very greatly, without increasing the number of the crew sufficiently. It has been found that these large masts require an enormously powerful crew to be of any advantage, and general opinion has now come round to having smaller masts."

"Their own ships have very small spars." (22)

As competition intensified, indicated by declining freight rates, vessels were converted or built with fore and aft sails supplying the main power source. These could be set and taken in from the deck, requiring few men to deal with them. The full rigged ship became obsolete, and with many other types, were converted. Brigs were commonly converted to Barques, or in the case of small vessels, topsail schooner or schooners. The basic reason being that of economics, particularly of labour costs, about 20% of total sailing vessel costs.

Crews, it would appear, were generally reduced over time and not necessarily because of some basic change in their rigging.

22. Final Report of the Royal Commission on Loss of Life at Sea. Part II. C.5227 Parl.Papers xliii. para.11,488-90
For similar see para.11,687-89

Brassey made the point, after commissioning research

"It results from Professor Biles inquiry that the number of men carried in sailing ships generally decreased with the lapse of time - that is to say that fewer men are carried in any given ship as the ship grows older." (23)

Longer term statistics produced by the Board of Trade confirmed this as indicated in Table IV:16. This is based on only a limited number of vessels, but it seems to confirm much already discussed. A footnote to all the tables from which the above was extracted stated,

"ships belonging to certain well-known firms have been selected at the chief ports of the U.K. as representative of their class, care being taken to select those vessels which it has been found possible to trace on the Registers on both of the years."

Vessels of 'well-known' firms were presumably those operating the best manning practices. Yet here, with only one decadal exception, the size of actual crews fall in the region of 12% and 16%, ratings again suffering the greatest fall, especially A.B.'s. Effective totals are based on Sir Digby Manning's criteria for effective crews on which to base comparisons. He explained.

"For instance, one ship might be manned by a crew of boys and another by a crew of men ... fair in that respect as between ship and ship that is to say, I have considered two idlers or two boys as equal to one effective man." (24)

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23. Lord Brassey Papers and Addresses. Mercantile Marine and Navigation from 1871 to 1894 Longmans Green & Co. London (1894) p.164
 24. Report on Manning of British Merchant Ships (1896) op cit. para.22,217

TABLE IV:16 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CREW IN SAILING SHIPS ENGAGED IN FOREIGN TRADE -- BY DECADE

COMPARATIVE YEARS .	1849-1859-1869 (SAIL & STEAM)			1865-75		1870-80		1875-85		1880-90		1885-95	
NO. OF VESSELS IN SURVEY	22			31		35		35		29		29	
CAPACITY													
MATE (MASTER)*	46	31	27	69	59	66	64	88	80	91	92	102	94
MIDSHIPMEN	-	-	-	11	3	3	5	10	6	8	5	11	3
BOATSWAINS	6	17	14	24	21	25	22	22	20	19	11	20	16
Q.M.	-	-	-	4	-	-	-	6	8	4	4	4	4
CARPENTERS	21	18	17	31	30	35	33	34	31	25	25	29	26
SAILMAKERS	7	10	4	21	19	17	21	26	28	17	15	22	23
A.B.	227	188	153	410	389	404	366	478	414	313	270	417	343
ORDINARY SEAMEN	21	44	45	87	59	76	72	70	53	37	39	40	45
APPRENTICES	76	28	9	52	26	39	37	100	82	106	72	99	85
BOY	-	3	6	23	16	17	14	16	19	16	20	14	15
STEWARD ETC.	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	83	63
OTHER PERSONS	37	34	24	105	85	85	84	116	98	99	76	12	5
ACTUAL TOTAL	463	417	348	837	702	767	718	966	839	735	629	853	722
EFFECTIVE TOTAL	378.5	340	286.5	698.5	602	656.5	610	804	693	595	517	708	604
% CHANGE ACTUAL	-	-	24.3%	-	16.3%	-	6.4%	-	13.1%	-	14.4%	-	15.4%
% CHANGE EFFECTIVE	-	-	24.8%	-	13.8%	-	7.1%	-	13.8%	-	13.1%	-	14.7%
NO. OF MEN PER 100 TONS (EXCL. MASTERS)	-	-	-	2.84	2.38	2.42	2.26	2.60	2.26	2.56	2.18	2.11	1.77
NO. OF FOREIGNERS (EXCL. LASCARS)	22	44	49	118	148	117	159	188	223	162	138	176	176
% OF FOREIGNERS	-	-	-	14.1	21.1	15.2	22.1	19.5	26.6	22.0	21.9	20.2	24.4
% OF FOREIGNERS WHO WERE SCANDINAVIAN				31.7	40.2	49.0	51.6	51.6	53.1	43.1	56.5	44.8	54.5
% OF FOREIGNERS WHO WERE GERMAN				-	18.2	23.1	13.8	11.7	15.7	17.3	16.6	13.4	15.9
% OF FOREIGNERS FROM U.S.A.				-	6.0	9.4	8.5	4.4	3.6	9.3	7.2	16.3	7.9

* Masters included post 1886

Source:- Registrar General of Seamen

He defined effective hands as Officers, including the Master, Boatswains, Quartermasters, A.B.'s and Ordinary Seamen (O.S.) The inclusion of the latter as one full effective hand was questioned, idlers were carpenters, sailmakers, stewards, apprentices, boys and other persons, these were calculated to be equal to half an effective hand. The table shows that the number of 'effective' hands was similar in magnitude in all decades except one, to that of the actual number. It appears that the contraction was not only in 'idlers' but in effective hands, presumably a limited indication of increased workloads. The ratio of men per 100 tons are compatible with the early general sail figures, if a little lower at the beginning of the period and higher towards the end. The lower section of the table confirms the earlier discussion of the general expansion in the number of foreign seafarers in sailing vessels.

Both the previous tables have given general figures of men per 100 tons ratios. These, of course, will vary according to the size of the vessels and the following table illustrates these variations, in selected tonnage ranges, containing broadly the largest number of seafarers.

TABLE IV:17
FOREIGN GOING SAILING VESSELS: RATIO OF MEN PER 100 TONS NET

TONNAGE RANGE	1871	1881	1891
3- 400	3.16	2.93	2.68
8 - 1,000	2.52	2.19	1.98
1,200 - 1,500	2.15	1.99	1.30
2,500 - 3,000	1.46	1.49	1.25
3,000 plus	1.33	-	1.19
All groups*	2.7	2.3	1.67

* in much larger table

SOURCE:- Report of the Manning of British Merchant Ships.1896
Appendix A No.6 p.883, 4 & 5

The figures show a similar pattern to that of the general table, that is a steady contraction throughout the period, ratios in the larger vessels being considerably lower than that in the smaller tonnage. The large vessels were, of course, increasing in number throughout the period.

What emerges from this general examination of manning in British sailing vessels is the lack of any basic criteria on which to make an adequate assessment. The evidence is of broad contraction in the number of men per ship, but to what extent this was accomplished through technological change or increasing intensity of work cannot be accurately assessed. However, in the increasingly competitive commercial climate in which sailing vessels operated, technical change appears the predominant factor in the early part of the period. Later this changed to pressure on increasing the seafarers' workload, an assessment which finds some confirmation in studies of seafarers' leisure activities. Ashley, for example, points out that folk art at sea attained its peak of achievement in the early part of the century, when ships were manned adequately. This began to change in the late 1860's.⁽²⁵⁾

The obvious weakness of such a general assessment is that it obscures the wide variation of conditions and experience between vessels. Variations that were superimposed on the uneven nature of the seamen's task in relation to geographical position and trade, for example 'flying fish weather' can change ^{either} to become long frustrating calms, or gales equal to the danger or exhaustion of rounding the infamous Horn. When the task was performed in an under, or barely properly

25. Ashley C.W. The Ashley Book of Knots New York (1950) p.2

manned vessel difficulties could arise. For example, of a man or men proved to

"to be incompetent to discharge properly the duties of seamen. The ignorance or incapacity of these men threw additional work on the good seamen, cause dissatisfaction in the ship and enhance the danger of navigation." (26)

Dana, in his famous book on American ships, Two Years Before the Mast, writes, somewhat earlier, of the same problem should a man fall ill,

"the sick are neglected at sea, and whatever sailors be ashore, a sick man finds little sympathy or attention forward or aft." (27)

Weibust treated undermanning as a proverbial fact of life, requiring neither examination or discussion,

"sailing ships were chronically shorthanded, not a man could be spared." (28)

Turning to steam tonnage, the contraction in the ratio of men per 100 tons, in total terms was more rapid than that experienced in sail. But in foreign trade the contraction is of a remarkably similar magnitude, between 1854 and 1900 sail contracted 59.2% and steam 64.7%. Table IV:18 shows steam in different trades.

These figures reaffirm that, in relation to employment steam progresses slowly and was only a minor element until the 1870's. That decade saw an 18.8% change, and in the

26. Final Report of Royal Commission on Unseaworthy Ships
C.1027 Parl. Papers Vol. XXXIV p.xii 1874, also see
para. 13679 and 15340

27. Dana R.H. Glasgow (1840) p.132

28. Weibust K. Deep Sea Sailors: A Study in Maritime Ethnology
Kungl Bortryckerist P.A. Norstedt & Soner. Stockholm (1969)
p.104.

TABLE IV:18 STEAM TONNAGE: % EMPLOYED
AND RATIO OF MEN PER 100 TON NET IN DIFFERENT TRADES

	HOME TRADE		HOME TRADE & PARTICULAR FOREIGN TRADES		FOREIGN TRADE		
YEAR	% OF TOTAL EMPLOYED LABOUR	RATIO	% OF TOTAL EMPLOYED LABOUR	RATIO	% OF TOTAL EMPLOYED LABOUR	RATIO	% OF TOTAL LABOUR EMPLOYED IN STEAM TONNAGE
1854	2.36	7.1	0.8	6.9	6.6	7.7	67.4
1860	2.7	6.9	1.0	5.8	10.5	6.5	68.8
1865	4.1	6.1	1.0	4.6	14.6	5.5	73.9
1870	5.8	6.7	2.1	3.9	16.9	4.4	67.9
1875	6.8	5.8	2.8	3.8	27.2	3.7	74.0
1880	7.3	5.9	1.4	3.9	35.0	2.9	80.1
1885	9.1	6.0	3.2	3.8	43.5	2.5	80.2
1890	9.7	7.0	1.8	3.3	52.7	2.7	82.1
1895	12.6	7.5	2.7	2.7	54.9	2.4	78.2
1900	16.3	7.9	2.0	2.6	61.4	2.7	77.1

SOURCE:- Register General of Seamen

1880's there was a decade change of 20.6% from sail to steam, the largest in both percentage and numerical terms. The table highlights the remarkably high level of employment in steam vessels in the foreign trade, varying between 67% low and 82% high. Hence in percentage terms, Home Trade and Home and Partially Foreign Trade, were generally in the area of 30% of employment in steam. While in terms of total seafarers employment they are of little importance until the 1890's when they occupied approximately 15% of total seafarers. In the Home Trade the ratio of men per 100 tons remained high throughout the period. This is due to a number of causes. The high ratio is consistent with the small size of vessels employed in this trade. Obsolete foreign going vessels with high ratios would be transferred to coastal work. Finally, the period saw the development of the steam passenger trade, for sea crossings in the British Isles and the Near Continent. They offered increasingly luxury services entailing larger crews, especially in the catering department.

The vast majority of tonnage and labour employed in steam was engaged in the foreign trade. In the general swing from sail to steam employment the 1870's and the 1880's particularly, are the vital decades. In the manning ratios these appear to be less important for the contraction is rapid in the central decades, slowing down by the late 1880's; here, once again, statistical reorganisation means the slight rise in the 1890's can be ignored. These ratios are somewhat high as already argued, but they must be treated with caution for another reason, for unlike the sailing vessel,

where there is virtually an automatic relationship between large size and small ratio, the massive expansion of the emigrant and passenger trade was concurrent with the development of the large steam propeller passenger vessels. This being the era of the high prestige passenger liners which carried large crews, if only in terms of catering staff. The extent of their influence on the ratios is impossible to calculate accurately, but the following table gives some indication of this trend.

TABLE IV:19

FOREIGN GOING STEAM VESSELS: RATIO OF MEN PER 100 TONS NET

TONNAGE RANGE	1871	1881	1891
3 - 400	6.38	5.25	5.62
8 - 1,000	3.78	2.60	2.52
1,200 - 1,500	4.02	2.42	2.13
2,500 - 3,000	3.48	3.29	3.25
3,000 plus	2.67	3.58	4.19
All groups*	4.30	2.80	2.61

SOURCE:- Report on the Manning of British Merchant Ships 1896.

Appendix A No.6 p.883, 4 & 5

* in much larger table

The all groups total is similar to that of the general table above, but this general table masks the contradiction of a range breakdown. The expected contraction with increased size, particularly in 1881 and 1891, occurs in the range of up to 1200 to 1500 tons, the group containing the tramp tonnage and the majority of cargo liners in the fleet. It is the tonnage range above 2,500 which contains the passenger liner fleet that, for reasons, already explained, the trend becomes contrary to expectation.

The higher ratio of manning says little about the intensity of workload because, in these larger vessels the nature of the task was basically changed. There is no shortage of statements on the reasons why these vessels were preferred; for example, in a Report of 1874, it states,

"It is admitted that the coasting trade, and some of the great lines of steamers attract the steadiest and best seamen. Voyages in which men are not long absent from home and where vessels return periodically to the same port are naturally preferred. The wages, the accommodation and the food, are generally better in the large steamers." (29)

However, such statements say nothing about workload and the growing sector of steam tramps is ignored.

It is remarkable that, in a similar way to sailing vessels, a decadal examination of steamer's crew size show contractions, remarkable for as Goss observed, the

"effectiveness of a factor of production in, or around a ship is largely determined by the design of that ship. Once you built a ship intended to be operated by a given number of crew it is quite difficult to change either the number of men or the proportion of the various grades." (30)

Yet, as Table IV:20 illustrates, changes on both levels did occur in the last four decades of the C19th.

In a footnote to the sources of the table, the following statement was made,

"In the above table ships belonging to certain well-known firms have been selected at the chief ports of the United Kingdom as representatives of their class, care being taken to select those vessels which it has been found possible to trace on the Registers of both of the years."

29. Final Report of Royal Commission on Unseaworthy Ships
op cit and paras. 1,797, 13,264 and 14,345.

30. Goss R.O. Economic Criteria for Optimal Ships Designs
Transactions of the Royal Institution of Naval Architects
Oct. 1965.

TABLE IV:20 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CREW IN STEAM SHIPS ENGAGED IN FOREIGN TRADE BY DECADE

COMPARATIVE YEARS	1865-75		1870-80		1875-85		1880-90		1885-95	
NO. OF VESSELS IN SURVEY	25		25		35		32		38	
CAPACITY										
MATE & (MASTER) ¹	67	69	68	63	104	97	150	147	170	168
BOATSWAINS	23	24	21	22	48	41	45	52	52	45
Q.M.	19	15	19	10	22	19	44	47	46	46
CARPENTERS	25	22	29	21	35	33	36	33	43	39
A.B.	349	323	279	258	483	364	460	406	460	376
ORDINARY SEAMEN	50	49	41	13	35	22	40	42	26	30
APPRENTICES	-	-	2	-	1	-	-	-	7	2
BOYS	25	17	20	10	10	11	41	32	19	18
ENGINEERS	78	79	82	79	137	130	142	142	169	169
FIREMEN	220	206	246	186	329	302	460	452	491	443
OTHER PERSON ENGINE DEPT	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	86	102
LASCARS) D. HANDS	-	-	-	-	-	-	124	128	205	204
") ENG DEPT	-	-	-	-	-	-	156	174	273	323
OTHER ASIATICS) STEW DEPT	-	-	-	-	-	-	52	45	120	120
STEWARDS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	606	682
OTHER PERSONS	439	345	281	281	569	495	699	766	53	68
ACTUAL TOTAL	1295	1149	1083	939	1773	1514	2449	2461	2826	2838
EFFECTIVE TOTAL	1039	945	909	772.5	1428	1229	1706.5	1675	1759	1710
ACTUAL % CHANGE	11.3		13.3		12.6		0.4		0.4	
EFFECTIVE % CHANGE	9.0		15.0		14.3		2.0		4.7	
ACTUAL % CHANGE (EXCL. LASCARS)	-		-		-		1.0		1.7	
NO. OF MEN PER 100 TON	4.8	4.26	4.45	3.86	3.47	2.96	2.89*	2.81*	2.57*	2.50*
NO. OF FOREIGNERS	70	73	56	61	115	130	133	78	169	139
% OF FOREIGNERS	5.4	6.4	5.2	6.5	6.5	8.6	5.4	3.2	5.9	4.9
SCANDINAVIANS	44.2	35.6	26.8	27.9	29.0	36.9	34.6	43.6	44.4	43.1
GERMANS	24.2	24.6	23.2	31.1	13.5	17.7	20.3	14.1	21.9	17.3
U.S.A.	4.2	8.2	1.8	14.7	6.4	10.8	15.0	5.1	9.5	8.6

¹ Included from 1886
 * Not excluding Lascars

Source:- Registrar General of Shipping

It may be presumed that these companies had the best manning practice in the steam fleet. Yet there is an unexpected similarity in the manning ratios in these limited samples to the general foreign trade steam figures above, as well as a long term contraction of like magnitude. It is also noticeable that the first three periods witnessed substantial contraction in manpower both actual and effective, using Sir Digby Manning's criteria. In the later periods the contraction, using all criteria, and excluding Lascars, is comparatively minor. This is explained by the stewards, etc., and other persons, the catering staff, who in the last two periods against the general trend expanded substantially as the standards of passenger comfort rose. This group is defined among the idlers by Sir Digby Manning, and the increase fails to mask completely the decrease in effective manning. In all capacities, with one exception, Lascars increase, foreigners are as expected, a minor general element in steam tonnage, but here, once again, they manage to expand against the general trend until the last two periods; why this happens is not clear. Foreigners consist of the same major national groups as in sail, Scandinavian and German being in excess of 50% in virtually every example.

Foreigners were only a small proportion but, as already argued, their presence only seriously affected ratings, in particular deck ratings, and to a lesser extent that of the engine room. As Table IV:20 reveals, it is precisely these groups who, in real terms, over the whole period suffered their greatest contraction. For deck ratings, this increases in severity as the century progresses, but in the engine room ratings' case, the process is reversed somewhat,

the largest contraction coming early in the period.

It is undeniable that there was a decline in the ratio of man per ton in all vessels, but especially in the foreign going vessels. A situation which implied an increase in the intensity of the work load and the patterns of labour; what it is difficult to assess is the degree of that increase. Contemporary discussion of this throughout the period was intermingled with that of safety, and was concerned with both the quality and quantity of the seafarers employed. It has already been pointed out that incompetence in the crew threw an extra burden on the other members, a particularly important point if the vessel was under, or inadequately, manned. Throughout all the evidence there is a dichotomy between the majority of shipowners operating adequately manned vessels and the remainder who undermanned their vessels, and overworked and endangered the lives of their employees. It was illustrated in 1873, by the shipowner MacIver, when he attributed collisions to undermanning,

"Men on foreign voyages are entitled to a full allowance of sleep undisturbed. I have no right to call that man up and break his sleep unless it is for something out of the common. That is not the rule with some shipowners." (31)

Gray, in his report to the Commission on the Loss of Life at Sea 1886, made similar comments.

"The Board of Trade have reason to believe that many ships are dangerously undermanned, and that collisions and other casualties are the result." (32)

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31. Preliminary Report of the Royal Commission on Unseaworthy Ships. C.853 (1873) para.9,388
 32. Report to the Right Honourable the President of the Board of Trade. 1896 op cit. p.17

The majority Report on Manning of 1896 supported this kind of statement, stating,

"We are glad to record that representatives of some of the largest and most successful shipowning firms in the United Kingdom have appeared before us, and have shown not only that their ships are manned in an unexceptionable manner, but have acknowledged that it is in the owner's interest to man his ships well."

and going on to say,

"On the other hand, the Committee have found that in certain classes of ships there is a tendency to reduce the number of men, out of proportion to the adoption of improvements in the rig or labour saving appliances of the vessels, and that many vessels that have been referred to in evidence or reported on by courts of inquiry, have not been so manned as to conduce either to safety or to the well-being of the crews." (33)

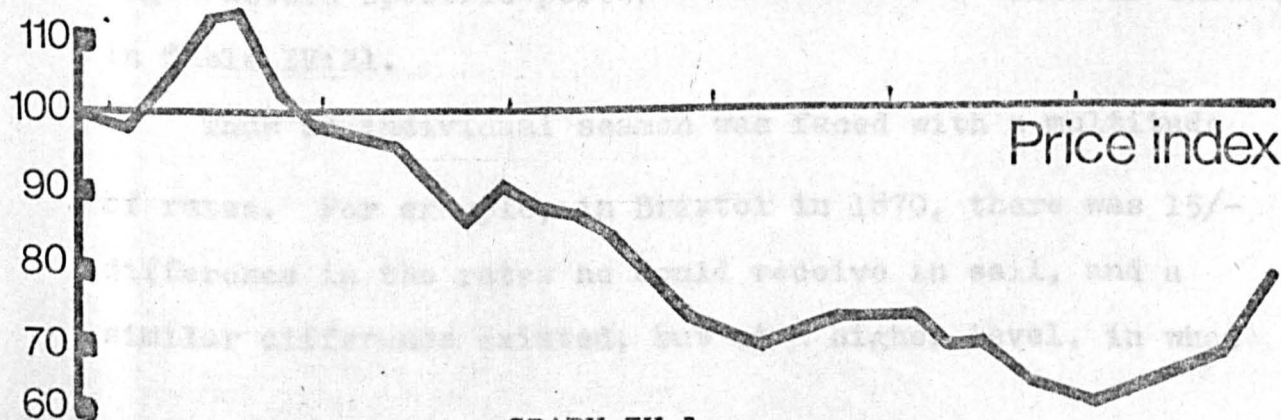
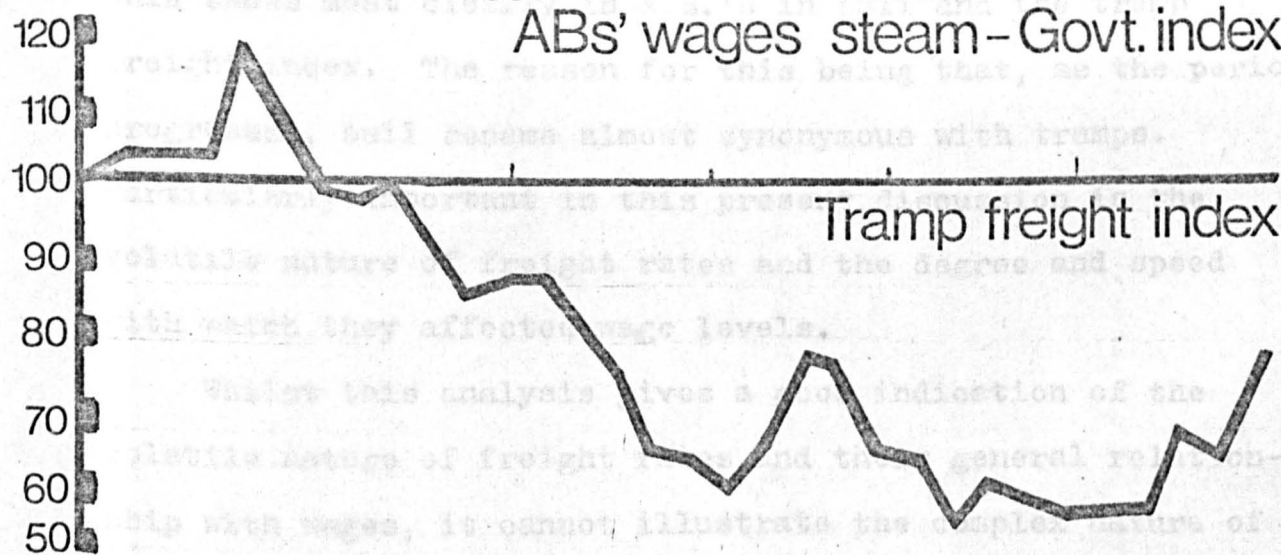
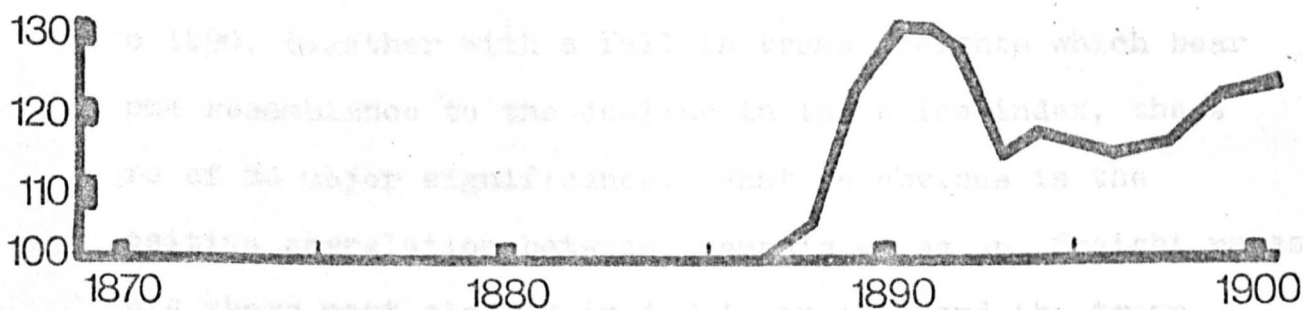
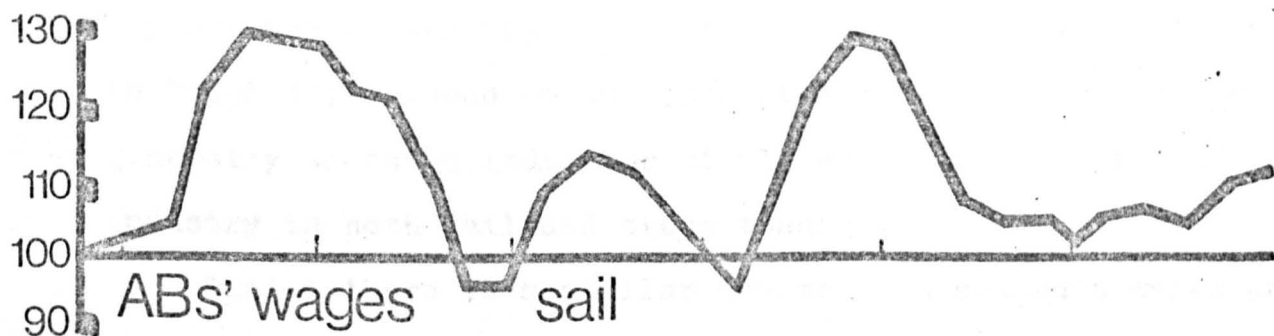
Much of the evidence put to the Commission suggests that a considerable proportion of this undermanning was in certain sectors of the industry. This is perhaps best summed up by Captain Froud,

"My belief is, after thinking the matter out carefully, that a very large number of tramp steamers and many sailing ships are seriously undermanned, and if I may add it, under officered." (34)

It is fair to assume, therefore, that there was a considerable amount of undermanning during this period and that such undermanning meant extra work for the seaman. This was in addition to the generally increased workload as illustrated by the tonnage/men ratios, but was not, however, reflected in increased rewards.

33. Report of Manning of British Merchant Ships. (1896)
op cit. para.6 and 7

34. Report Loss of Life at Sea Part II. para.7327



The seafarers' rate of pay was dictated by the free play of the economic forces of demand and supply. Although the days of not paying the individual seaman if the vessel received no freight had passed, freight levels remained the key arbiter of wage rates. This relationship is illustrated in Graph IV:1, based on an index of A.B.'s money wages, the generally accepted indicator of all wage movements in the industry in both sail and steam tonnage.

Whilst there is a similar movement in seamen's wages and average money wages evident between 1869 and 1873 and 1888 to 1890, together with a fall in tramp freights which bear some resemblance to the decline in the price index, these are of no major significance. What is obvious is the positive correlation between seamen's wages and freight rates, this shows most clearly in A.B.'s in sail and the tramp freight index. The reason for this being that, as the period progressed, sail became almost synonymous with tramps. Particularly important in this present discussion is the volatile nature of freight rates and the degree and speed with which they affected wage levels.

Whilst this analysis gives a good indication of the volatile nature of freight rates and their general relationship with wages, it cannot illustrate the complex nature of wages within specific ports. This is shown in Table IV:21.

Thus an individual seaman was faced with a multitude of rates. For example, in Bristol in 1870, there was 15/- difference in the rates he could receive in sail, and a similar difference existed, but at a higher level, in what

TABLE IV:21 A.B. WAGE RANGE ALL TRADES (SHILLINGS)

(MIN. - MAX.)

	BRISTOL		GLASGOW		LIVERPOOL		LONDON		NEWCASTLE SHIELDS		EXTENT OF RANGE
	SAIL	STEAM	SAIL	STEAM	SAIL	STEAM	SAIL	STEAM	SAIL	STEAM	
1860 (ALL VESSELS)	50-50	-	50-70	-	50-60	-	50-60	-	50-70	-	50-70
1870	50-65	60-75	55-80	60-80	50-50	55-80	50-70	50-80	50-65	60-70	50-80
1875	60-80	70-80	70-90	70-90	60-80	55-90	65-70	60-90	65-80	80-80	55-90
1880	50-55	60-70	45-70	55-70	50-60	50-80	50-55	60-75	50-60	70-70	45-80
1885	60-60	70-70	55-65	60-70	55-60	50-80	55-55	65-75	55-60	70-75	50-80
1890	70-70	90-100	70-73	80-92.6	60-70	70-80	70-75	80-90	65-75	90-95	65-100
1895	50-60	65-70	55-55	65-80	55-55	65-90	55-55	70-80	60-60	70-80	55-90
1898	60-60	80-80	55-60	70-80	55-55	60-80	55-60	70-80	60-60	85-100	55-100

SOURCE:- Parliamentary Papers

could be earned in a steam ship. Whereas, to take another example, in London in 1885, there was a standard rate in sail, but this was 10/- below the lowest rate in a steam ship and a full £1 below the maximum. Therefore, to the casual nature of his employment was added considerable uncertainty as to income when he was in work. The seafarer was not only aware of the local differences of pay, but also because of his mobility, the extent of the maximum and minimum nationally which was in the region of 35/- between 1870 and 1890.

It may be argued that wage rates were affected by the type of trade in which the vessel was employed. However, Table IV:22 shows that over a specified trade the same conclusions can be drawn. Whilst the Mediterranean has been selected as an example, an examination of other trades shows similar results.

What both tables highlights is the higher level of pay in steam than in sail, this appears to be peculiar to the British industry at this time.⁽³⁵⁾ The low rate in sail meant that these ships were avoided by experienced seamen whenever possible. Gray says

"the reason why they had not better sailors in sailing ships was not because seamen were worse as a body, but because some particular trades and services would not give sufficient wages to attract good seamen." (36)

35. In Norwegian vessels for example no such difference existed.

36. Quoted in Lord Brassey British Seamen Longman (1877)

TABLE IV:22 A.B. WAGE SAIL AND STEAM - SHILLINGS

VOYAGE TO MEDITERRANEAN - 1860-1898

(MIN. - MAX.)

	BRISTOL		GLASGOW		LIVERPOOL		LONDON		NEWCASTLE		EXTENT OF RANGE
	SAIL	STEAM	SAIL	STEAM	SAIL	STEAM	SAIL	STEAM	SAIL	STEAM	
1860 (ALL VESSELS)	50	-	55	-	50	-	50	-	60	-	50-60
1870	55	60-75	60	65	50	60	50-55	60-70	57.6	70	50-75
1875	70-80	80	70	80	60	70	70	75	70-75	80	60-80
1880	55	65-70	55-60	60-70	50	55	50-55	65-75	55	70	50-70
1885	-	70	55-60	60-65	-	60	55	65-75	60	70-75	55-75
1890	-	90	-	80	-	80	70	80-90	70-75	90-95	70-95
1895	-	70	55	70	55	70	-	70-80	-	80	55-80
1898	60	80	55-60	70	55	70	55	70-80	60	85-100	55-100

SOURCE:- Parliamentary Papers

One way of securing men was through the use of the advance notes, sometimes referred to as half pay notes. This entitled a seaman's nominee to an advance on his wages, the note being cashed after the ship had sailed. Crimps discounted these Notes and then ensured the seaman actually sailed.

"The advance note is retained in sailing ships chiefly as a bounty to induce sailors to accept lower wages." (37)

Attempts were made to abolish such notes in the Merchant Shipping Act of 1880, but this was strongly resisted by sailing ship owners who used what is known as a Bonus note which gave a seaman's nominee all his first months pay while he signed on at a rate of 1/- for that month. The success of this ploy resulted in the Advance Note being reinstated in the Merchant Shipping Act of 1884. The retention of the Advance Note perpetuated the role of the crimp; as has been said

"the seedy boarding house keeper crimp and the runner with his cart and knuckle duster helped the sailing ship owner to survive into the C20th by keeping his wage costs down." (38)

Even taking into consideration the higher rates of pay in steam throughout the period, the seaman was regarded as poorly paid, particularly in view of the irregularity of employment. A representative of the shipowners gave credence

37. Lord Brassey (1894) op cit p.50

38. Jones S. 'Blood Red Rose: The Supply of Merchant Seamen in the Nineteenth Century' The Mariners Mirror Vol.58 No.4 (1972)

to this assessment of the seafarers position, although ostensibly denigrating the activities of the seamen's organisation, when in giving evidence before the Royal Commission on Labour in July, 1891, he replied to a suggestion that money wages had doubled in the previous twenty or thirty years by saying

"I do not wish you to infer that the wages are really double what they were, or even that the wages per annum have much increased. I do not believe that the casual seaman of today gets more money than he did then, because then they were sailing ships, and it was a constant employment for the men. They came back after one or two years with a lot of money to take. He had been constantly employed and regularly fed. Now the man comes back after a voyage of a month or two with £3 10s, ten shillings of which is paid to the crimp to get him a ship. For a month, perhaps, at a time he is without a ship. Although he gets £4-10s, he is not at the end of the year able to spend more money upon himself or his family than he would when he was getting only £2-10s."

"Do I understand you that now the seamen is, on the average, only employed about 6 months in the year?"

"I fancy that is about it, except in the very best lines, where they keep them on constantly, or in the home trade." (39)

TABLE IV; 23 NUMBER OF OUTBREAKS OF SCURVY
REPORTED TO THE BOARD OF TRADE FROM 1889 to 1901 INCLUSIVE

YEAR	NO.OF OUTBREAKS	NO.OF CASES
1889	20	62
1890	11	26
1891	13	26
1892	22	59
1893	16	66
1894	18	68
1895	14	61
1896	14	47
1897	15	79
1898	11	26
1899	8	22
1900	6	11
1901	3	22
	-----	-----
TOTAL DURING 13 YEARS	171	575
	-----	-----

SOURCE:- Report of Mercantile Marine Committee
Parliamentary Papers LXII Appendix A No.14 (1903)

The relative position of the seafarers was measured both in terms of their poor pay and the conditions under which they worked.

"Taking into view the conditions of a seaman's life - the danger to which he is exposed, and his long separation from home - it is evident that he is but poorly compensated for the privation and hardship to which he is subjected." (40)

Part of the privation was related to the standard of accommodation and food. It is virtually impossible to provide an accurate assessment of how adequate the seafarers diet was. There was undoubtedly, as there had always been, a diversity of practice among different owners. "To some the food, though uninviting and plain, was wholesome." (41) but one shipowner agreed in some cases that the standard was very low indeed

"I suppose we may pick out gross instances of seamen being badly fed in every trade ... which may be perfectly true, but I say it is an instance which is very much the exception." (42)

Just how exceptional is perhaps open to question since Dr. Spooner, in a report to the Board of Trade, stated that "sailors as a rule are fed on worse than workhouse or prison fare." (43) The fact that scurvy (see Table IV:23), probably the tip of a malnutritional iceberg, was still in existence

40. Lord Brassey (1894) op cit. p.129

41. Royal Commission on Labour Minutes of Evidence
Evidence of G. Laws. Group B Vol.II (Cmnd 6795) Q14,754

42. Ibid para.13,429

43. Ibid quoted by Plimsoll S. para.11,297

in the British Merchant service throughout the second half of the 19th, although it was "almost unknown in French and Dutch ships" and "had been for years unknown in the British Navy"⁽⁴⁴⁾ does provide some indication of the inadequacy of diet in merchant vessels.

It was, however, the element of danger to which Brassey had referred, rather than accommodation and food, which provided the basis of Plimsoll's crusade which began in 1868. The main aim of his campaign was the compulsory survey of ships and the fixing of a maximum load line. On the one hand the national campaign evoked an unprecedented sympathy for the seafarers conditions and on the other, revealed to the seafarer the possibility of questioning and thereby improving his position. It also showed that the state could be impelled to intercede in his employment situation, through the agency of the Board of Trade. Whilst this was the theory behind the subsequent legislation, both Plimsoll and the seafarers were inclined to suspect the Marine Department would be more amenable to the shipowners viewpoint than their own. Plimsoll certainly felt that

6. "the Board of Trade, rather than the shipowners as
7. a body, constituted the main source of opposition
to him. Other Liberals agreed, at least to the
extent of blaming the President of the Board of
Trade, Adderley, for paying too much attention to
the shipping interest." (45)

44. Lord Brassey (1894) op cit p.82

45. Alderman G. 'Samuel Plimsoll and the Shipping Interest'
Maritime History Vol.1 No.1 April 1971

Nevertheless, Plimsoll and the subsequent legislation increased the power of the Board of Trade and it added a further consideration to the calculations of the shipowner.

The ensuing decades were to prove how little the strength of the Board of Trade achieved in improving the conditions of the seaman and ^{minimising} the danger he faced. The 1887 Commission dismissed earlier inquiries, for example that of 1873, and legislation as having been ineffectual.

"When we looked at the general results of the legislation, thus referred to, upon the loss of life and property at sea in British vessels, it is most unsatisfactory to find that no sensible effect has been produced in the reduction of this loss of life" ... "it appears that from 1874 to 1883 inclusively there was a marked increase in the loss of British ships and of the lives of those employed on them." (46)

The Board of Trade estimated

"the proportion of men who lost their lives by wreck or other casualties, including deaths in registered fishing vessels, and in rivers and harbours, varied from 1 in 81 in 1875 to 1 in 56 in 1883; and for the triennial periods increased from 1 in 75 in the three years 1875-7 to 1 in 76 in their next period and 1 in 58 in the last period 1881-3." (47)

Table IV:24 takes a more extensive look at the extent of loss of life among seafarers.

46. Final Report Loss of Life at Sea (1887) op cit. p.11

47. Ibid p.12

* Total all recorded industrial accidents - all post 1885

Sources: Parkhurst P.C.T. Ship of Peace Memorial F. p.405 (1867 - 1881-2)

British Labour Statistics Historical Abstract 1885-1963

H.M.S.O. 1976.

TABLE IV:24 LOSS OF LIFE ALL SEAMEN IN BRITISH VESSELS 1867 - 1900
COMPARED WITH OTHER INDUSTRIES 1880 - 1900

YEAR	SHIPPING	COAL MINING	RAILWAYS	TOTAL*
1867	2,350			
1868	2,027			
1869	2,035			
1870	1,933			
1871	2,002			
1872	2,073			
1873*	1,716			
1873-74	2,758			
1874-75	2,282			
1875-76	1,716			
1876-77	2,417			
1877-78	1,605			
1878-79	1,799			
1879-80	1,490	1,318	580	2,437
1880-81	2,218	954	562	2,024
1881-82	3,006	1,126	580	2,242
1883		1,054	602	2,143
1884		942	585	1,986
1885	2,194	1,150	470	4,257
1886	1,792	953	459	3,585
1887	2,390	995	456	4,265
1888	2,364	906	442	4,170
1889	2,260	1,112	476	4,355
1890	2,136	1,194	536	4,396
1891	2,239	1,005	603	4,318
1892	2,275	1,016	575	4,344
1893	1,850	1,060	516	3,913
1894	2,460	1,127	522	4,699
1895	2,236	1,042	489	4,493
1896	2,233	1,025	490	4,566
1897	1,874	930	566	4,262
1898	1,410	908	542	3,810
1899	2,000	916	584	4,619
1900	1,830	1,012	631	4,753

*six months

* Total all recorded industrial accidents - all post 1885

Source:- Parkhurst P.C.T. Ship of Peace Appendix F. p.406 (1867 - 1881-2)

British Labour Statistical Historical Abstract 1886-1968

H.M.S.O. 1976.

TABLE IV:25 - PERCENTAGE & TOTAL OF DEATHS AMONGST SEAMEN EMPLOYED AT SEA
(EXCLUDING LASCARS)

	% BY WRECK & CASUALTIES		% BY OTHER ACCIDENTS		% BY DISEASE ETC.		TOTAL			
							SAIL		STEAM	
	SAIL	STEAM	SAIL	STEAM	SAIL	STEAM	NUMBER	%	NUMBER	%
1884-85	.65	.58	.32	.09	.25	.21	985	1.22	955	.88
1885-86	.86	.14	.28	.10	.29	.27	1,153	1.42	559	.51
1886-87	.91	.55	.31	.10	.27	.21	1,114	1.50	872	.85
1887-88	.93	.44	.45	.21	.30	.26	1,176	1.68	936	.90
1888-89	.75	.32	.50	.14	.31	.20	1,067	1.60	724	.66
1889-90	.68	.37	.43	.17	.32	.22	923	1.43	888	.76
1890-91	1.29	.31	.37	.11	.33	.22	1,231	1.76	778	.64
1891-92	1.15	.24	.37	.13	.36	.29	1,145	1.88	838	.66
1892-93	.86	.23	.32	.08	.25	.16	877	1.43	605	.47
1893-94	1.03	.44	.41	.12	.27	.22	1,016	1.71	1,020	.79
1894-95	1.03	.23	.39	.12	.32	.21	986	1.74	736	.57
1895-96	1.18	.32	.42	.12	.32	.20	1,035	1.92	831	.64
1896-97	.80	.28	.35	.16	.27	.20	722	1.42	836	.64
1897-98	.52	.15	.31	.09	.34	.18	552	1.17	563	.43
1898-99	.98	.45	.30	.12	.34	.19	703	1.63	1,013	.76
1899-1900	.74	.27	.25	.09	.31	.25	535	1.39	840	.62

SOURCE:- Shipping Casualties. Cd.3666. 1907 P.xxiv

These grim statistics for the last three decades can be compared with other industries having high death rates. In the period 1885 to 1900, as an approximation, shipping rates are in the region of twice those of coal mining and four to five times that of railways. In the total from industries covered by the Factories and other Industrial Acts, shipping accounted for between 40% and 50% of all deaths throughout the period.

In Table IV:25 the shipping death rate is broken down into sectors and causes of loss.

The most noticeable feature of the table, which takes account of changes in the size of the labour forces, is the persistently high level of death within the industry throughout the period, (particularly important since the wider social conscience was such that in society at large, 'welfare' was regarded as a more acceptable concept.) Those who manned sailing vessels were the most vulnerable. Within these parameters marginal differences are evident. The gap between sail and steam widened as the period progressed and as sail's attempts at competitive survival became the more desperate. The widening of these differences depends almost totally on differences in Wreck and Casualties and accident. In respect of disease there are, comparatively, only minor differences between the two sectors. A seaman manning a steamship had more chance of dying from disease, etc., than from accident. But in both groups Wreck and Casualties, including unknown losses, were the main life takers.

TABLE IV:26 DEATH RATES AND TOTAL
AMONGST BRITISH SEAMEN AT SEA (1884-1900)
(EXCLUDING LASCARS)

	BY WRECK OR CASUALTIES	BY ACCIDENTS (INC. COL.1)	BY COL 1&2 & DISEASE ETC.	TOTAL NUMBER
1884-85	1 in 164	1 in 125	1 in 97	1,940
1885-86	1 in 223	1 in 160	1 in 111	1,707
1886-87	1 in 142	1 in 112	1 in 88	1,986
1887-88	1 in 157	1 in 106	1 in 82	2,112
1888-89	1 in 200	1 in 129	1 in 98	1,791
1889-90	1 in 207	1 in 135	1 in 100	1,811
1890-91	1 in 157	1 in 120	1 in 92	2,009
1891-92	1 in 187	1 in 135	1 in 95	1,983
1892-93	1 in 231	1 in 169	1 in 128	1,482
1893-94	1 in 158	1 in 119	1 in 92	2,036
1894-95	1 in 210	1 in 147	1 in 108	1,722
1895-96	1 in 175	1 in 128	1 in 98	1,866
1896-97	1 in 234	1 in 157	1 in 117	1,558
1897-98	1 in 397	1 in 250	1 in 160	1,115
1898-99	1 in 171	1 in 134	1 in 103	1,716
1899-1900	1 in 262	1 in 195	1 in 129	1,375

SOURCE:- Shipping Casualties. Cd.3666. 1907 P.xxv

Table IV:26 illustrates that the seafarers in employment lived constantly with death from industrial hazard as an everyday occurrence, the simple average throughout the period being 1 to 106 from all causes.

The U.K. resident seafarers in the period under consideration were therefore working in a hazardous environment, very often in poor material conditions and with little, if any, extra reward for the increased productivity of the industry. Furthermore, he was in an insecure, casual employment situation where job opportunities were being threatened by technological change and foreign labour, and his old skills and traditions were being undermined by the industrialisation of the industry with the transition to steam from sail. Although there had been some sympathetic recognition of the "many privations of the seamen's life" and "the inferiority of his situation to that of any other skilled labourers"⁽⁴⁸⁾ it had not resulted in effective action or improved rewards. By the mid 1880's there were a lengthy accumulation of outstanding grievances to which, apparently, the seafarer could obtain no redress without taking the matter very firmly into his own hands.

49. Lord Brassey (1877) op cit

CHAPTER V

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE NATIONAL AMALGAMATED SAILORS AND FIREMEN'S UNION

During the late 1870's and early 1880's both seafarer and shipowner had become increasingly aware of the need for organised representation to government, and it was in this context that the latter had formed the Chamber of Shipping. Whilst the seafarer did not have such structured representation there is evidence of increasing concern about legislation. The campaign of Plimsoll on behalf of the seaman, and later the work of Chamberlain, had not only awakened public sympathy for them but also made the seaman himself more aware of his right to improvements in conditions outside the narrow limit of wages in a society which was becoming more conscious of social injustice.

From 1883 onwards there were consistent demands for a manning scale, continuous discharges, a four years apprenticeship for A.B.s., a certificate of competency, employers liability, weekly allotments and the strict regulation and inspection of provisions.⁽¹⁾ This period also saw a resurgence of seamen's unionisation and renewed efforts to establish some form of amalgamation. There was a conference of British seamen and seagoing firemen in Leith in August 1885 which discussed all of the above topics, but were most concerned with the first three which were directly

1. Sunderland Daily Echo 20 November and 17 December 1883, 15 and 18 February 1884.

Royal Commission on Loss of Life at Sea
1st Report C4577 Parl. Papers xxxv 1884-5
Final Report C5227 Parl. Papers xliii 1887

related to the control of the supply of labour and inhibited the employment of foreigners.⁽²⁾ There were delegates from London, Hull, Shields, Aberdeen, Dundee and Sunderland and⁽³⁾ they claimed to represent a membership of 90,000 seafarers who agreed that a draft set of rules "be printed and copies of the same forwarded to the various societies for their consideration with a view to amalgamation."⁽⁴⁾

The mid 1880's would appear to have been a good time for such a move as the period saw a resurgence of unionisation amongst seamen; new societies were emerging such as the Bristol Channel Ports Seamen's Defence League,⁽⁵⁾ the Vigilance Association in London,⁽⁶⁾ the Union of the Bowl in Liverpool⁽⁷⁾ and there already existed in Goole a strong society which was involved in a strike during July.⁽⁸⁾

It is difficult to assess the long term influence of the 1885 conference but foreigners and the possibility of inclusion in the Employers Liability Act remained of concern

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2. A society was formed in Shields with this aim in mind.
 3. Wilson J.H. My Stormy Voyage Through Life Vol.1
Co-operative Printing Society Ltd. London (1926) p.116
 4. Sunderland Daily Echo 28 August 1885
 5. Bristol Times and Mirror 27 and 28 April 1886
 6. Royal Commission on Labour Minutes of Evidence 1885
Group B Vol.1 Q9232
 7. Loss of Life at Sea op cit para.16273 and 4
 8. Sunderland Herald and Daily Post 23 July 1886
See also Appendix I

throughout the ensuing year. There were demonstrations in Sunderland and Shields in early March 1886 against the employment of foreigners in English vessels.⁽⁹⁾ In May of that year the South Shields United Seamen's and Firemen's Society met to discuss the inclusion of seamen in the Employers Liability Act followed by a similar meeting three days later in Sunderland.⁽¹⁰⁾

The focus for amalgamation remained strong on the North East coast. In July there was a conference of delegates from North and South Shields, Sunderland and Hartlepool to consider "a proposal to amalgamate all the societies on the North East coast."⁽¹¹⁾ A month later the North Shields society passed a resolution that

"it is for the best interest of sailors and sea-going firemen of the North East coast that the existing local society shall be federated and united under the registered rules of the Sunderland society (North of England)" ⁽¹²⁾

and a week later branches were opened in North and South Shields. This movement widened in September when the North of England communicated with the secretaries of the Goole, Glasgow and Aberdeen seamen's societies with a view to amalgamation.⁽¹³⁾

To what extent concern with legislation and attempts to

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9. Sunderland Daily Echo 27 February and 3 March 1886
 10. Ibid 22 and 25 May 1886
 11. Sunderland Herald and Daily Post 17 June 1886
 12. Ibid 5 August 1886
 13. Ibid 17 September 1886

directly influence state action gave the impetus to schemes for amalgamation of existing local societies, or federation on a wider basis, is difficult to assess. Undoubtedly where such moves were suggested there was strong emphasis on the need for unity in order to achieve the 'betterment' of seamen's conditions generally rather than merely to take advantage of improved economic conditions or to avoid wage reductions as was usually the case. For example, when the two Hull societies amalgamated to become the Hull Seamen's and Marine Firemen's Amalgamated Association (HSMFAA) their resolution stated,

"Knowing that great advantages were derived from unity and co-operation moved that on and after 1st January 1887 the Seamen and Firemen of the two associations do amalgamate to form an association under the name and title of the Hull Seamen's and Firemen's Amalgamated Association having for its greatest object the bettering of the conditions both morally and socially and the professional improvement of the seafaring populations of the United Kingdom." (14)

However, when a further conference was called in December 1886 the main issue was one of wages. The emphasis was not on merely increasing wages but introducing national uniformity. Letters had been received from

"London, Glasgow, Hull and Goole stating that they intended to take up the question of seamen's wages there was a view to bringing about an equalisation in the rates at the various ports." (15)

It was anticipated that delegates would come to the conference from the London Seamen's and Firemen's Vigilance Association,

14. Minutes of the Hull Seamen's and Marine Firemen's Amalgamated Association (H.S.M.F.A.A.) 5 October 1886

15. Sunderland Daily Echo 14 December 1886

the Glasgow and Aberdeen United Seamen's Friendly Society and similar bodies at Hull, Goole, Middlesborough and Hartlepool. In the event, on 30th December, there were only representatives from the last three ports and from the local societies in Sunderland and Shields, and the concern of the conference seems to have been entirely local.⁽¹⁶⁾

Whilst the conference was apparently a failure, the question of increases in wages and the possibility of amalgamation remained alive. Although the envisaged national wage campaign did not materialise, there were isolated incidents of agitation for increases in pay and gains were made.⁽¹⁷⁾ There was a ballot of the North of England membership⁽¹⁸⁾ in February which gave overwhelming support to strike action on the North East coast but if in fact a strike did take place it was not of sufficient importance to be reported in the local press. Nevertheless, this local society continued its efforts to

"amalgamate or federate with seamen's societies at London, Liverpool, Glasgow, Hull and Hartlepool, Middlesborough and other ports, on a basis similar to that of the Engineer or Railway Servants." ⁽¹⁹⁾

An approach was made to these other societies and there was a positive response from Hull who requested that further details be sent to them.⁽²⁰⁾ At a meeting a week later the

16. Ibid 31 December 1886

17. Ibid 17 November 1886

18. Ibid 4 February 1887

19. Ibid 14 April 1887

20. Minutes of H.S.M.F.A.A. op cit 19 April 1887

North of England unanimously agreed that a Committee be set up to draw up rules to bring about a federation of seamen's unions. This move, like others before it, did not come to fruition.

What is significant about this particular failure is its indirect link with the formation of the National Amalgamated Sailors and Firemen's Union of Great Britain and Ireland (NASFU), since J. Havelock Wilson and fellow members of the local society who founded the new organisation defected over this issue. The exact motivation for this split in the case of J. Havelock Wilson is in some doubt. At its lowest level it may have been a question of personal rivalry for a leading position in the Society of which Wilson had been President in 1886. The Secretary at the time of the break, Alfred Rutherford, was anxious to maintain special local relationships,⁽²¹⁾ which meant that any form of co-operation with other ports and organisations implied a large degree of 'branch' autonomy, whereas Havelock Wilson preferred "amalgamation which would have prevented societies from seceding after any petty grievance."⁽²²⁾

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21. Such as between the North of England and Lambtons in Sunderland, see below; and the H.S.M.F.A.A. and Thoms Wilson & Sons in Hull. See Brown R. Waterfront Organisation in Hull 1870-1900 University of Hull occasional Papers in Economic and Social History No.5 (1972)passim and Fletcher B. A Local Union in the Era of New Unionism Reading University (1973) unpublished manuscript passim.
22. Sunderland Herald and Daily Post 26 April 1887

These differing viewpoints illustrate the problem on which schemes for amalgamation foundered at this time. The existing local societies were almost invariably dependent on special relationships with local shipowners or a strong community of interest for long term stability; commitment to national policy, which was implicit in any effective amalgamation, was a potential threat to special relationships that were locally based. This is substantiated by a statement made by a seaman who sailed out of Sunderland in the 1880's

"They [the North of England] were afraid if they incorporated all seamen in their union they would lose the monopoly they had of the weekly Lambton boats." (23)

Havelock Wilson on the other hand, recognised this inherent weakness of the amalgamation of local societies, and if any co-operation was to be successful it must have as its first priority a national commitment rather than a local one.

His break with the North of England came in late June or early July 1887, by July 26th it was reported that he had been requested to resign as the Union's representative on the Sunderland Trades Council, that he had done so and a new representative had been elected. (24) Following this he called

23. Shorthand notes of an interview with Charles Lindley in Sweden sometime in the late 1950s in the Archives of the National Union of Seamen.

24. Sunderland Daily Echo 26 July 1887

a meeting to establish a rival union.⁽²⁵⁾ This decision was presumably not an impulsive one since he had been a sailor for a number of years and also had extensive trade union experience.⁽²⁶⁾ Furthermore, he was by this time established ashore and would perhaps have had a more objective view of the problems of the effective organisation of the seafarers, and his connection with the local society would give him some knowledge of the support he was likely to get.

A public meeting was held on the 18th August of those "seamen and firemen interested in the formation of a 'National Seamen's and Firemen's Union' at Mr. J.H. Wilson's Eating House, High Street East, (Sunderland)." (27)

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25. Sunderland Herald and Daily Post 9 August 1887. and Shipping Gazette 20 August 1887
 26. McConville J. and Saville J. 'J. Havelock Wilson' in Dictionary of Labour Biography Vol.IV Ed. Bellamy J. and Saville J. Macmillan (1978)
 27. Minute Book of the National Amalgamated Sailors' and Firemen's Union of Great Britain and Ireland (N.A.S.F.U.) 18 August 1887

Mr. Wilson explained that he had seceded from the North of England because of their disinclination to extend their sphere of influence.

"The inability of the local society in the case of the recent seamen's strike to secure the wages asked for be attributed to the purely local influence of that organisation."

In addition to which he felt that influence on government policy, in particular in relation to the evidence given to the Select Committee on Loss of Life at Sea and the question of the undermanning of vessels, would be more effective had

"an amalgamated union been in existence"

and "that they should keep the local society as the nucleus of a national one, extending it to other ports." (28)

Not all those present were committed to an amalgamated organisation. The Chairman of the meeting, whilst agreeing that since a local society was beneficial then "surely a union throughout the Kingdom would be infinitely more powerful.",

advocated a national Federation, "the influence of which would be tremendous extending even to parliament itself."

The meeting concluded with the resolution

"That this meeting is of the opinion that, owing to the complete failure of local societies in protecting the interest of sailors and firemen, it is desirable that a national amalgamated union should be formed without delay - these having branches in all ports of the United Kingdom - on the same principle as the successful trades unions of other workmen." (29)

28. Sunderland Herald and Daily Post 19 August 1887

29. Ibid. 19 August 1887

The objects of the new society, as defined at the meeting, included the intention

"to improve the tone and to protect the interests of all classes of the seafaring community; to provide a better class of men for the merchant service, and to see that all members engaged through the union will be on board their vessel at the appointed time, and in a sober condition, to endeavour to obtain reasonable hours of duty and to maintain fair rates of wages." (30)

These objectives did not radically differ from those of the North of England except perhaps for the extent of the provision of Friendly Benefits which included the establishment of seamen's homes in addition to the more usual provision of assistance to those travelling in search of work, to relieve the sick or temporarily disabled and to pay for 'respectable interment in case of death'.

The extent of the friendly benefits is presumably due to the influence of a "well-known workmen's society, which has been very successful", that is the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, since the local secretary of that organisation had assisted in the formulation of the rules. (31)

In attempting to form a separate organisation, Wilson and his colleagues wished to create a base from which they could pursue the policy of federation and amalgamation with other local societies or branches. This did not imply a centralised national organisation, but was in line with the policy they had endeavoured to get adopted by the North of England and was well within the tradition of

30. Ibid 19 August 1887. Also see Sunderland Daily Echo 19 August 1887.

31. Ibid. Wilson J.H. op cit, p.108.

federation and amalgamation which emerged out of the agitation of the 1850's and 1870's. It was to be an amalgamation of autonomous branches but with a firm commitment to the priority of national policy and the establishment of a respectable and responsible seafaring labour force. (32)

Such an amalgamation appealed to the London Vigilance Society who wrote late in August to the N.A.S.F.U.

"expressing a desire to join the new amalgamation" (33)

It is difficult to say whether any formal link was established, but the Secretary, Mr. Simpson, wrote offering his services as travelling organiser/secretary, particularly in relation to opening a branch in Cardiff. At the same meeting that this letter was discussed, Wilson reported that he had enrolled some Cardiff men when they were in Sunderland, in the hope that they "would lend valuable assistance in opening a branch in the former port." (34) Enrolment of men from other ports may be seen as a method of 'spreading the word' and providing the nucleus for the foundation of branches in their home port.

32. Sunderland Herald and Daily Post 19 August 1887
Minutes of N.A.S.F.U. op cit, 26 September and
5 December 1887. N.B. 14 men were expelled in the
first three months of the Union's existence, a
substantial amount in a port with another society and
no union shop.

33. Ibid 23 August 1887

34. Ibid 19 October 1887

It may well be that in this way the desire for organisation was engendered in Newport, since in February, 1888 they wrote to Sunderland requesting help with the formation of a branch. No direct action was taken by the N.A.S.F.U. but the idea was encouraged through correspondence.⁽³⁵⁾ Large meetings of seamen were held in Newport, presumably with some success since at the end of February, Wilson wrote enquiring "what progress they are making with the Union at that Port,"⁽³⁶⁾ and this movement appears to have continued throughout May and June.⁽³⁷⁾

These attempts by the N.A.S.F.U. to encourage more widespread local organisation was matched with a concern by the established societies to federate. There is no direct evidence as to the source of a scheme for Federation which was put forward and discussed in the early months of 1888. On the one hand it may have been a manoeuvre by the N.A.S.F.U. to establish formal links with the existing societies such as the North of England and the H.S.M.F.A.A.; on the other, it could just as easily have been a recognition by those societies of a need to take into account the growing awareness by seamen of the need for concerted action. The idea of a scheme for federation is first mentioned in the Minutes of the H.S.M.F.A.A. when it was suggested the committee should assist the Secretary to amend the scheme if required and the Secretary was to forward the results to all known societies, which he did at the end of February.⁽³⁸⁾

35. Minutes of N.A.S.F.U. op cit, 3 February 1888

36. Ibid. 27 February 1888

37. Ibid 28 May and 18 June 1888

38. Minutes of the H.S.M.F.A.A. op cit 3 January 1888

On 19th March the North of England had a communication which claimed

"the special attention of members, a circular sent from a kindred society containing an elaborate scheme for the federation of all seamen's societies in the U.K."

and the main objectives were approved.⁽³⁹⁾ The N.A.S.F.U. do not make particular reference to such a scheme at this time, although they do later endeavour to federate with existing societies.

What is of importance is that such a scheme was put forward, rather than who made the suggestion, for it is an indication of the continuance of the traditional type of national action by seamen, which had last been stated at the 1886 conference in Shields.⁽⁴⁰⁾ A tradition from which the N.A.S.F.U., in its first six months, showed no inclination to deviate.

In summer 1888 the N.A.S.F.U. was still in practice a local organisation with little more than 500 members.⁽⁴¹⁾ It was in this capacity that it acted with the other two northern societies in an interview with the Home Secretary and the Board of Trade on 8th May, 1888.⁽⁴²⁾ The main topics discussed were the inclusion of seamen in the Employers' Liability Act, the official re-establishment of

39. Sunderland Daily Echo 20 March 1888

40. See above page 111.

41. Report of Trades Union Congress held in Bradford 1888, see also Appendix II

42. M.T.9.334. M8933/1888 - P.R.O.

of advance notes, certificates of competency for A.B.'s and the Widows and Orphans Pension Fund. The deputation was accompanied by a group of well known Liberal M.P.s, such as Thomas Burt and Charles H. Wilson, the Hull ship-owner. On their return from the meeting the N.A.S.F.U. tendered a vote of thanks to Mr. Butcher of Hull and Mr. H. Friend, secretary of the North of England,⁽⁴³⁾ and the two Sunderland societies held a joint demonstration over the Widows and Orphans Bill.⁽⁴⁴⁾

It is not possible to assess the effect of the deputation itself, but the benefit to the N.A.S.F.U. was considerable. Not only did they gain publicity by attending and offering a vote of thanks to the secretaries of the two other societies, but their participation gave them the status of a bonafide and representative organisation, albeit still confined to Sunderland.

From the inception of the society, Wilson had striven to get recognition as a representative organisation. In September 1887 he approached the local employers, setting out the objectives of the society, with particular reference to the provision of sober and reliable men, in the hope perhaps of establishing the special kind of relationship that the North of England had with Lambton and Co. He was however ignored by the shipowners.

This did not deter the union from further discussing

43. Minutes of N.A.S.F.U. op cit 10 May 1888.

44. Sunderland Daily Echo 26 May 1888

co-operation in the form of a ships council of owners and representatives of the men. In the following April he again wrote to the owners

"they were desirous to have a joint committee of shipowners and seamen appointed to consider all questions affecting their interest." (45)

This approach was again ignored, but on the specific question of provisions they met with more success. The union sent the Shipowners Society a proposed scale in April, (46) and after a meeting with the shipowners three months later it was

"practically adopted with the exception of the tin of milk and currie powder. In lieu of which they received dried apple, lard and baking powder." (47)

As far as the other Sunderland working men's organisations were concerned, the advent of a second seamen's society in the town was not regarded as exceptionable. For the N.A.S.F.U. was accepted by the Trades Council virtually from its establishment, and in November they wrote to the Union concerning the proposal for the Federation of all working men's societies in the town. (48) By early 1888, Wilson was the societies representative on the Trades Council. (49)

45. Ibid 9 April 1888

46. Minutes of N.A.S.F.U. op cit 27 February and 10 May 1888

47. Ibid 27 August 1888

48. Ibid 7 November 1887

49. Ibid 30 April 1888

Within the local labour movement he achieved some prominence in attempting to stand for the East Ward in the Council elections and he was "thanked for offering to fight the East Ward." (50)

Despite the aspirations of the new society to spread its influence through federation and J.H. Wilson's efforts to consolidate his own influence in the community, it was still, 12 months after its foundation, confined to Sunderland. However, during July 1888 it was actively considering opening branches in Shields, and on 31st July a meeting was held for this purpose. The society was .

"determined to establish branches of the Union at nine or ten of the principal ports in the Kingdom" (51)

The first expansion into South Shields resulted in "very satisfactory progress." (52) It is interesting to note that it was insufficient apparently to warrant, or permit, the setting up of a branch across the river in North Shields until some three months later.

It was in the autumn and winter of 1888-1889 that the influence and organisation of the N.A.S.F.U. spread outside the confines of the North East coast. The reason for this lies in the economic climate in the maritime industry rather than any change in policy or tactics by the Union. During

50. Sunderland Herald and Daily Post 12 and 17 July 1888

51. Sunderland Daily Echo 1 August 1888

52. Ibid 8 August 1888

this time there was a recovery in freight rates. A contemporary wrote in December 1888,

"The past year will stand out as a remarkable one in the history of shipping interest - a transformation scene of the whole trade - from abject depression to revival and prosperity." (53)

It is not possible to attribute the circumstances in which particular branches were formed, but there appear to be two main categories of development. Firstly there were requests from ports for the formation of branches, not always taken up, and such a request was often linked with existing or potential disputes; or secondly by the N.A.S.F.U. intervening on their own initiative, without invitation, where disputes existed, and sometimes when at least a nucleus of organisation already existed, if not a strong local society.

It was shortage of labour, no doubt also due to the improved economic conditions, rather than specific agitation, which attracted the N.A.S.F.U. to Cardiff, in addition to which there may well have been a nucleus of membership in the port already. (54) A representative went to the port and a branch was opened on 5th September with 33 members. It was not a success as, by the end of the month, it only had 140 members with a deficit of £7.15s.0d. This was despite a visit by Havelock Wilson following which he had declared the branch "promised to be the largest in the Union." (55)

53. Fairplay 4 January 1889

54. See above page 119

55. Sunderland Daily Echo 29 September 1888

It was only when a local trade unionist, although not a seaman, took over early in October that the branch began to thrive.

The impetus for a move to organise the N.A.S.F.U. in Liverpool seems to have been a desire to capitalise on existing agitation and the presence of a small local society. Early in September there had been an attempt to reduce wages in sailing vessels out of Liverpool and this had resulted in placards being posted on the 8th, presumably by the local society, the United Marine Benevolent Society, calling a meeting to discuss the situation. One or two strikes took place but the disaffection came to an end on September 14th and a compromise settlement of 5/- per month was accepted. On the 17th September, the N.A.S.F.U. Executive Committee agreed to send a delegate to Liverpool rather than Glasgow which had been their original intention,⁽⁵⁶⁾ to open a branch since "seamen there had made some attempt to organise."⁽⁵⁷⁾

The same strategy was followed in Glasgow when a delegate of the Union was despatched there and a branch started on 6th November,⁽⁵⁸⁾ when a dispute was already in progress. The following month the men in Newport declared that they would not ship with non-union men.⁽⁵⁹⁾ The

56. Minutes of the N.A.S.F.U. op cit 17 September 1888

57. Sunderland Herald and Daily Post 18 September 1888

58. Weekly Echo and Times [Sunderland] 9 November 1888

59. Sunderland Daily Echo 8 December 1888

involvement of the N.A.S.F.U. in the port had been requested throughout the year, but no move was made until the agitation in late October and early November in the Bristol Channel ports. There is, however, no mention of the N.A.S.F.U. in Bristol when the seamen successfully stood out for an increase in October, nor were they mentioned when there was a similar strike in Cardiff and Penarth which only lasted a few hours and resulted in an immediate advance of 5/-⁽⁶⁰⁾

The N.A.S.F.U. did not always get involved in current agitation, and when a request for assistance was received from Cork during a dispute, no direct response was made. It is perhaps unfortunate that when the time was ripe and the opportunity there for expansion, the society did not always have the capability to respond.

At the same time as this expansion was taking place, the position of the society was being consolidated in the traditional area of the North East coast. A branch was opened in North Shields on 17th October with 40 members; this event may well have been associated with agitation in South Shields over attempts to get equal pay with that achieved in Hartlepool the previous August, apparently without any trade union organisation. Therefore by the time the first Annual Demonstration⁽⁶¹⁾ was held on 30th October, the Union could

60. Commonweal 27 October 1888

61. Some sources refer to this as the Annual Demonstration and others the first Annual General Meeting. As the meeting in Cardiff in 1889 is also referred to as the first Annual General Meeting, the term Demonstration has been used to avoid confusion.

boast five branches and a membership of 2,585.⁽⁶²⁾ Whilst the existence of branches in Liverpool and Cardiff did give some support to national aspirations, as perhaps did Havelock Wilson's presence at the 1888 Trade Union Congress where he affiliated with 500 members, it was, nevertheless, regarded by a leading maritime journal as one of the "two local and rival societies in Sunderland."⁽⁶³⁾

The favourable economic circumstances which encouraged the growth of the N.A.S.F.U. also enabled the well-established societies, such as the North of England, and the H.S.M.F.A.A. concerned mainly with weekly boats, to make gains through the normal channels of negotiation. In October both organisations requested increases of their respective employers,⁽⁶⁴⁾ and although there was some delay due to a colliers strike, the advances had been conceded by the end of the year.⁽⁶⁵⁾ The men in the weekly boats on the Tyne do not appear to have been so fortunate; they appealed to the N.A.S.F.U. for help in connection with their bid for a rise but this does not appear to have been forthcoming.⁽⁶⁶⁾

62. Sunderland Daily Echo 31 October 1888

63. Seafaring 20 October 1888 See also Appendix II

64. Minutes of H.S.M.F.A.A. op cit 9 October 1888
Sunderland Daily Echo 30 October 1888

65. Minutes of H.S.M.F.A.A. ibid 1 January 1889

66. Sunderland Daily Echo 30 October 1888

By November it had become common knowledge that there had been an improvement in freights, although the owners themselves regarded it as only partial, and by the end of December it was calculated that, in Liverpool, they had gone up by 50% over the preceding year. It was this broadly favourable economic climate which under-pinned the new expansion of the union rather than its own missionary zeal, and engendered the agitation which was to provide its greatest challenge in 1889. As the prosperity grew, seamen increasingly made both organised and unorganised demands to benefit. New branches of the N.A.S.F.U. continued to be set up with Seaham and London organising in January. In the former case Havelock Wilson successfully intervened in a local strike which resulted in the setting up of a branch, whereas in the case of London, the initiative appears to have come from the N.A.S.F.U. Executive Committee. A resolution to this effect was passed by them on 31st December 1888, and during the first week of 1889 a branch was formed under the secretaryship of A.R. Abbott.⁽⁶⁷⁾ By the end of the second week in January the branch claimed 170 members.⁽⁶⁸⁾ Before the end

67. Arthur Richard Abbott, b.1857 in Hull, Yorkshire of a seafaring family. Went to sea at 13 years, became an A.B., took part in agitation of various kinds before joining the N.A.S.F.U. in the autumn of 1888.

68. Sunderland Daily Echo 16 January 1889

of the month three branches had been established⁽⁶⁹⁾ and were becoming increasingly active on the question of wages.

Branches were also mushrooming elsewhere. Havelock Wilson, on his return from Glasgow on February 13th, claimed that while he had been in the North

"branches had been established in Greenock, Leith, Ardrossan, Campbelltown, Troon, Ayr, Dublin, Belfast, Londonderry, Kingston and Cork, while applications for branches had been received from Portsmouth, Kings Lynn, Workington, Whitehaven, Goole, Grimsby, Yarmouth and Southampton." (70)

The name of Aberdeen was added to this impressive list a few days later, and was notable for the fact that the application came from the Aberdeen Trades Council and not, as was usual, from the seamen themselves⁽⁷¹⁾

This rapid growth is perhaps another example of the seamen's readiness to claim their share of the recovery rather than a long term commitment to unionisation. Whilst this climate provided the N.A.S.F.U. with welcome opportunities to become the national union it claimed to be, it also brought problems. Furthermore, in order to satisfy the aspirations of the new membership from widely differing ports, it had to prove its effectiveness by gaining immediate wage increases

69. The Star 23 January 1889
Shipping Gazette 23 January 1889

70. Sunderland Herald and Daily Post 16 February 1889
Sunderland Daily Echo 16 February 1889

71. See Buckley K.D. Trade Unionism in Aberdeen 1878-1900
p.37 and passim.

and precipitate action was by no means conducive to long term stability and often highlighted the local/national dichotomy. There are examples of disputes directly involving the N.A.S.F.U. in January and February, 1889 in a number of major ports such as Glasgow, Hull, London and Liverpool.

At a union meeting in Glasgow on 16th January, it was resolved that

"we the seamen and firemen of Glasgow consider our wages to be far lower than they ought to be and resolve to demand the following rates of wages:-- Firemen £4.5s and Seamen £4.0s in all class of steamers, except weekly boats for which the wage demand will be 30/- per week. For sailing ships to the Baltic and Quebec £3.15s and southwards £3.0s." (72)

By the 1st February it was reported that 20 ships were idle and that "both parties to the disputes maintain their position with uncompromising firmness." (73) Although the owners attempted to import labour, this was not always successful since when

"a scratch crew ... of rather unlikely looking men" sailed in a vessel from Greenock to Liverpool and

"very heavy weather prevailed off Lamlash, and some of the crew who were not used to the seafaring life turned seasick. Under the circumstances the captain determined to put the vessel back to Greenock." (74)

72. Shipping Gazette 19 January 1889, Glasgow Herald 30 January 1889 and Glasgow Evening News 30 January 1889

73. The Times 1 February 1889

74. Shipping Gazette 2 February 1889

By the 6th February, compromise settlements were being made and it was felt that the agitation was drawing to a close.⁽⁷⁵⁾ The matter finally went to arbitration on 12th February when Mr. Kerr, a member of the school board intervened successfully with a settlement of 27/- to be paid immediately, the men to be re-instated and a further advance of 3/- was promised in June.⁽⁷⁶⁾

It may well be that a demand for increases in the weekly boats encouraged the National Union to attempt organisation in Hull in late January, although the local union was strong and had already gained some advances at the beginning of the month. The National Union had little success since the H.M.S.F.A.A. resented their tactics and refused to support their actions, in addition to which the largest shipping company in the port, Thomas Wilson, imported foreign labour.⁽⁷⁷⁾ As in Glasgow, arbitration was attempted, but in Hull it failed and without the co-operation of the local union the strike petered out.

In London, following the formation of branches there, several disputes over wages occurred. The first, on 16th January, was settled by the local secretary within a few hours with an advance of 10/- per month.⁽⁷⁸⁾

75. The Times 6 February 1889

76. Glasgow Evening News 13 February 1889

77. Sunderland Daily Echo 5 February 1889

78. Ibid 17 January 1889

The second, in February, involved a strike at Rotherhithe against the General Steam Navigation Company, which continued for two weeks until the men obtained a rise of 2/6d per week, half of their claim. (79) This strike illustrated the inability of the N.A.S.F.U. to assist particular branches, as the London secretary later stated,

"I got no support from the society I represented, The only support I got was from the shoemakers, who sent in £5.0s-0d of support." (80)

This agitation and the activity of the union in general appears to have been boycotted by the London press with the exception of the Star. (81)

In terms of understanding this stage of the N.A.S.F.U.'s development, its future dilemmas and indeed the problems of maritime unionisation in general, however, the Liverpool strike would appear to be the most important of the winter of 1889.

Whilst there may have been some earlier agitation for increased wages, it was not until the 22nd December, 1888 that the N.A.S.F.U. put up a notice stating that, as from that day, they would be demanding an increase of £1 or 30% on previous rates, (82) i.e., in steamers £4 for sailors and £4.5s for firemen, with, in the case of sailing vessels,

79. Shipping Gazette 6 February 1889. It was stated at this meeting that 400 riggers were planning to join the Union, but these were later decided to be outside the Union's area of recruitment.

80. Royal Commission on Labour Minutes of Evidence Vol.1 op cit Q9059.

81. See Commonweal 2 March 1889 - which may explain why there is no mention of it in The Reports of Strikes and Lockouts of 1889 C.6176 p.27.

82. Liverpool Echo 22 December 1888

£3.5s for Baltic and Quebec ports and £3 for Southern voyages (the same rates as were claimed in Glasgow). The notice exhorted the men to 'stand firm', join the National Seamen's Union and join the victory. It is uncertain how many members of the N.A.S.F.U. there were in the port at this time; claims in the press suggest it was as high as 1000, but only a minority of these would have been full financial members. (83)

The choice of time for action must have been very opportune since increases were paid almost at once by some shipowners anxious to get vessels away. (84) No doubt one of the main reasons for the initial success was the shortage of competent men in the port, perhaps in part due to the fact that men would not want to sail immediately prior to Christmas. The owners tried the normal ploy in these circumstances and endeavoured to sign men on at the docks or on board, or alternatively, using shore gangs to move ships into the river, but this did not have the desired results and the owners offered a 15% increase on the 29th and on the 31st it was openly admitted that there was a severe shortage of men. (85)

83. Taplin E.L. Liverpool Dockers and Seamen 1870-1890 University of Hull Occasional Papers in Economic and Social History No.6 (1974) p.65

84. Liverpool Echo 24 December 1888

85. Liverpool Daily Post 31 December 1888

The advent of fog at the beginning of New Year looked as if it would undermine the success of the first week of the strike, particularly as the shipowners felt that it would result in a favourable excess of seamen in the port. However, the increases gained were still being paid on 10th January, although this was sometimes only a compromise on the amount asked for accepted by the non-union men, and a general advance was readily made for the mail steamers.⁽⁸⁶⁾ The men signing articles on 15th January were felt to have been given an advance in wages in every case. The firemen exhibited a more militant stance than the sailors, and were on occasion less prepared to compromise.

The union maintained that there was no strike in Liverpool, merely a demand for higher wages, and success in this led them to increase some of their demands, particularly in relation to the westward steamers and the Baltic trade by a further 10/- sums, which, it was commented, had already been paid. The claims were also extended to cover the weekly boats, not mentioned in the previous circular. In addition, once the increases were granted, the Union would then refuse to sail with non-union men. Whilst the owners were not entirely averse to the union if it could indeed provide a competent and reliable crew, they endeavoured to ship crews from Cardiff and Glasgow, but it was found that the Union was strong in the latter port.⁽⁸⁷⁾ This action was deprecated

86. Ibid 15 January 1889

87. Ibid 18 January 1889

by the union, as was signing on other than in the shipping offices, a practice they hoped to enforce once they 'had become a little bit stronger' in the port.

The strike continued with the Union increasing its nominal membership through the use of pledge cards. These cards enabled any branch of the union to expand rapidly without the new members making any immediate financial commitment, and was originally used for this purpose by the North of England. What the cards did provide was a body of support for the Union, particularly in times of dispute, since they provided for an initial membership of three months (long enough to resolve specific disputes) and entitled the member to participation in all the consultations of the union. In return for this, the members pledged

"my word of honour that I will assist the officers of the above Society (N.A.S.F.U.) in carrying out the objects of the same, ... to persuade all seamen of good character to join the Union ... assist union men to get employment." (88)

The new member also pledged to keep the secrets of the society and not to accept accusations against the Union or its officials until their truth had been ascertained by application to the Union itself.

88. Liverpool Echo 30 January 1889

89. Sunderland Daily Echo 4 March 1889

90. The Echo 9 February 1889

Whenever possible, the owners attempted to circumnavigate the hold of the union. They advertised widely for men, made use of crimps, for example,

"It is stated during one day of last week a certain boarding-house keeper shipped seventy-one sailors or firemen, and the son of the same man shipped sixty-one, a total of 132, and for each of these they received money from the men themselves, and from the companies, to the amount of £2.10s or £3.10s for each man." (89)

This type of incident was widely reported, and it was always claimed that men were shipped illegally from the gaol and the workhouse. (90)

The reaction of the owners was by no means uniform, and not surprisingly, it was the large companies that made the more determined stand against the demands. The higher rates were most readily paid on the sailing vessels, in addition to which The Times stated on 9th February that increases were being paid by the steamers, "many belonging to private owners and single companies" and

"Four out of twelve important companies running to North America have conceded the advance, the most determined opposition is Cunard." (91)

The White Star Line had complied from the start.

Apart from the solidarity of the seamen, a factor not as commonly accepted then as it was to be later, the most unusual feature of the whole dispute, was the favourable

89. Liverpool Echo 30 January 1889

90. Sunderland Daily Echo 4 March 1889

91. The Times 9 February 1889

reporting it received, not only from the local but also from the national and shipping press.⁽⁹²⁾ The Liverpool Journal of Commerce, 7th January 1889, said

"We are afraid that in many cases large numbers of physically incompetent men have taken advantage of the agitation to obtain employment which under normal conditions they would be unable to get ... while we hold a very strong opinion on strikes, and the harm they inflict in the country, we nevertheless are glad to say that its the National Union influence on the whole is for good in as much as it expels those who wilfully break their agreements with the ship-owners by reason of desertion, drunkenness, etc. ... but if by becoming a member of this society Jack can be made to join his ship at the proper time, and in a sober condition and if it will induce the habits of thrift, and give him more self respect and make him a reasonable citizen, shipowners will not object to the extra wages that the society demands for its members."

This was prior to the inclusion of the mail ship in the conflict which was an important factor in changing the attitude of this paper. As late as 6th February, the Shipping Gazette was still criticising the shipowners,

"In some cases men have been received through the hands of boarding house masters and are admittedly of an inferior class as far as present capacity is concerned ... In spite of the prevailing opinion among shipowners that there is an unlimited supply of men willing to go at the old rate of pay, several companies are not able to obtain them and have thought it best to ship crews from the ranks of the union."

In the context of the whole period, this type of reporting is exceptional and progressively changes during the next few months.

With the opening of the emigration season, the N.A.S.F.U. felt they would be in an improved position to press their case and to influence the supply of labour. At a meeting to inaugurate a branch at Birkenhead on 13th February, it

92. Fairplay and The Times are exceptions to this generalisation. See particularly Fairplay 28 December 1888 and 8 February 1889.

was stated the object of the meeting was

"not simply for their own benefit but for the benefit of the shipowners as well ... and also to put at the disposal of the shipowners a better class of men." (93)

However, there seemed to be indications that although union men were standing out for their demands, they were losing the support they had gained during the January agitation. The men were perhaps drifting away as increases were given and compromises arrived at, and they were less inclined to refuse work on the grounds of not sailing with non-union men. Certainly, by mid February, the effect of the two month long dispute was being increasingly felt by the strikers

"Much distress exists in Liverpool among the strikers." (94)
From the outset the union had made no secret of the fact that there was little or no money to back the men, and therefore no strike pay. On Saturday 16th a deputation went to see the leading steamship companies and

"expressed a desire to compromise but no decision was arrived at." (95)

It appears that, at this or a later meeting, a promise was given to pay what the shipowners regarded fair and reasonable, that is £4 for sailors and £4.5s.0d for firemen in steamers. (96)
The following Monday it was announced that the strike was over.

93. Liverpool Daily Post 14 February 1889

94. Liverpool Journal of Commerce 15 February 1889

95. Ibid 18 February 1889

96. Ibid 23 April 1889. Part of text of speech made by Mr. Stewards, Birkenhead delegate N.A.S.F.U.

Following the winter agitation, the N.A.S.F.U. held a Conference in Sunderland early in March to reassess their situation. What emerged from this was commitment to a policy of achieving national uniformity of wages. The existence of numerous local rates was seen as detrimental to the authority of a national union since it encouraged local independence, and therefore implicitly branch secession. Mr. Abbott of London proposed

"that no branch secretary should have power to change the wages in any port without the order of the Executive Committee ... who should correspond with the branch secretaries so as to bring about the adoption of a general scale at the different ports."

On the other hand, Mr. Darby of Glasgow

"advised caution in dealing with wages but urged so far as was practicable there should be one uniform scale."

This timidity of approach was not favoured by Mr. Reid of Hull, who remarked that

"if we are to be a National Union we must work on national lines."

As a result of the discussion, Wilson said the Executive would endeavour to draw up a uniform rate of wages throughout the country.

"In the course of four or five months notice would be given that the men wanted a little more for their labour." (97)

Circumstances, however, overtook the plans of the Executive when the owners in Liverpool,⁽⁹⁸⁾ in March, threatened to reduce wages and the seamen in the port were anxious to strike.

97. Sunderland Daily Echo 4 and 5 March 1889

98. South Wales Daily News 27 March 1889

The Executive did not want to precipitate unilateral action and it was stated that

"the leaders, if possible, wish to avert the necessity of again coming out on strike." (99)

The discontent rumbled on through April and the Union organised appropriate demonstrations against both the Board of Trade and the shipowners of Liverpool "attempting to screw down wages to the starvation rate." But circumspection over strike action was urged since as the Secretary in Liverpool, Mr. Nicholson, pointed out,

"three months ago they made a second demand before the first was established and they admitted that that was a mistake."

a view supported by J. H. Wilson. Speaking at the same meeting, he went on to say that the union was not only to be a national one, but an international one, in order to overcome the importation of foreigners. (100)

The men themselves were very much more parochially minded, and although an official warned them of the dangers of independent action which had caused previous local unions to collapse, they urged strike action. (101) The first week of May 1889 saw increasing pressure from the men, said to be a large number, but the union officials still advised against

"an extreme course until the basis of a new demand had been sent to the H.Q. in Sunderland." (102)

99. Ibid

100. Liverpool Daily Post 23 April 1889

101. Ibid 9 May 1889

102. Ibid

The precarious situation was exacerbated two days later when some of the Union's members on the liner, City of Chicago, refused to sail with non-unionists after they had signed articles. This action was strongly deprecated by the Union's branch secretary, who said

"if they signed articles they must proceed to sea and act in an honourable manner towards the shipowner who engaged them." (103)

for their action had undermined their boast of being capable of supplying disciplined men. Incidents of this kind jeopardised what appeared to be an encouraging situation for the union in the port, signified by the fact that in mid-May the Cunard signed Union crews. The union officials continually stressed that the men must try to work in harmony with the shipowners and that the Union "had rules which were severe on men who misconducted themselves" (104) Sufficient concern was felt for Wilson to decide to visit the port, and in the meantime he wrote to the branch

"With reference to the rate of wages, there must be no strike until I have finished organising the few remaining ports. We don't want a strike and the only way we can avoid it is to be well organised, and I am working night and day for that purpose." (105)

When Wilson arrived in Liverpool he arranged to meet the ten principal steam shipowners in an endeavour to reach an understanding with them over wages and so avert the

103. Ibid 11 May 1889

104. Ibid 17 May 1889

105. Ibid 22 May 1889

necessity for the strike action demanded by the men. The shipowners did not concede the demand was justified and declined to give any increase. This placed Wilson in an invidious position in respect of the local branch, which was more determined than ever to take action. When he spoke at a public meeting following the shipowners decision, it was poorly attended, it is perhaps indicative of both his fear and the likelihood of local secession that made him "urge the members of the union not to make the branch a local one." (106) The situation the union faced in Liverpool was by no means unique. An editorial in Seafaring at this time stated

"Strikes and rumours of strikes among seafaring men are the talk of the day and very foolish talk we venture to say that it is. Let us by all means have strikes if fair wages be not forthcoming. But let us also have patience since strikes to be successful mean organisation and organisation means time and money and preparation without which they are doomed to partial or complete failing." (107)

This highlights the predicament of the Union and particularly Wilson. On the one hand, he was in danger of losing the support of local branches, whilst on the other he was aware of the need to eliminate the availability of alternative, unorganised labour. Initially the objective of the union had been to organise qualified and respectable seafarers. However, the conduct of the strikes in January

106. Ibid

107. Seafaring 18 May 1889

and February had proved the necessity of organising on a much broader basis than had previously been foreseen. It was not only a case of accepting foreign members but also of extending to the insignificant ports, where shipowners could recruit non-union crews and potential strike-breakers. A great deal of Wilson's and other officials' time had been spent to this end since the March conference, but was by no means complete by the end of May. Wilson was, therefore, faced with Hobson's choice and rather than see the organisation the union had built up over the previous months disintegrate over local issues, new national wage demands were put forward much earlier than intended and a national strike declared for the 3rd June if the shipowners did not concede.

1. For example in Tyne and Wear, Newcastle, Grimsby
2. South Wales Daily News 24 May 1939
3. WALL Daily News 12 June 1939

CHAPTER VI

UNION CONSOLIDATION AND EMPLOYER REACTION

1889 - 1890

It was a recognition of the need for a uniformity of rates which was the basis of the national strike; the outcome, in June, proved emphatically the importance of this policy as a means of reconciling local and national aspirations. Whilst the strike was called nationwide for uniform rates, local differences soon became obvious; Liverpool was precipitate and struck two days earlier, whereas in Glasgow the local secretary attempted to delay action in the hope of negotiating a settlement, and in some ports union rates were accepted by the owners almost without question,⁽¹⁾ whilst in Cardiff the men were already receiving the rate demanded.⁽²⁾ In Hull the situation was complicated by the strong local society and although there was some agitation the trade of the port was not seriously disrupted; some owners conceded increases, but the major company refused to do so and began to import labour, and efforts at arbitration collapsed.⁽³⁾

The pattern of disunity was characteristic of the strike,

1. For example in Tyne and Wear, Maryport, Grimsby.

2. South Wales Daily News 24 May 1889

3. Hull Daily News 12 June 1889

and in terms of achieving national aims it was a fiasco. The response to strike action by both the men and the owners differed from port to port, making uniform settlement quite impracticable. Within less than three weeks the Executive Council of the N.A.S.F.U. had issued instructions that "each branch was recommended to arrange a suitable rate of wages."⁽⁴⁾ The success of individual branches depended much less on national pressure than on local conditions, custom and practice.

There were, however, two ports where the disputes were not resolved, Liverpool and Glasgow. These were the two ports where there had been most strike activity, and in the former most militancy, and whose pressure precipitated the national strike call. Initially the men in the two ports had reacted differently; in Glasgow the local secretary had attempted to delay action and withdraw the strike notice when negotiations with the local owners seemed possible. This attempt failed and it was stated by a leading shipowner that

"it was impossible to concede to the exorbitant demands made by the men. In almost every instance the ship-owners were fully prepared for a strike, and in the course of a very short time would have had sufficient men brought together to fill the places of those who had left, but even if [it] were not so ... most owners were quite prepared to lay up their boats and in many cases had actually made their arrangements to do so." ⁽⁵⁾

This threat of lay-up was made in other ports and became a reality in Leith almost at once. ⁽⁶⁾

4. Shipping Gazette 28 June 1889 - reprint from Dundee dated 21 June 1889

5. Glasgow Evening News 4 June 1889

6. Ibid 7 June 1889

At Liverpool, in spite of the men's early reaction, the first week of the dispute was uneventful, and not entirely successful from their point of view, since on 7th June, 15 Atlantic liners sailed without undue difficulty at the old rate. The Union had attempted to initiate conciliation

"for the purpose of considering the increased demand for wages in Atlantic steamers ... and arrange for some fair terms to be agreed upon so as to put an end to the present struggle, which is likely to be detrimental to the interests of both employer and employed." (7)

The 12 principal firms to whom this offer was made remained adamant that they were

"unanimously of the opinion that it would be useless to have another meeting."

As in Hull and Glasgow, the Liverpool employers were looking for alternative labour and it was stated that

"having commenced to engage men for permanent employment at several Norwegian and Danish ports, the firms had authorised their agents there to send forward all English-speaking, competent sailors and firemen that offer, they must provide berths for such men, and cannot possibly give two rates in the same vessel." (8)

There are two possible explanations for this strong reaction by the employers. In the first place the owners had made, for them, considerable concessions in the agitation in the early months of the year, and secondly the seamen had

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7. Shipping Gazette 28 June 1889 - Letter from the Secretary of the Liverpool branch of the N.A.S.F.U. to shipowners of Liverpool dated 7 June 1889.
 8. Ibid - Letter from Shipowners of Liverpool to Secretary of Liverpool branch of the N.A.S.F.U. dated 7 June 1889.

in both ports received extensive support from the dockers which would, of course, exacerbate the problems the ship-owners faced.⁽⁹⁾ In Liverpool, the dockers had responded at once to the seamen's action by attempting to form a branch of the Amalgamated Dock Labourers Union of Great Britain and Ireland,⁽¹⁰⁾ whereas they did not come out in Glasgow until the end of the first week.⁽¹¹⁾ It was at this time that attitudes hardened on both sides, in Glasgow probably as a direct result of the dockers' action, and in Liverpool because the men resolved to extend their action and

"not to sign for any ship or steamer however high the rate of wages, till the resolution of the shipowners refusing concessions is withdrawn." ⁽¹²⁾

The refusal of the shipowners was not universal in Liverpool, some employers were willing to give full rates since several steamships were without crews. Such was the case with the Inman steamer, the City of New York, and Havelock Wilson was approached with an offer to ship union men at union rates. However, the General Secretary refused to do so unless the whole crew consisted of union members.

9. In the case of Maryport it may well have been the vital factor.

10. Liverpool Daily Post 1 June 1889

11. Glasgow Herald 8 June 1889

12. Shipping Gazette 14 June 1889
Liverpool Echo 10 June 1889

This escalation of previous demands was not acceptable and the ship obtained a crew from other sources.

In both Glasgow and Liverpool the owners turned increasingly to traditional methods of obtaining and retaining an alternative labour force, both in respect of seamen and dockers. The two most obvious sources of this labour were through the services of the boarding-house keepers and crimps,

by importing labour from other British ports or engaging foreign seamen. Men were engaged in Scandinavia, and in Glasgow men were imported from such places as Tilbury and Dundee.⁽¹³⁾ With 10,000 men out in Liverpool⁽¹⁴⁾ and 6,000 in Glasgow⁽¹⁵⁾ the problem of importing labour without interference from strikers became increasingly difficult.

In Glasgow the imported men were housed in sheds or slept on board the ships and extra police patrolled the docks in order to protect non-union dock labourers.⁽¹⁶⁾ Whilst in Liverpool the shipowners had made similar arrangements and it was stated

"that in their joint interests the Cunard steamer Atlas will this day 15th June be moored in the river so that men coming from the outports and the continent can be taken directly on board and there await distribution among the various steamers. The Atlas will also be available for such portions of the crews of incoming steamers as are desirous of continuing in their employment without being exposed to the intimidation of the Union." (17)

13. Shipping Gazette 14 June 1889 - report from Glasgow dated 12 June 1889.

14. Liverpool Daily Post 10 June 1889

15. Shipping Gazette 14 June 1889

16. Sunderland Daily Echo 13 June 1889

17. Liverpool Daily Post 15 June 1889

This was a step which was taken 20 years ago under similar circumstances. Some of the owners had already declared that they would rather lay-up than concede. (18)

The need for united action was increasingly being accepted by the owners, and in Glasgow on 14th June they held a meeting where

"It was resolved that united action was necessary to meet the evil which threatened the shipping trade of the port, and the firms present agreed to make common cause in resisting the action of the men on strike, delaying their sailings to such an extent as might be necessary, until the work at their vessels could be overtaken by labour obtained from other quarters. They further resolved to bear such expenses as may be incurred in procuring such labour, and appointed a strong committee with powers to take all necessary measures to that end ... the position the strikers were taking up left them no alternative but to combine. (19)

The idea of combination by shipowners to deal, on a local basis, with local problems was not a new one, nor confined to Glasgow. The owners on the North East coast also appreciated the advantages of such co-operation, and in the same way as Glasgow, they resolved to continue to "take defensive measures against the Union." (20) This new organisation was to be known as the Shipowners Association of Great Britain, and when it was registered its aims were

18. Sunderland Daily Echo 12 June 1889

19. Shipping Gazette 21 June 1889

20. Fairplay 21 June 1889

stated as being

- "1) To adjust, by conferences with seamen's representatives, any questions of differences that may arise;
- 2) To resist, by mutual action, including compensation for detention in test cases, any excessive or unfair demands of seamen or their organisations upon shipowners;
- 3) To establish convenient centres in the leading ports where independent British and foreign seamen can make enquiries as to shipowners requiring seamen, and receive information and advice as to employment;
- 4) To bring shipowners together for mutual discussion and action and to secure co-operation with other shipowners organisations having the same object." (21)

Their expression of a desire to continue was not, therefore, ostensibly to directly oppose the union but rather to provide a centralised channel through which relations with the men could be regulated. Although it had aspirations to being a national organisation, it did not really spread outside the North East coast.

For Glasgow the combination of owners was directly concerned with resolving the strike without conceding to the men. In this they were successful. Although there was some socialist agitation both there and in other Scottish ports, it did not advance the men's cause, and by 26th June the strike was brought to a close through the good offices of Mr. Chisholm Robertson, an agent of the miners, the terms being that the men return to work at the old rate but that no

21. Shipping World 1 November 1889. The association was registered on 2 October 1889.

objection would be made to them remaining in the union.⁽²²⁾ This settlement was accepted by the men after the Secretary, Mr. Darby, had strongly advised this course of action, he had himself regarded the strike as premature. It was anticipated that the dockers would also resume work

"seeing that for some time they had been dependent on the Seamen's Union for maintenance." ⁽²³⁾

This was not to be the case.

The collapse at Glasgow left Liverpool out on their own, apart from sporadic rear guard actions which were being attempted for example in Hull.⁽²⁴⁾ By 18th June it was calculated that 6-7,000 men were out and 300 boiler scalers had joined the strike and the owners were intensifying their efforts to obtain an alternative labour force, efforts which the seamen's action increasingly brought under scrutiny. The legal theory was that seamen could only be supplied by those in possession of a Board of Trade licence, but this was a requirement which in practice could be ignored. Perhaps the most extreme example of this was in Liverpool where crimps recruited paupers. The Board of Trade reaction to the strike was

In the third week of the strike Havelock Wilson took action by intercepting men recruited from the workhouse who

22. Shipping Gazette 5 July 1889 - report from Glasgow dated 27 June 1889.

23. Ibid.

24. Hull Daily News 4 July 1889

then accompanied him and a deputation of M.P.s to see Thomas Gray, Assistant Marine Secretary of the Board of Trade. As the leader of the deputation, Mr. Gourlay, M.P. pointed out that they were not concerned with "the wages question, but simply as the Board to administer the law." However, the deputation received no concrete promises from the Board of Trade, but merely a restatement of the Boards' official position that

"it did not intend to take the part of either the sailors or the shipowners, but would deal out the law justly between the two." (25)

In addition to this Havelock Wilson embarrassed the workhouse authorities, on the one hand by proving that men could be procured through that institution with a union official posing as a crimp, and secondly by presenting 500 of his most respectable members, and their families, as potential inmates. These members were Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve men who had joined the union in protest against "the employment of Scandinavian and other foreign seamen on the Atlantic Ocean boats." (26) The Board of Trade reaction to the incidents was to take action against some crimps, which resulted in their being fined. Whereas the shipowners explained the employment of such men was not in itself illegal.

Whilst superficially the issue may appear a trivial one

25. Shipping Gazette 28 June 1889 - report from Liverpool dated 24 June 1889.

26. Liverpool Daily Post 26 June 1889

its importance lies in the relationship it has to the control of the supply of labour. This concern with attaining and retaining control over the labour force was central to the strategy of the Union and the employers. This has been shown by the apparent shift in demands of the Union in mid-June, when full union crews were demanded after wage increases had been conceded. The shipowners had repeatedly stated that

"it was not upon the wage question that they were fighting ... they were fighting the organisation of the seamen's union." (27)

That is the formation of an organisation which had shown itself intent on challenging what shipowners regarded as an essential right in the profitable pursuit of their business.

The failure of the men to impede the shipowners' importation of alternative labour was increasingly obvious, as stated in the local press on 24th June,

"it had become evident that the shipowners have been able to man their vessels and sail them to sea in spite of the manifesto issued by the sailors and firemen's union." (28)

It was perhaps a recognition of their weakness in this respect that led the union to attempt arbitration, and an indication of the shipowners strength that it was rejected out of hand since it was the shipowners view that "there was nothing on which to arbitrate." (29)

27. Liverpool Daily Post 29 June 1889

28. Liverpool Daily Post 24 June 1889

29. Journal of Commerce 2 July 1889

The officials, recognising the impossible position in which such a rejection placed them, decided to ballot the Merseyside membership on Monday, 8th July, as to their commitment to the continuation of the dispute in these circumstances. At the Liverpool branch the vote was 580 to 40 for maintaining the strike, with a similar result being recorded in Bootle.⁽³⁰⁾ A decision which, by virtue of the existing employment situation, could have no impact and within two days it was declared that the N.A.S.F.U. was in a state of 'ignominious collapse'. An outcome which Wilson had feared and forecast in May. It is difficult to see what other result there could have been once unionism rather than wages had become the central issue. In deciding to call the strike, the Executive were attempting to resolve an impossible dilemma. If they had not done so, there is every likelihood the Merseyside branches would have seceded, whereas by calling a strike they threatened the loyalty of the less militant areas. This was indeed the case as may be seen from the censure motions passed by Dundee

"on the General Secretary and the Executive of the Union for forcing the strike upon its members." (31)

and by Glasgow

"That this meeting ... is of the opinion that the Central Executive have led the Union into a grave position in connection with the wages question and we hereby call upon them to resign." (32)

The majority of branches at the very least passed

30. Liverpool Daily Post 9 July 1889.

31. Shipping Gazette 5 July 1889 - In report from Dundee dated 28 June 1889.

32. Ibid - In report from Glasgow dated 1 July 1889.

resolutions calling the General Secretary to meet them in order that he might be called to account for his actions; such a meeting was fixed for early August. It is an indication of the depth of concern that Wilson spent the next few weeks prior to the meeting travelling the country attempting to placate the dissident branches, and going to considerable trouble to ensure that the votes of censure on him and the Executive passed at the end of the strike were rescinded.

This overt dissatisfaction with the outcome of the strikes is indicative of the still local emphasis of the union for the rank and file membership. Unified national action was only justifiable in their eyes if it brought in its train concrete local advantages in terms of wage increases and/or improved conditions of work. The union was at a crucial stage in its development since it could only get effective national action if local differences were subjugated to national and perhaps long term objectives. Yet that type of organisation could not be achieved until national action had been sufficiently effective locally to convince the branch membership of the advantage of giving up at least some of their autonomy. This the 'national strike' in June had patently failed to do, the fear being that the Union would disintegrate, as many had before, in the wake of an unsuccessful strike, and the return to sea of a divided and disillusioned membership.

Both membership and leadership recognised by July that the organisation was not satisfying the immediate demands of the men or the longer term aspirations of the leadership

and in particular Havelock Wilson. The Union had been conceived on the lines of a New Model, that is an organisation of skilled men recruited through apprenticeship, committed to national aims to be achieved through centrally organised and financed strikes in detail. The basic assumption of New Model Unionism, which was reflected in its organisational structure, was the extent to which the supply of labour could be controlled through the acquisition of skill and the bargaining power that skill automatically engendered. There is no doubt that this is how the N.A.S.F.U. saw themselves, as indicated by the emphasis on membership being confined to respectable seafarers who would be disciplined and ultimately expelled if 'standards' were not maintained. However, the idea that skill could be the basis of effective organisation for seamen was a grave misconception. In the local setting, which had been the only previous experience, and the progenitor of the N.A.S.F.U., this had not been obvious since the bargaining power of seamen's skill was underwritten by the loyalty of the community and the alternative labour force less of a threat. Once the organisation spread to the larger ports, with their diversity of trade and larger companies, the myth of the skilled seamen having the same industrial strength of the skilled artisan was dispelled. The skill of the seamen had been devalued by the long term changes in maritime technology, since all that was needed to get a vessel to sea was a nucleus of experienced workers who were operating under the command of professional officers. This nucleus need not necessarily be British, since the shipowner was able

to sign foreigners from the international labour market. The remainder of the crew need never have been to sea, but could be recruited from other ports, or indeed from the general pool of the unemployed.

The early experience, particularly in the spring of 1889, had shown that restricting recruitment to the respectable, i.e., most skilled, seafarer was ineffectual. In order to succeed in a dispute with shipowners, the Union had to be capable of preventing the movement of vessels and this could only be achieved with the maximum organisation of potential seafarers. This was a task which had occupied Havelock Wilson during April and May 1889, and which he had hoped to complete before the declaration of a national strike.

The problems of the development of the Union were exacerbated by the unexpected response of the seafarer generally to Union organisation in the favourable economic environment of late 1888 and early 1889. That this widespread organisation and expansion was neither planned for nor expected, is evidenced by the fact that the original 1887 rules provided for the payment of 1d per week per member to the Union solicitor when it was anticipated that the membership would not exceed 4,000 to 5,000 in the course of a year. (33)

That the original organisation was inadequate to the demands made upon it had become obvious to the leadership

16. 1889 7 August 1889 See also Appendix 11

33. Seafaring (Supplement) 18 October 1889

34. The effective headquarters of the Union were still in Sunderland and the representatives on the Executive Committee came from that area.

down to branch level by the time of the March conference.

In the Chairman's address it was stated that

"considering the dimension to which the society had grown it became imperative to frame such rules and regulations as would enable it to give satisfaction to its membership." (34)

whilst the General Secretary conceded that

"coming to the rules ... he hoped to make them more workable." (35)

This almost intuitive recognition of the inadequacy of the structure to meet the changing demands of unprecedented growth had, by the August conference, become an unavoidable problem as had the recognition of the inadequacy of the organisational structure to meet the needs of the unionisation of sailors and firemen. At that time it was claimed that the Union had a membership of 65,000,⁽³⁶⁾ and subsequently the General Secretary stated

"that during the half year from December to June 1889 they had established 35 branches." (37)

The two main concerns of the meeting were to ensure the centralisation of funds and the proper representation of the membership in the decision making process.⁽³⁸⁾ A resolution was passed ordering the funds to be centralised according to the rules, but the main burden of the discussion concentrated

34. Sunderland Daily Echo 4 March 1889.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid 7 August 1889 See also Appendix II

37. Seafaring (Supplement) 19 October 1889

38. The effective headquarters of the Union were still in Sunderland and the representatives on the Executive Committee came from that area.

on the right of the branches to be represented on the national executive. This right was admitted by the General Secretary who was not anxious that "the present committee should monopolise the whole of the government," and suggested that the branches should be grouped into districts and each said district elect a delegate to attend the Executive Committee meetings, but he added,

"the present Committee could not legally be altered until the Annual General Meeting in October." (39)

This suggestion, together with the promised rules revision at the Annual conference in October, appears to have satisfied the membership.

The year from the autumn of 1889 to the autumn of 1890 was one of organisational transition for the N.A.S.F.U. so that the primary allegiance of the membership could be harnessed to a central authority rather than to the virtually autonomous local branches, which had previously been the case. That is, to transform the nationally amalgamated union into a national one that was more than merely the sum of its parts.

Of course, this re-assessment of the N.A.S.F.U. was taking place at a crucial moment for the development of unionisation for the unskilled, which had as its focus the Great Dock Strike. The effective organisation of dockers was particularly important for the seamen since the identity of interest and action between seamen and dockers had already been firmly established for example in Glasgow and Liverpool

in the spring and early summer of 1889. This co-operation was to be repeated in London in August 1889, and the N.A.S.F.U. London Branch Secretary addressed a meeting on 3rd August, supporting the establishment of a new organisation for dockers.⁽⁴⁰⁾ During the strike, the seafarers actively supported the dockers and Burns was of the opinion that sailors and firemen made the best pickets.

"Like the stevedores, these men had come out early and in sympathy with the dockers, and their work on the picket line complemented perfectly the work of the stevedores in administration." ⁽⁴¹⁾

The extent of this co-operation has largely been ignored by historians of the period, perhaps because of the lack of comment in the contemporary press.⁽⁴²⁾ The latter omission was complained of in Seafaring,

"While much credit has been given to other societies with reference to activity in promoting the cause of the strikers, the work of the Sailors and Firemen's Union has been almost entirely overlooked; it has certainly never been acknowledged, says a correspondent. Now it is a fact that had the sailors and firemen not come out, as they did on principle, the strike would never have been prolonged as it was, nor would the demands of the strikers have been conceded to the extent they have been. The sailors and firemen could have discharged, loaded, coaled and taken away the ships in spite of all opposition on the part of the dockers, and thereby supplemented their wages three-fold; but all inducements held out by captains and shipowners were of no avail with the 'shellbacks'. In fact, not only men but officers were dismissed their ships because they refused to work cargo ... The Sailors and Firemen's picket prevented hundreds of 'blacklegs' from starting work during the progress of the strike."⁽⁴³⁾

40. Lovell J. Stevedores and Dockers Macmillan (1969) p.99

41. Ibid p.107

42. See for example, Clegg H.A., Fox Alan and Thompson A.F. A History of British Trade Unions since 1889 Vol.1 1889-1910 (O.U.P. 1964) p.57

43. Seafaring 21 September 1889

While the rank and file were actively involved, Havelock Wilson played only a minor role. Wilson claimed that the reason for this was that

"They were not very impressed with me because I was a provincial man, but, nevertheless, they were kind to me, and I got opportunities of addressing large crowds, but I took no part in the London strike Committee." (44)

This was an uncharacteristically modest, yet perceptive assessment of Wilson's own position, and indeed that of the Union. In spite of this, the 'provincial man' was elected to the Parliamentary Committee of the Trades Union Congress in Dundee in 1889.

The successful outcome of the T.U.C. for Wilson meant that he went to the Union's Annual Conference in Cardiff a few weeks later with his position within the labour movement considerably enhanced. It was, perhaps, also an indication of both his and the Union's increased prestige that the Conference was attended by Henry Broadhurst, M.P., and Lord Brassey.

The 1889 Conference, regarded as the first Annual General Meeting of the N.A.S.F.U.,⁽⁴⁵⁾ was crucial to the long term development of the Union. Unless the need for centralisation could effectively be integrated with democratic national representation in policy making, there was every likelihood the organisation would disintegrate. The Conference

44. Wilson J.H. My Stormy Voyage Through Life
The Co-operative Printing Society Ltd. (London 1925)p.167.

45. The meeting in 1888 was called a Demonstration. See footnote 61, chapter V.

was therefore presented with an organisational dilemma, which was emphasised by Henry Broadhurst in his address to the delegates.

"He pointed out ... the great secret of the strength of their great amalgamated trade unions ... arose from the fact that each locality had a great power of local self-government ... He could not say how far this would be suitable for the seamen's union. At any rate, he wished to impress upon them the necessity of upholding the Executive who knew no special local interest. The executive must always consider the interests of the whole body as opposed to those of any particular locality ... He begged them to remember that in a great society there must always be decisions arrived at which appeared to sections to be entirely unjust to them, but in the long run they would find how right and proper that decision had been." (46)

The first task of the Conference, in the light of the discontent following the outcome of the 'National' strike and the August agreement, was to provide for an Executive Council that was representative of the membership. It was, therefore, resolved that the New Executive Council was to be elected annually at the Conference on the basis of district representation. The Council would total 23 members, 20 of whom were to be elected by the 11 districts, the remaining three were to be ^{ex-officio} members, including the General Secretary and the Treasurer. Thus, the credibility of the Council was strengthened, but in such a way that the power of the branches was not enhanced. Thereby, perhaps, reducing the potential for fragmentation.

The development of the district was not as democratic as it appeared, for they were supervised by secretaries who

were appointed from above, and not chosen by the branches which they oversaw, their duties being to

"visit such branches as the Executive Council or General Secretary may direct, and such visits may be made at regular intervals without giving notice thereof and he may require the production of all books, vouchers, and accounts, and information from all branch officers relative to their duties and the working of their branches." ... "He shall also perform all other duties required of him by the Executive Council or General Secretary, and be entirely under their control." (47)

Thus the district Secretaries may be seen as a channel whereby the branches could be made to comply with instructions from headquarters, rather than one whereby the rank and file could influence central decisions.

Whilst particular organisational structures may encourage national cohesion and overcome problems that branch autonomy engenders, to be really successful it must be underpinned by unity over national aims and objectives. For the N.A.S.F.U. at their meeting the previous March, the focus for such unity had been seen as the achievement of uniform rates of pay throughout the country. However, by October, following the experience of the strike, and possibly with a larger representation, this objective did not have unanimous support. The attitude of the membership to this objective provides a good indication of the difficulties inherent in the task.

Whilst some "thought they should have a uniform wage for the whole country" (S. Elger, S. Shields) or were "strongly in favour of uniform wages" (Walsh, London) this was the

47. Rules of the National Amalgamated Sailors and Firemen's Union of Great Britain and Ireland 1889
Rule 5 Clause 3 and 4.

minority view. It was in the main opposed, either on the grounds that the time was not ripe; Mr. McKendrick (Dundee) had a knowledge of every port in the kingdom and knew it was simply impossible to have a uniform rate at the present time; or that the organisation of the Union was too weak. The Hull delegate considered "that so far as his district was concerned they had not sufficient organisation as yet to insist upon a uniform rate." It was also stated that in Liverpool it would be impossible at the present time "without more thorough organisation." (48)

The concern seems to have been not to object to the principle, but to retain flexibility through local wage negotiations. For example, the Aberdeen delegate recognised the propriety of the principle of a uniform scale of wages,

"but to say that any port must immediately adopt it would be absurd ... If the Union men at any port agreed, and joined the Executive in bringing about the uniformity, then all well and good."

That this view was accepted generally is reflected in the successful amendment to the resolution, which stated

"That there shall be a uniform rate of wages throughout the kingdom, drawn up by the Executive Council and the Secretaries of the Districts and to be submitted to the members for their vote before being acted upon in any place where the minimum rate does not exist." (49)

Therefore, in spite of the effort to centralise policy, the initiative over this central issue remained local and in practical terms the branches retained independence of action,

48. Seafaring (Supplement) 19 October 1889

49. Ibid

not least because employers regarded wage rates as a local issue.

The appointment of District Secretaries does not appear to have gone any ^{way} _k to ensuring that local opinion underwrote national policy since by the 1890 Conference it had been recommended that District Committees be formed. This apparently gave local branches some say in district matters which would possibly make centrally appointed District Secretaries, and thereby central policy, more acceptable. The effect of the new clauses was that

"For the management of each district there shall be a district committee elected by the branches comprised in the district ... The district committee shall have power to deal only with the following questions affecting the branches in the district, viz:- Rates of Wages, Hours of Labour, Conditions of agreements between Shipowners and Seamen, and to receive a monthly report of the district secretary, and shall cause the same to be forwarded to head office within the time prescribed by this Rule. That the Executive Council if necessary shall have full power to suspend district committees." (50)

In addition it was stated that the Committee

"shall have full control of the funds of the district but shall remit quarterly the amount due by the district to Head Office." (51)

This last resolution is perhaps surprising in view of the emphasis placed on the centralisation of funds at the same conference. It may well be that this establishment of 'district funds' was merely an expedient to placate resistance to the encroachment on branch authority, since the provision

50. Ibid

51. Ibid

for such funds only lasted a short while and was not included in the rules for the following year.

Whilst the resolution amending the rules were passed either unanimously or with a large majority, that is not to say the modification of the union organisation during 1889 and 1890 was achieved without dissension. In the former year this was based on local port or branch interest and the concern was not to

"allow themselves to drift into petty local jealousies of one district getting a little more than another ... That had been the downfall of all seamen's societies that had existed previous to the present one. Don't let them have one district fighting against another for a house which was divided against itself was sure to fail." (52)

By 1890 the emphasis had changed to dissension between branch members and the central authority that is between the rank and file and the Executive Council. Although this presented difficulties for the leadership, it does reflect the success of the efforts at centralisation, and the extent to which they moved away from the New Model union structure. (53)

When addressing the delegates at Glasgow in 1890, Havelock Wilson indicated the shift in criticism when he

52. Ibid

53. By this time not only had the Executive Council been democratised and strengthened but the headquarters had been removed from Sunderland, the Union's birthplace, to London on 6 July 1890.

stated

"No doubt at times you will not be able to agree with the government of the Union - it is not to be expected that you should; we cannot all think alike. Perhaps the Executive Council are of the opinion that the ship should be steered on a certain course, and you think she should be steered a little more to the northward. If everyone wants to take command of the vessel you will find that you will be on the rocks, and that the pirates will come on board and clean you out ... Therefore I urge you at all times to be obedient to the government of your Union." (54)

There were attempts to dilute the central authority by the delegates of branches such as the Tidal Basin and Green's Home, both London branches, and Greenock. However, these were unsuccessful and in fact the Executive Council was strengthened. The resolution which achieved this, in general restated the previous rule, but was far more explicit on points of central authority over branch affairs, and much less explicit about branch authority over central affairs. For example, part of the new rule setting out the duties of the Executive Council stated,

"The Executive Council shall have the entire management and superintendence of the business of the Union and all its branches ... to further the objects of the Union and to protect its funds both general and branch from misappropriation." (55)

The words underlined are those inserted in 1890. (56)

The need for clarification of the relationship of the branches to central authority had been highlighted in early 1890. A court case arose out of a protracted disagreement,

54. Seafaring (Supplement) 18 October 1890.

55. Ibid

56. Rules of the N.A.S.F.U. and *ibid*.

which began in July 1889, between the officials of the Tower Hill branch, in particular the secretary, Robert Pleasance, and the National Executive.⁽⁵⁷⁾ The nub of the case was what rights the Central Executive had over the branch records and accounts; a question which was of vital importance to the emerging concept of a national rather than a nationally amalgamated union. The outcome of the case was unsatisfactory because of the imprecision of the 1889 rules on this point which precluded a legal decision. This challenge to central authority explains, in part, the preoccupation at the 1890 conference with the consolidation and clarification of the rules. The attempt to achieve an efficient national structure did not of itself solve what had emerged as the central problem of the 1889 agitation, the extent to which the labour supply could be controlled by the Union. Experience had shown that this was not merely a matter of organisation of experienced ratings who could then use their skill to bargain with employers; because of the nature of the labour force it was a problem with many facets. The strength of the national union was dependent on their ability to exclude from employment any form of 'alternative labour'. One essential in this process was achieved in the spring of 1890 when, after several attempts, the Hull Seamen's and Marine Firemen's Amalgamated Association and the North of England federated with the N.A.S.F.U., thus

57. See Seafaring during July and August 1889 for details of this incident.

providing a united front to both unorganised seamen and shipowners in the two ports. further, as Wilson said,

"it will enable us to establish a uniform rate of wages and uniform conditions of labour." (58)

However, since the shipowner could draw his labour from an international market, the N.A.S.F.U. were trying to spread their own net wider with the establishment of branches of the union in Antwerp and Rotterdam, as well as supporting the Danish seamen's strike. (59) Efforts were also made to encourage foreign seamen to join the Union, the method being to announce that the fee for foreigners would be increased substantially in the future, thus obtaining the membership of those men employed on British ships whilst creating a barrier to restrict future employment of foreigners.

The Union also recognised the advantage of restricting the supply and use of alternative labour in other ways. For example, the waterside workers could be a suitable source of such labour, which was less likely to be available if unionised, and would co-operate with the seamen in preventing ships from sailing crewed by strikebreakers. The co-operation of dockers and seamen was evidenced in the Glasgow and Liverpool strikes in 1889 and the seamen were increasingly aware of the need to establish this unity of action on a more formal footing, and if possible to extend it to a wider section of their kindred workers. This type of organisation

58. Sunderland Daily Echo 15 October 1889, 17 May 1890; Seafaring 7 June 1889; Minutes of H.S.M.F.A.A. op cit.

59. For details see N.A.S.F.U. Minutes 21 July 1890; Seafaring July 1890 passim.

was mooted in Liverpool in April 1890 by the Sailors and Firemen following attempts to negotiate concerted action with the dockers over a pay claim at the end of January. The idea was favourably received by the trade unions concerned, in part because

"The recent strike of dock labourers in Liverpool had entailed considerable loss to the sailors, firemen, flatmen, quay carters, and various classes connected with the shipping industry, and it is felt by many of the members of the trades unions connected with these bodies of labour that it would be a wise thing if they mutually co-operated together." (60)

These same trades unions also recognised the need to strengthen the sailors' positions

"inasmuch as they [sailors] had to contend with the surplus labour constantly pouring into Liverpool." (61)

The proposal put forward by the sailors and firemen had as its main object

"the formation of a federal council composed of all classes of labour connected with shipping and the docks. They desire that such a council, if established, should discuss the labour question in all its bearing and, if possible, to try and arrive at a common understanding." (62)

Having learned the lessons of precipitate action themselves

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- 60.. Journal of Commerce 27 January 1890
Liverpool Daily Post 18 April 1890
61. Journal of Commerce 3 February 1890
62. Liverpool Daily Post 18 April 1890

in 1889, they were anxious to guard against being involved in similar impetuous action by the dockers since their proposal went on to

"urge that no Body should take any extreme steps to remedy grievances until the others were made conversant with the facts, and that the ultimate decision must be left in the hands of the federal council or a board of Conciliation." (63)

At a national level there was insufficient appeal for the various unions to co-operate in this way until they were faced with a common enemy in the shipowners' organisation. It was only following that event in the autumn of 1890 that an effective national federated association came into being.

Within the industry itself it could only be of benefit to the N.A.S.F.U. if there was a sympathetic attitude to their cause on behalf of the officers. This was not least because the ship master was the person responsible for hiring and firing seamen, and with whom the contract of employment was made. It was to this end that Havelock Wilson assisted in the formation of a new officers' organisation on the North East coast in January 1889.⁽⁶⁴⁾ After an uncertain start, the Union was reformed in May of that year as the Certificated Officers' Union of Great Britain and Ireland, with Captain George Luccock as Assistant Secretary and Havelock Wilson as General Manager, but the question of officers being unionised was not pressed by the N.A.S.F.U. until the end of the year. From the Union's point of view it was seen

63. Ibid

64. Sunderland Daily Echo 17 January 1889

as "an additional strength to their power."⁽⁶⁵⁾ and on the 27th November, at a meeting of the officers' union, Wilson

"announced that the day had arrived when seamen and firemen would no longer sign articles or sail in ships until the shipmasters and mates joined the Union." (66)

In practice the resolution appears to have had little effect, although it was claimed that

"In some cases ... owners who were completely nipped by their commercial engagements paid the fees of their captains and officers to join the union in order to get their ships away." (67)

These developments were limited to the North East coast, but the advantages were recognised elsewhere since the District Secretary in Liverpool was reported in June 1890 as endeavouring to set up an officers' union.⁽⁶⁸⁾ The unionisation of officers was perhaps more important once the issue became union crews rather than merely wages and conditions, which was the case during the strikes of the spring and summer of 1889.

Obviously, the position of the N.A.S.F.U. in relation to supply would have been greatly strengthened had they been able to obtain a Board of Trade Licence, and by the 1890 Conference the Union made a definite commitment to attempt to obtain such licences for branch secretaries.⁽⁶⁹⁾

65. Royal Commission on Labour, Minutes of Evidence, Group B Vol.I 1892 (C6708) Q10346, also see Q9313, 9315, 10028, 10029, 10345-50 and Vol.II (C6795) Q14601, 14622.

66. Fairplay 6 December 1889 Shipping World 1 January 1890

67. Royal Commission on Labour Minutes of Evidence, Group B Vol.II (Cmnd 6795) Q14,622.

68. Journal of Commerce 26 June 1890

69. Seafaring (Supplement) 18 October 1890.

At the same time as the N.A.S.F.U. were widening their area of influence with other Unions, they were endeavouring to strengthen their own bargaining position in regard to skill. For many years there had been pressure from the seamen themselves for the strict implementation of competency qualifications for Able Seamen (A.B.s). However, this had become more important since the realisation that seamen could not use skill as the basis of negotiation with employers. It would also be a way, ultimately, of restricting supply. There was a provision in legislation for the certification of A.B.s in the Merchant Seamen (Payment of Wages and Rating) Act 1880, Section 7.

"A seaman shall not be entitled to the rating of A.B. that is to say, of an able-bodied seaman, unless he has served at sea for four years before the mast."

That this was not the practice was indicated by a seamen's leader

"I consider that ships being undermanned and the terms of the Merchant Seamen's Act of 1880 referring to wages and rating not being put into force is the cause of our having so many inferior seamen ... the principal cause of complaint is that there is no reliable source from whence we can get seamen in the future. So far as Hull is concerned I only know of one firm which carries ordinary seamen. Consequently if there are no ordinary seamen I do not know in the near future how we are going to get able seamen. There are plenty of ordinary seamen and they are very ordinary." (70)

It had always been, and remained, the long term policy of the N.A.S.F.U. to get this law enforced, (71) but they were not

70. Royal Commission on Labour Minutes of Evidence Qs.13815 and 13817.

71. P.R.O. MT9/348/M4850/1889

very successful in their efforts during this period.

One indirect step towards influencing supply and to counteract the predominance of the shipowner was to gain representation on the Local Marine Boards which were provided for under the Merchant Shipping Act of 1854. The purpose of these Boards was to carry into effect the provisions of the Act and they appear in practice to have been mainly concerned with charge of the Mercantile Marine Office where seamen were engaged, and with disciplinary enquiries.⁽⁷²⁾ There is no extant evidence of how wide N.A.S.F.U. representation was

"The President [of the Board of Trade] has, where suitable persons of the class of an A.B., or a suitable representative of seamen can be found, appointed such a person as a member of the Local Marine Board."

14.808 "Is that commonly done?" -

"Wherever a suitable person of that description can be found it is always done." ⁽⁷³⁾

The shipowners must have viewed the growing influence of the N.A.S.F.U. and its apparent recognition as an official spokesman of seamen with increasing disquiet. For some shipowners, the reaction had been to combine locally to deal specifically with labour matters in addition to the existing local organisations such as Protection and Indemnity Clubs and Shipowners Associations.⁽⁷⁴⁾ However, it appears to have

72. Royal Commission on Labour Minutes of Evidence
Q14,805.

73. Ibid Qs.14,857 and 8. Evidence given by the Permanent Secretary of the Board of Trade 8 March 1892.

74. The shipowners did not always form a separate organisation but often got together on an ad hoc basis as was the case during the strikes in Liverpool in 1889.

been the widening agitation of the winter of 1889/1890, affecting to a lesser degree all waterside workers, rather than the national seamen's strike of June 1889 which engendered moves to increased combination by Shipowners. At the beginning of December it was reported

"the shipowners and shipbrokers of the Thames have formed a labour Committee to deal promptly and in a conciliatory spirit with labour questions.

There are now therefore two powerful bodies of shipowners organised for the purpose of defense against unreasonable demands - one comprising the Thames, the other all the North Eastern ports and Cardiff. (75) Liverpool shipowners, it is to be presumed, will act independently as they generally do. Scotland seems able to hold its own against labour combinations." (76)

In the early spring of 1890, Liverpool employers formalised what had previously been an ad hoc arrangement in times of agitation, by forming the Employers' Labour Association in February. This represented the majority of the principal steamship owners and the master stevedores and porters, a combination therefore which employed 60 per cent of the seamen and waterside workers in the port. (77) It was to be a permanent defensive body with "no desire whatsoever to interfere with the men's organisation." (78)

75. There are several indirect references to the Cardiff Shipowners Association being allied to the Shipowners Association of Great Britain, but no firm evidence.

76. Shipping World 1 December 1889

77. Liverpool Mercury 10 February 1890
Liverpool Courier 11 February 1890

78. Journal of Commerce 1 March 1890
The fact that there was pressure for a federation of waterside workers in Liverpool at this time may have been significant in the formation of the E.L.A.

A further development was the emergence of unions which either implicitly or explicitly had the encouragement of shipowners. It was presumably hoped that these would effectively rival the N.A.S.F.U. but would have a membership more appreciative of the Shipowners' position.

The main examples are the International Federation of Stewards, Seamen and Firemen (I.F.S.S.F.), originally based in Sunderland, and the Amalgamated Seamen's and Tradesmen's Union of Great Britain and Ireland, based in Cardiff (known as the Boarding House Masters' Union)

The former was established in the early summer of 1890 and registered as a trades union on 3rd July. Havelock Wilson regarded its formation as part of a shipowners' conspiracy.

"In April 1890 a deputation of those men waited upon one shipowner, Mr. Scrutton of the North East coast and he told them that they were prepared to subsidise these men in carrying out this work; further, that if they would start a rival organisation to ours the shipowners would be prepared to subsidise this organisation. These men then commenced and formed a rival organisation, which is known by the name of the International Federation of Seamen, Firemen, Cooks and Stewards that is the I.F.S.S.F. " (79)

In view of Havelock Wilson's bias it is difficult to assess how true this assertion was. Particularly as the men involved were Robert Pleasance, George J. Hornsby, Arthur R. Abbot and Maurice E. Darby, all dismissed officials of the N.A.S.F.U. and Captain Lawrence who had had a dubious connection with Havelock Wilson's attempt to organise the officers. However, even if, at its inception, it had

79. Royal Commission on Labour Minutes of Evidence Group B, Vol.I (Cmd 6708) Q9291

been a bona fide organisation, it was definitely in receipt of shipowners' funds by the autumn of 1890.⁽⁸⁰⁾

The Cardiff society, the Boarding House Masters' Union, was formed on 25th August, apparently specifically to provide the local shipowners' society with 'free labour'. The Cardiff Shipowners' Association had declared for free labour on 6th August,⁽⁸¹⁾ and at the end of the month it was reported that

"The boarding-house keepers who have suffered a great deal from the proceedings and exclusiveness of existing unions are ready to help the Shipowners' Combination in many ways." ⁽⁸²⁾

The shipowners were approaching and attempting to solve what they regarded as a labour problem on a widening front. Nevertheless, their level of combination, where it existed, was for the most part local, or at best regional, as on the North East coast. It was from this area that calls had come, over a number of years, for national action in this sphere, but they remained largely unheeded.

80. See Chapter VII p. 194 and Webb Collection A Vol.XLI, 16A

81. Royal Commission on Labour Group B op cit Vol.II (C.6795) Q13,750

82. Fairplay 29 August 1890

CHAPTER VII

THE SHIPPING FEDERATION

The formation of a national organisation of shipowners to deal with labour matters was an important break with the traditional local and regional reaction to the periodic unionisation of seafarers. Undoubtedly the rapid growth of the N.A.S.F.U. gave the shipowners considerable individual cause for concern. This was increased once the union extended its area of activity beyond wages and conditions of work to pressing for employment of unionists only and what was regarded as 'interference' with the supply of labour, and placing restraint on their commercial freedom. However, the power of the N.A.S.F.U. was not sufficiently well co-ordinated or strongly based nationally, or indeed successful to warrant a spontaneous consensus among the majority of shipowners for united action. This would also apply to the alleged pressure the N.A.S.F.U. put on officers to join the Shipmasters and Officers Union, and which was later to receive most publicity as the direct participation for the foundation of the national organisation. (1)

In attempting to understand the impetus for the establishment of an organisation to be concerned with labour, the common error lies in assuming it was a national movement from its

1. See below page 208

inception. It was rather a successful attempt by a relatively small group of militant shipowners, in the main from the North East coast, to harness the increasing frustration felt by many shipowners in the management of their affairs, of which the activities of the N.A.S.F.U. and the possible unionisation of officers was symptomatic. It is not difficult to understand why 1890 might be seen as the right time to show how beneficial united action could be.

The summer of 1889 had seen the emergence of the successful organisation of unskilled labourers which had retained an unusual degree of permanence. In addition

both public opinion and indeed the state had shown a new sympathy to the collective ideas of the working man, ideas which were particularly threatening to employers committed to the philosophy of the individual freedom of contract and unrestricted commercial endeavour. The shipowners certainly fell into this latter category and in spite of the apparent victories in 1889 were increasingly concerned with union interference in what they regarded as their sole concern.

Furthermore, there were signs that it could no longer be automatically assumed that the attitudes of government would coincide with shipping's best interest. For example, the Board of Trade were perhaps showing themselves more amenable to the employee's point of view and looking more readily for seamen's representation through the Unions on such matters as loss of life.

A more pertinent factor as far as the shipowners were concerned was the economic situation. There had been signs,

since the spring of 1890, of a contraction in freights from the peak of 1889. As Messrs. Angier Bros. Steam Freight Review for 1890 stated,

"The salient fact brought by a review of the past year's steamship owning, is the sudden relapse of all freights and values of steam property from the high points reached in 1889 to about the lowest figure touched during the long depression in this trade from 1883 to 1887. The decline commenced with early spring and progressed rapidly till at the close of 1890 freights have reached as low figures as can be remembered, and the position is aggravated by the abnormally high cost of coal, wages and high working expenses." (2)

The boom of 1889 possibly provides the explanation of why the attempt at national organisation did not occur until 1890, that is when the shipowners were under pressure of falling freights, rather than in 1889 when the industrial unrest was at its height.

What existed then by the summer of 1890 was a climate of opinion withⁱⁿ the shipping industry in regard to labour matters that provided sufficient support among owners to form the basis of a viable national organisation. The need for such an organisation was publicly expressed at the General Shipowners Society Annual Meeting, held on 25th July, 1890, when it was stated that

"the fact is, the men are thoroughly organised, whereas we shipowners are thoroughly adrift; the men see this and they beat us 'hands down'." (3)

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2. Fairplay 9 January and Angier E.A.V. Fifty Years' Freights 1869-1919 Fairplay (1920) p.85.
 3. Ibid 25 July 1890

This was certainly felt to be the case in regard to seamen; a leading shipowner, E. H. Watts, commented,

"It was necessary for shipowners to take immediate action. The men", he said, "are at the present time beating us in detail; they have their delegates with them, who tell them what a grand success they are having, stopping this ship or that ship, etc. If this sort of thing goes on, we shall be out of the race altogether. Shipowners ought to combine now; unless they do, we shall be beaten in detail all over the shop." (4)

This was a view that was shared by the President of the Chamber of Shipping, T. L. Devitt, and he convened the first formal meeting of interested parties which was held in London on 19th August, 1890. Those already committed to the idea of such a national organisation were anxious to take advantage of the momentum that now existed for co-ordinated action and went to this first meeting with a well thought out scheme.⁽⁵⁾ However, whilst there was a general acceptance among those present that something should be done in a concerted way to meet the 'labour troubles', there was by no means a consensus of opinion as to the form such an organisation should take. It was presumed that the new organisation would be a centralised association of P & I clubs to which individual owners or groups of owners outside the club could affiliate.

4. Ibid

5. Conference of Shipowners Association Minutes of Proceedings 19 August 1890 p.27 and passim

However, this basis of organisation did cause some problems later on, as not all tramps belonged to the Clubs, being prepared to risk under-insurance for maximum profit; and the large liner companies were so secure that they had no need of this type of mutual support. Therefore, the basis of P & I Club representation did not necessarily mean a united front on the part of the shipowners. This is one reason why the support of the Chamber of Shipping was so vital since they were representative of the owners not in the P & I Clubs.

There was some disagreement as to whether the situation warranted the formation of a new society, or whether it would not be better to use existing societies, in particular that on the North East coast, of whom Mr. Roche was the Secretary and foremost advocate. Mr. Jones of Cardiff expressed the views of several other owners at the meeting when he said

"As my colleague has already said what the Cardiff ship-owners would prefer would be something on the lines of Mr. Roche's association which has now become I may say, something more than the nucleus of a society. If that could be added to, I think it would be preferable to bringing into existence another association for similar purposes." (6)

In the event a vote on the resolution was postponed in order that a copy might be sent to the P & I Clubs for their consideration. A further meeting could then be convened to

which the Clubs could send their agreed representatives. An interim committee was formed to further the project. This consisted of the Executive Council of the Chamber of Shipping and the leading members of the P & I Clubs, and thus the national appeal of the Chamber involvement was maintained.

Prior to the adjournment meeting on the 2nd September the Interim Committee met at 11 a.m. Primarily they were to discuss what position the Chamber was to have in relation to the new organisation and to decide the policy to be pursued at the general meeting. It is obvious from these preliminary discussions that the Committee at least had moved away from the idea of 'forming an anti-strike association by a confederation of the existing P & I Clubs,' and towards a much wider ranging membership, even to the extent of one member recommending the inclusion of shipbuilders, an idea strongly opposed by a P & I representative on the grounds that his association might find itself financially responsible for a shipbuilders' dispute.

The need to widen the appeal, albeit not to shipbuilders, was recognised in the resolution finally put to the general meeting later in the day. The resolution read

"That in the opinion of this meeting it is expedient to constitute a central association consisting of ship-owners and others consisting of the various protecting and Indemnity Associations and other Associations, and also shipping and other companies and shipowners not entered in any protecting and indemnity or other Association for the purpose of protecting the interests of shipowners against the unreasonable demands or actions of Trades Unions or combinations affecting such interests." (7)

The P & I Clubs present, representing some 5 million tons, (8) signified their assent & confirmed that the appropriate resolutions had been passed in their respective localities. A decision was also made to call the new organisation The Shipping Federation Limited. (9)

The shipowners were by no means unanimous in their expectations of the new organisation. For some it was to be simply a short term expedient to meet the specific threat to the shipowner of the N.A.S.F.U. and the New Unionism. As one owner stated

"You must not imagine this is an association which is going to last twenty years. I hope it will kill this thing [Trade Union interference] in twenty months." (10)

The Chairman of the meeting, however, showed greater sensitivity to the changing climate in which they were operating as employers by pointing out that the circumstances in which they found themselves provided them with a unique opportunity

"to come together in a common interest in which we are all bound together it is not going to fall to pieces in twenty months." (11)

He did not think that they should see it merely as a solution to 'the momentary panic we have got into', and it was worth an effort to make it the beginning of better things. (12)

The meeting then went on to establish the exact aims

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8. Ibid p.40
 9. Ibid p.46
 10. Ibid p.88
 11. Ibid p.89
 12. Ibid

of the Federation and to set up the structure in detail. Its proposed purpose and objects were set out in a memorandum produced by Roche.

"To deal with labour questions of all kinds including conferences with labour organisations. Indemnity of shipowners whose vessels are detained by reason of the arbitrary and unreasonable action of Trades Unions. Legal proceedings where necessary in important test cases within the objects of the association but not for ordinary breaches of discipline. Protection of the officers, crews or servants of shipowners against intimidation on the part of trade organisations or their members. Proposed legislation affecting ship-owners counteracting the effects of agitation against the shipping interests." (13)

Originally the emphasis had been on the need to organise a combination

"against the tyranny of those unions, the tyranny exercised in ships where they have the power." (14)

but later a more moderate line was adopted with an amendment suggesting 'that the word tyrannical be changed to unreasonable' and the new society should be 'against the unreasonable demands of trade unions.'

The problem of representation proved to be a matter of contention with each representative concerned to maintain an advantageous position without conceding too much to the others. Finally a vaguely worded resolution was agreed, giving one representative organisation one vote for every 100,000 gross tons registered entered. Members having less tonnage entered

13. Ibid p.46 and 47

14. Ibid p.26

were allowed to group together for the purpose of representation and voting. These representatives would go to make the Executive Council which would initially number 55.

It is difficult to say how general was the acceptance that the Federation was the beginning of permanent national co-operation. The main concern of the initiators of the Federation was to capitalise on the unusual national support that had been engendered by the 'momentary panic'. It was agreed that the day-to-day running of the Federation was put into the hands of an interim committee until such time as the Executive Committee was formed. The Interim Committee was made up of members who were mainly London based, presumably because they would be required to meet daily to draw up the Memorandum and Articles of Association, etc. It was decided that the President and Vice-President of the Chamber of Shipping should also serve as ex-officio members of the Committee

"although they are not contributors and do not contribute to the funds; still at the same time they are the cause of the initiation of this and they are the means of bringing us together and the organisation and the power that they represent is one that we can very well incorporate with our own." (15)

Certainly it seems that much of the preparatory work was carried out by Devitt. The preparations for the meeting on 2nd September were certainly thorough and a candidate

for the post of General Manager and Secretary of the proposed new organisation had already been selected and was presented to the meeting for little more than confirmation of his appointment. The man in question was George Alexander Laws, an ex-ship's master and small shipowner from the North East coast who was well known among the shipping fraternity. He was felt to be

"a good fighter and he rather likes it; and under the orders of the Executive Council I have no doubt he will be an exceedingly able man." (16)

Whilst the P & I Clubs, forming as they did the basis of the Shipping Federation, were prepared to support the idea of a national policy, they were nevertheless anxious to retain their local influence, local disputes to be dealt with at local level, but falling in line with a national policy. It is not surprising therefore that they insisted that proper weight be given to district organisations. In fact, it was agreed that the formation of district committees should be left directly in the hands of the localities themselves.

The new organisation was to be financed by making a call on members, based on gross tonnage entered, and in the first instance at the rate of 1d per ton for steamers and $\frac{1}{2}$ d for sailing ships. Notice of the first call was given on the 1st October for payment on 4th November, and it was expected

to raise £25,000⁽¹⁷⁾ (Appendix III). This money was to be used in part to provide for the actual running costs of the organisation and in part for a margin of compensation to any owners whose vessels were blocked by the actions of the unions. In cases where indemnity was claimed the amount to be paid out of Federation funds was to be decided by the Legal and Indemnity Committee with a maximum set of 6d per ton.⁽¹⁸⁾ This was the key to ensuring adherence in local disputes to a central policy.

Settling the form of organisation and administration occupied the Council during the month of September, and many of the finer points of detail were not finalised until after the Federation was registered. The primary consideration was to prove the viability of the new organisation as rapidly as possible. There was an urgent need to increase allegiance so that national policy could become a reality, and of course increased membership was needed to provide the financial underpinning. Before registration could take place, the Memorandum and Articles of Association had to be drawn up. This produced a number of problems, not least because the Federation was anxious not to be seen as in any way comparable to trade union combination. Furthermore, whilst they wanted to make their aims and mode of operation clear privately,

17. Shipping Federation (Sh.Fed.) Minutes of Central Executive Meeting 1 October 1893 p.77

18. Ibid passim

in order that there could be no question about what the members were committing themselves to, they were concerned to present a public image of reasonableness.

At the meeting, when the draft Memorandum and Articles were discussed, the importance of

"seeing exactly that you are agreed as to what you want and as to the way in which you intend to carry out your objects." (19)

was emphasised.

On the other hand it was recognised that a clear statement of their intentions would only bring about public censure and possible legal action by the Unions. As Mr. Roche, the Federation solicitor pointed out

"these objects as set out in this draft Memorandum of Association, and which are most properly set out in my opinion for you to consider and discuss to see if they cover anything you want to do in your Association - these objects will in the registration of this Association have to disappear; they will not have to be registered; but you can still have those objects as the basis of your operations and you will understand by other means quite as efficacious, the mode in which you will conduct the business of this Association. But if you will just think for a moment that as soon as you register this as a Company, Mr. Wilson or Mr. Anybody Else can go to Somerset House, he can obtain a copy of your Memorandum of Association and if there be a legal point which he can get hold of, as for instance that this Company ought not to have been registered as a Company under such objects as are stated here, you can quite understand that that will be readily availed of." (20)

19. Sh.Fed Minutes of Proceedings 19 September 1893 p.25

20. Ibid p.24 and 25

Two items in the draft made clear the intentions and general method of operation of the Federation who would protect and indemnify shipowners (and others who may become members) who suffered loss

"by reason of the striking, desertion or refusal of duty or labour by any Officers, Engineers, Sailors, Firemen, Stevedores, Dockers, Trimmers or other workmen pursuant to the rules, directions or authority of any Trade Union or combination, hereby necessitating the procuring maintenance and special employment of others in their stead." (21)

and, (d), to

"Protect, assist and support any Manager, Master officer, Engineer, Seaman, Fireman or workman or anybody, or class of these persons against the unjust or tyrannical action, boycotting, compulsion or intimidation of any Trade Union or Unions or Combinations or of any of the members thereof." (22)

It is an indication of the founder members' recognition of the need for circumspection in stating their aims that in the final Memorandum, these objects are covered by the clause,

"(d) to protect and indemnify the members or affiliated members thereof against any loss arising in the management of their trade without their actual privity or default, which in the opinion of the Company should, in its interests or in the interests of the trade, be made good." (23)

These were aims with which even the most moderate shipowner

21. Ibid p.29

22. Ibid p.31

23. Memorandum of Association of the Shipping Federation Limited Clause 3 (d) date 30 September 1890

could identify, particularly in difficult economic conditions, and which could not attract public disapprobation.

The signatories to the Memorandum are perhaps significant as a reflection of those who shaped, and were most committed to the formation of the Federation. Of the ten signatories, three were from London, five from Newcastle, and the remaining two from Sunderland, and all were shipowners who would be regarded as militant in their approach to labour matters.

In order to show their seriousness of purpose, the Shipping Federation had to make a firm 'stand' even before its structure had been fully set up. They had to meet any instances of Union 'interference' with firmness whenever and wherever they occurred.

Laws was requested by the Interim Committee

"to act on the defensive, but to maintain freedom of contract whenever assailed by any union." (24)

The method to be used to implement this policy was traditional, that is when threatened by unionised labour to replace it with labour without union allegiance - i.e., free labour. The Federation were prepared to finance the lay up of vessels if the situation warranted it, and it was envisaged that in extreme cases whole fleets would be made to lay up as a maritime equivalent of the lockout, rather than owners being dictated to by the N.A.S.F.U. However, the question of laying-up vessels appears to have received more publicity

than was warranted by the actual preparations for the course of action. It was not an integral part of the policy laid down in the inaugural meetings, nor did it gain the universal support that is implicit in the press coverage. Indeed it is extremely unlikely that a wholesale laying-up could have been seriously contemplated either on the grounds of expense or the threat it would be to the apparent unity of the Federation. On the other hand, it did enhance the public image of the Federation in that it appeared that they were prepared to make altruistic sacrifices in their stand for free labour against the Unions.

It was the provision of an adequate supply of free labour that was the immediate concern of the Interim Committee and the General Manager. Initially it was envisaged that this labour would be supplied locally as the result of co-operation with existing organisations such as the International Federation of Stewards, Seamen and Firemen, and on 6th September, at the suggestion of Mr. Roche, Captain Lawrence and Messrs. Pleasance and Abbott had an interview with Laws.⁽²⁵⁾ They stated they were on their way to Liverpool to establish a branch of their union and had brought a copy of their rules for his perusal. They went on

25. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.1 from General Manager.

to say

"that their objects were opposed to those of the N.A.S.F. (Wilson's) Union, inasmuch as they deprecated any interference with the captains and officers of vessels or with other unions or free men in any way. They intend to have branches at all large seaports of the Kingdom, and will shortly be prepared to provide men in cases where crews are withdrawn by order of the N.A.S.F.U. delegates." (26)

From the General Manager's report it appears that he was anxious to get the co-operation of this organisation in securing a supply of free labour as economically as possible.

The Union, for their part, saw the Federation support as a means of successfully spreading their own net wider with minimum expense for themselves.

"They required some assistance towards the expenses of establishing a branch in Liverpool which had hitherto been borne entirely by themselves; they were now without funds to work upon and were in want of at least £80 to carry the matter through." (27)

Laws obviously felt they would be useful to the Federation and so encouraged them "to the extent of the £80 required." (28)

However, in doing so he made it clear, at least in his report, that the Federation were not in the business of union warfare, or against reasonable demands. He wrote

"After hearing what these men had to say I informed them that the Shipping Federation could not mix in any disputes between Trade Unionists; but as their proposal to have branch officers for the supply of 'Free Union men' was in itself reasonable, I would endeavour to get the support from individual ship-owners to cover travelling expenses, rent of offices, etc., to make a start with." (29)

26. Ibid

27. Ibid

28. Ibid

29. Ibid

It should be noted that here the emphasis is on co-ordinating the needs of the individual shipowner, who would meet the expense of the sources of the supply of free labour, rather than the direct involvement of the Federation.

It is an indication of the 'defensive' policy and the Federations desire not to alienate their potential membership and support that when the I.F.S.S.F. officials suggested they could initiate a successful vendetta against Wilson and force him out of his position, Laws reported that

"In regard to any accusation or personalities in connection with Wilson, I was most careful to impress upon these men that the Federation would not give its countenance to anything of the kind, and that any such occurrence would be certain to alienate the sympathy of the shipowners, with whom I had arranged."(30)

When Mr. Laws went to Liverpool himself on the 8th September, he ensured the activities of the I.F.S.S.F. in Liverpool would be under what he regarded as reliable surveillance. He arranged that Mr. Callaghan of the Seamen's Benevolent Association would

"act as agent there and give information with regard to the working of these branches, and also to supply the names of any trustworthy men who might be entrusted with branches in all the leading seaports." (31)

Mr. Callaghan stated that "the 'Free Union' branches had the support of his society which numbered a large body of seamen."

By this time the Federation's plan to obtain supplies of

30. Ibid

31. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.2 Visit to Liverpool
10 September 1890

free labour appears to have undergone some modification. The reason was that Laws recognised the need for uniformity and, at least in the early stages, some central control, especially as there were increasing signs that the unsupervised use of the 'free labour' organisation might result in the Federation being involved in a personal vendetta against Wilson. (32)

The scheme now proposed was the setting up of Registry Offices, specifically so that seamen and firemen willing to work with non-union men could enter their names for employment and in return would receive a ticket entitling them to preference when shipping in Federation vessels. In taking the ticket the seaman committed himself to the Federation rules which were printed on the reverse of the ticket. The most important rule was Rule 6 which stated

"Every seaman, by registering, pledges himself to carry out his agreement in accordance with the Merchant Shipping Acts, and to proceed to sea in any vessel in which he signs articles, notwithstanding that other members of the crew may, or may not, be members of any Seamen's Union." (33)

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32. G.J. Hornsby had attempted to involve the Shipping Federation in a campaign against J. Havelock Wilson. See Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.2 Ibid and R.C. on Labour Group B Vol.II Q14689 - 14697
33. Powell L.H. The Shipping Federation, A History of the First Sixty Years 1890-1950 Shipping Federation (1950) facing page 5

However, the local and practical implementation of the scheme was still at this stage to be left in the hands of the 'free labour' unions. To this end, negotiations continued for the following fortnight, and resulted in a series of meetings on the 19th and 20th September between Devitt and Laws and various representatives of the 'free labour' unions. The arrangements made with Captain Lawrence on the 6th were confirmed and meetings were held with Captain Lemon, Mr. Stewart of the Amalgamated British Seamen's Protection Society and Mr. Linde of the Riggers' Union, with a view to organising a registry in the Thames District. In addition, a proposal that Mr. Darby should be responsible for the Glasgow registry, entirely apart from any unions, was considered but felt to be impracticable at that time. It was felt it would be

"more efficient and less costly to work in connection with the International Federation of which Darby was an official and other Seamen's and Firemen's Unions which have no coercive tendencies." (34)

Finally the following were proposed as Free Labour Agents under the Federation registry scheme:

"Messrs. Callaghan, Lemon, Linde, Darby, Lawrence,"

and they were said to be

"all opposed to the New Union System - and opponents of the coercive policy persisted in by Wilson, the General Secretary of the Sailors' and Firemen's Union (35) which policy they describe as socialistic and selfish."

34. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.4 on the Registry Scheme from General Manager 20 September 1890

35. Ibid See also Saville J. 'Trade Unions and Free Labour: the Background to the Taff Vale Decision' in Ed. Briggs A. and Saville J. Essays in Labour History Macmillan (1967)

It was not until late October that arrangements were made in Cardiff. Here the organisation utilised was the Amalgamated Seamen's and Tradesmen's Union of Great Britain and Ireland, which was run by the Boarding House Masters' Association for the purpose of supplying free labour to vessels. Laws found the rules satisfactory and considered that "a Registry Office might be safely entrusted to them. (36)

In Hull the attempts to get the local union involved were less successful. While the Secretary of the Hull Seamen's and Marine Firemen's Amalgamated Association, representing about 1200 members said

"he thought that most of them would register if they were offered preference of employment." (37)

he was not approached with a view to forming the basis of the registry scheme in the port. The members of the local union were in fact very circumspect about the matter when the subject of registering was put before them two weeks later and they agreed that

"the Secretary write informing them that we cannot come to any conclusion without mature deliberation but will give it our careful consideration and let them know our decision." (38)

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36. Sh.Fed. Documents Manager's Report No.6 to Executive Committee for General Purposes 29 October 1890
 37. Sh.Fed. Documents Manager's Report No.5 to District and General Purposes Committee 18 October 1890
 38. Minutes of the H.S.M.F.A.A. 4 November 1890

The Minutes do not refer to the matter again.

The Federation, in facilitating the setting up of the Registry Offices, had to take cognisance of legal requirements. It was recognised that, in order to regularise the position of the Registry, the 'free labour' agents involved must take care

"to pose as agents for the owners or master in that case no action could be taken by the Board of Trade under the Merchant Shipping Act." (39)

since crews could only be supplied under a Board of Trade Licence.

During all the negotiations which took place in September it is increasingly obvious that the Federation merely saw themselves as facilitating the setting up of Registry Offices for the supply of free labour, the idea being that the individual shipowner and the men using the scheme would ultimately provide the finance. In the meantime it recognised that

"The cost of the offices, Registrars and delegates was to be supported by the Shipping Federation, during the first year at least." (40)

39. Sh.Fed. Documents Letter to the General Manager dated 31 October 1890 from the Assistant Secretary

40. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.4 20 September 1890

It is a credit to Laws' foresight that as early as the 16th September he realised the significance of the Registries when he urged the

"great importance of this branch of the Scheme"
on the Executive Council

"and the necessity of reasonable expenditure towards its establishment." (41)

It is worthy of note that the word 'reasonable' replaced the more conservative 'some moderate' expenditure when the report was submitted. Laws reiterated the point of the 16th September by saying

"the New Unionism has become so firmly established that without such expense, it will be difficult to cope with." (42)

There is no extant detailed analysis of the expenditure which the setting up of the Registries involved, but some examples indicate the degree of economy with which it was hoped they could be operated. For example, Captain T.Lemon of the Amalgamated British Seamen's Protection Society "considered that the Thames District might be worked ... for say £650 per annum," while Captain Lawrence of the I.F.S.S.F. in Sunderland estimated

"offices at that port at £15 p.a. Registrar (Boy) 12/- p.w. delegate 32/- p.w. To be worked in connection with the International Federation of Seamen and Firemen. Annual cost £100 p.a." (43)

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41. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.3 Manager's Report to Executive Committee for District and General Purposes 16 September 1890
 42. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.4 op cit 20 September 1890
 43. Ibid

In the case of the Cardiff Boarding House Masters' Union, they were sufficiently profitable in their dealings with seamen that they only required the Federation to meet the cost of a clerk's salary.

The total expenditure was calculated by the General Manager for the seven principal shipping districts to be not less than £2000 for the first year. This included

"the services of two travelling agents, for engaging free labour and reporting upon the supply, in different ports, but probably their services might be discontinued after the first six months."

In addition some part of £1000 assumed to cover the salaries of District Committee secretaries, would also have to be put against the expenditure on Registry business. (44)

The Registry offices were officially opened as soon as the negotiations in any particular port were complete. In some cases it was weeks, or even months, before they were functioning efficiently.

The setting up of the Registry scheme was not the only matter which concerned Laws and the Interim Committee in the few weeks up to the registration of the Shipping Federation. They were concerned to encourage membership, particularly of the large companies, and to lay the groundwork for the District Committees.

It is not without significance that Laws went to the two major ports, Liverpool and London, to whip up support for the

Federation in September. In the case of Liverpool, the existence since February of the Employers' Labour Association could well pre-empt any influence the Federation might have, and thus endanger the implementation of a national policy, and indeed Laws received a very lukewarm reception. He met representatives of the Steam and Sailing Association and appears to have offered them various methods by which they could affiliate without offending against their rules or other affiliations but they "did not seem inclined to adopt any of these courses."⁽⁴⁵⁾ Mr. Ismay of White Star Lines "did not see his way at present to join in the name of his company,"⁽⁴⁶⁾ and in all cases Laws was referred to the Employers' Labour Association. When he saw Mr. Bounphrey of Cunard, their interest was mainly a financial one; they wanted a restriction on the amount of the call and that the rules should ensure that members met their full responsibility. At this stage they did not want to join an association where both the call and indemnity could apparently be open ended. Nevertheless in his Report, Laws stated the visit to be a satisfactory one and believed that "in time the Liverpool companies will co-operate in the movement."⁽⁴⁷⁾

If the organisation to which Laws was devoting his time was to succeed, then encouraging co-operation in the early

45. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.2 op cit 10 September 1890

46. Ibid

47. Ibid

weeks was vital to ensure as wide a coverage of membership as possible. In London it was necessary to persuade the larger liner companies, who were not members of the P & I clubs, of the advantages of the Federation. The only large London company which committed itself to the Federation from the first was the British Indian Steamship Company. It was only when confronted with labour militancy in the winter of 1890/91 that the London companies actually committed themselves.

An important part of the co-operation rested with the district organisation since these committees were the ones that would ultimately be responsible for the unquestioning implementation of national policy when the confrontation with the unions came. Although it was intended that the official appointment of the committee was to be left until the first Executive Council was properly elected through the P & I clubs, the Interim Committee were anxious that the spadework should be done before them, and Laws wrote privately

"to influential owners at each large seaport, asking them to prepare to elect and return the names of owners who are willing to act and with as little delay as possible." (48)

At the same time, copies of the draft Memorandum and articles had been sent to all the great steamship companies and largely distributed amongst shipowners. However it was stated in the Liverpool Journal of Commerce in September that the Federation was not getting as much support as they had anticipated.(49)

48. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.3 op cit 16 September 1890

49. Journal of Commerce 5 September 1890

Thus by the time the Shipping Federation was registered as a limited company, on 30th September, 1890, its structure and modus operandi were already determined. Its aims at this stage were limited to ensuring the freedom of contract of the shipowner, particularly in his relationship with the seaman. Its founders were motivated by a desire to return to what they regarded as the normalcy of the 1880s, that is where supply and demand determined wages, with perhaps some legitimate influence from local seamen's organisations, but where the right of the shipowner to select his crew as he, and he alone, saw fit, was paramount. This equilibrium of commercial liberty had been undermined by the growth of N.A.S.F.U. and the strength it gained during the boom years when shipowners conceded at least some of their traditional attitudes in order that vessels might make the tide. As a Newcastle shipowner pointed out at the first meeting of the Federation

"a bold front now would restore a great deal of the power you have lost." (50)

In order that the rightful 'equilibrium' could be re-established, the plans for the Registry scheme had been put in motion, the support of the majority of the P & I clubs had been gained, and a central and district structure affirmed. Therefore, from the 1st October the new Executive Council, its 3 sub-committees and the District Committees were faced with the task of putting the plans into effective

operation, a task which was to prove more complex than they can have anticipated. These complexities arose not only from the practicalities of achieving their original limited aims, but also from an increasing recognition that the reality of the context in which they were operating was not as they had first seen it. The efforts to adapt to this realisation re-shaped the Federation.

Not least of the initial problems was the fact that registries did not exist in every port. As late as the 12th November it was reported that although

"sixteen district committees had been organised and had appointed secretaries [only] nine of the principal districts had undertaken the establishment of offices for seamen etc., all of which would shortly be in working order." (52)

Therefore, even if shipowners were willing to use free labour, the provision of it might well involve transportation from another region. On the other hand, even where registries existed, the local shipowners might well not belong to the Federation, the best example of this being Liverpool. Even where the owners did belong, it could not necessarily be assumed that preference would in fact be given to Federation men prepared to sail with non-union labour, as for example in Hull. Failure in this respect did, of course, undermine the very principle on which the Federation were making their stand.

It was important that these problems were overcome quickly, since their objectives had been made public and initial success was imperative. This was because on the one hand it was a method of undermining the N.A.S.F.U. membership and on the other to encourage the less convinced shipowners to join since a united front was important both psychologically and financially. The first move by the administration, after the setting up of the district organisation and the registry offices, was to make sure that, as far as possible, the new scheme was used. It was in this respect that the role of the officer and his relationship with the Shipping Federation assumed a new importance. It was the officers, in particular the Master, Mate and Chief Engineer, rather than the shipowner, who actually recruited the crews, and they did not by any means invariably prefer free labour. As the Secretary of the local union pointed out when Laws visited Hull in October

"the great access of strength to Wilson's Union has been caused by the connivance of the officers and engineers when shipping crews, as they gave preference to the New Union men, and declined the Free Labour whenever possible." (53)

This was a

threat to the registry scheme of which apparently neither the owners nor the officials were aware, and the owners

"at once gave instructions to prevent such action in future and requested me [Laws] to have a general notice sent to the affiliated members warning them against this practice." (54)

53. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.5 op cit 18 October 1890

54. Ibid

It surprised the shipowners to find that in making their stand against the unions over their freedom to employ the labour they chose, they did not in fact directly recruit that labour. This was a matter of concern, since only a month before they had reason to doubt the loyalty of some of their officers in a strike in Australia.⁽⁵⁵⁾ They had, however, been reassured at that time both by telegrams from officers in Australia and by an approach from the newly formed Federated Shipmasters' Societies⁽⁵⁶⁾ professing community of interest with the shipowner over the threat from organised labour. A sentiment based as much, in the case of the old professional societies, on a desire not to lose influence and members in face of the movement towards trade unionism by some of their colleagues as a concern for the welfare of the shipowner.

The question of the unionisation of officers and possible coercion by the N.A.S.F.U., particularly under the auspices of the Certificated Officers' Union of Great Britain and Ireland, has been regarded as an important precipitatory factor in the formation of the Federation. This is not

55. Sh.Fed. Minutes of Proceedings 19 September 1890 p.4

56. Shipping Gazette 19 September 1890. This federation comprised the Mercantile Marine Services Association (founded in 1857); the Shipmasters' Society (1876); the British Shipmasters' and Officers' Protection Society (1873); the Scottish Shipmasters' Association (1877) also see Fairplay 26 September 1890

supported by the Minutes of the inaugural meetings; it is mentioned briefly only as a symptom of the general threat from the New Unions with the possibility of specific action by the N.A.S.F.U. in this respect on the Tyne in November. (57) The myth of the importance of the officers' union seems to have been perpetuated as a result of the evidence which Laws gave to the Royal Commission in July 1891, where he said the establishment of the Shipping Federation was

"due to the coercion of the sailors' union leaders wishing to force the masters and officers into the other Union [Certificated Officers] which was controlled by the same body ... had this not occurred it would not have come into existence." (58)

Whilst undoubtedly the possible unionisation of officers was symptomatic of the problems the shipowners faced, its greatest value to the Federation was the extent to which it might have engendered public sympathy.

The Shipping Federation for their part issued a circular encouraging the officers to join "one of the original Shipmasters' societies." In September, the importance of the officers in respect of the success of the registry had not been recognised, the concern of the officers and the owners was much more in respect of discipline. On the 9th

57. Conference of Shipowners Association Minutes op cit
19 August 1890

58. R.C. on Labour Group B Vol.I op cit Q5096 and 5097

September Laws wrote to the secretary of the Shipmasters' Society saying

"the Federation owners are in perfect sympathy with the position taken up by your society to resist trade union membership for officers and will not willingly permit their trusted masters and officers to become the bondsmen of Trade Union officials, whose present and threatened actions are subversive of discipline, and fraught with danger to the security of life and property at sea."

He went on to add

"I have to inform you that any case of coercion or intimidation reported to this office will have attention and neither time nor expense will be spared to afford adequate protection and indemnity."(59)

Following the Australian strike the matter of discipline was re-emphasised, but it was not until the role of the officer in the recruitment of labour was recognised that the shipowners fully realised how important the loyalty of the officers was and how "if it [the registry scheme] is to succeed they too must be encouraged to use free labour."

Finally the Federation had to get the seamen to use the Registry scheme and see the advantage of the ticket if it was to have a lasting influence and restore the balance in favour of the shipowner. The shipowners believed that in giving preference of employment to the Registry men, this would provide the basic attraction to the men using the scheme. This view was, of course, based on the assumption that the competition for jobs among seamen was such that they

would readily avail themselves of this preference. The officials were aware, however, that gaining employment was not the only consideration, and that Union pressure would be exerted on any who attempted to use the scheme.

"At Shields they stand in the Gate-way at which the men go in and positively intimidate them.

"At Hull they have got a place opposite the door of the shipping office and they stand at the windows above and look into the shipping office and watch the men." (60)

One way of avoiding this intimidation was to secure offices for the Registry away from the shipping office

"as at that point Free men were more likely to be brought under the influence of the Unionists." (61)

There was an early recognition that it might be advantageous to establish a Benefit Fund in connection with the Scheme, which would provide some cover for accident or death. However, when it was first mooted in October the Assistant Manager took the view that although the Executive would seriously consider it, this would not be until

"the present pressure of business afforded an opportunity for discussing this question." (62)

At this stage the setting up of the Scheme in its original form was task enough without widening its scope, however beneficial that might be.

60. Sh.Fed. Minutes of Proceedings 1 October 1890 p.86

61. Ibid p.85

62. Sh.Fed. Documents Letter op cit 31 October 1890

63. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No. 3 of cit

Even when the practicalities of using the scheme had been surmounted and a crew obtained through the Registry, sailing was by no means certain. The obstacle of the attitude of organised labour still had to be overcome. Whilst shipowners undoubtedly expected the intimidation and picketing of crews by N.A.S.F.U. members and sympathisers, they seem to have been unprepared for the extent and tenacity of sympathetic strikes from fellow waterside workers, as for example in Leith. On 5th September, a member of the Sailors' and Firemen's Union had refused to sail with a non-Union chief steward, and this action had been supported by the dockers and the blocking spread to another vessel of the same company. The Federation reacted by sending "the requisite authority to a member of the Executive Council", and he

"at once met the labour difficulties with such vigour and determination that the vessels were shortly discharged and loaded by free men."

Mr. Barnett Matthews, the Federation's Assistant Secretary, was also in Leith at this time and he reported that

"a non-union crew had been obtained. Owner has been obliged to pay his free labour something extra, and has also given some gratuity to the police. I stated that the Federation could indemnify him for the extra expense he has been put to; he anticipates this would be no more than £20 or £30."

When the vessels moved on to Grangemouth, they were again blocked and the Wood Carriers struck for a month. The whole incident involving three ports and two vessels was estimated to have cost the Federation under £1,000 in direct expenses.(63)

The shipowners seemed to fail to understand that the social changes, particularly in respect of industrial relationships, (64) which had brought them together in the Federation, had also encouraged a permanent movement to national solidarity amongst organised labour following the Great Dock strike. A movement which was given further impetus in the case of the waterside workers by the very fact that the shipowners had organised themselves to deal nationally with labour matters. The Federation did not appreciate that, in forming their association, they had so altered the context in which they had to operate that further adaptations would have to be made on both sides. For example, the Dockers Record saw it

"as a stimulant urging on the workers to the necessity of perfecting their organisation." (65)

Whilst Havelock Wilson stated in August

"In the first place I do not look with any alarm on the formation of a Union among shipowners. I have been expecting it for some time past, ... that the shipowners would in course of time follow our example and form a combination of their own. They will in no way injure our interests by so doing." (66)

64. Most obviously manifest in the setting up of the Royal Commission on Labour 21 April 1891

65. As quoted in Shipping Gazette 24 October 1890

66. Sunderland Daily Echo 23 August 1890

By late October he had modified this view,

"owing to the efforts being made by the Federation of Shipowners, it is absolutely necessary that we should take prompt action to consolidate our forces." (67)

A concrete manifestation of this was the formation of the Federation of Trade and Labour Unions connected with Shipping, and whilst it did not formally come into being until January 1st, 1891, it was actively discussed and organised through the autumn of 1890.

Faced with intimidation, disruption and sympathetic strikes, the shipowners turned instinctively to traditional solutions. They attempted to strictly enforce and re-enforce the employer/employee relationship as defined in the Merchant Shipping Acts. This was to be achieved in two ways, firstly by adopting a punitive approach to the law as it stood and secondly by endeavouring to manipulate the law to their advantage. There seems little reason to doubt their intention to turn to the law at every opportunity, since within one month of formal existence the Legal and Indemnity Committee reported that

"Four prosecutions for coercion and/or threats have been agreed to and are pending ... four prosecutions for refusal of duty have also been ordered and have resulted in committals for one month in each case."

In a further case, the Federation agreed to pay a third of the costs. (68)

67. Seafaring 8 November 1890

68. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.8 of the Executive Committee
Legal and Indemnity 12 November 1890

It was also felt that in regard to desertion

"The present punishment is totally inadequate your Committee suggest that terms of agreement be arranged on ship's articles for deserters to forfeit the wages of any subsequent voyage and that the Marine Department be requested to circulate the names of deserters to all Shipping Offices." (69)

Some members did not feel it was worth approaching the Board of Trade for anything other than

"to go back to the old law, under which if a man did not join the ship when the ship was going to sea you could give him in charge of a policeman and have him run in and give him two months imprisonment." (70)

Certainly the Board of Trade was approached with a request that certain legislation be amended with a view to returning to the status quo of pre-1880.⁽⁷¹⁾ More immediately it was hoped that the Board of Trade would be amenable to certain adjustments in the implementation of existing regulations which would facilitate the task of the Federation. At the first meeting, the view was expressed, and supported, that

"with regard to our present action I think that there are a great many things that we can do with the law as it is. I think if we could get the Board of Trade to relax some of the regulations and work somewhat into the hands of the shipowners a vast deal might be done to overcome this." (72)

69. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.7 op cit

70. Sh.Fed. Minutes of Proceedings 12 November 1890 p.19

71. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.7 op cit. In respect of desertion they did get back to the 'old law' but not until 1894.

72. Conference of Shipowners Associations op cit
19 August 1890 p.40

In particular they wanted to be allowed to sign articles on board rather than at the Shipping Office, to issue more than one set of articles per vessel permitting signing in more than one place, and finally to obtain Board of Trade Licences for the supply of men for their agents.

The Federation's campaign to use the law to reassert their dominant position in labour matters was by no means entirely successful. Their extensive prosecutions whenever the opportunity arose did not necessarily deter the seamen from agitation; for example it was reported in November that

"although several prosecutions for gross breach of duty have been ordered and committals obtained which it was hoped would have a deterrent effect yet crews of 7 years' standing in the Cork Packet Company's fleet have elected to spend a month in jail, rather than work the vessels." (73)

Similarly, the response from the Board of Trade was not the one the shipowners expected, and they were by no means always prepared to collude in bending the law. No doubt this was because they were conscious of the increasing influence of the trade unions. It must be remembered that by this time the seamen's union was represented on the Marine Boards, and the State were sufficiently sensitive to the change in the social climate to recognise the need for the representation of working men on Royal Commissions, etc. Whilst signing on board seems to have been generally accepted it was by no means automatic, and signing in several places was refused. Furthermore, the Board of Trade did not always regard the

free labour crews as adequate within the terms of the Merchant Shipping Act. In the case of providing licences for the Registry offices for supplying seamen, they were adamant and such licences were 'absolutely refused.' (74)

In spite of their efforts to get the organisation functioning successfully and to re-establish their legal position, it appears that by November the plans of the Federation no longer provided a solution to the problems the shipowners found they were facing. In part this was because the free labour question was gaining a wider momentum of its own beyond that of the shipping industry, and ironically this new impetus was to some extent based on the well publicised minor victories the Federation had achieved.

With the escalation of the problem the Federation came under pressure in terms of finance and unity. The first call was due on 4th November, and by the 10th only £9657.13s.10d had been paid on account, although the total call of 1d per gross registered ton was due to raise £20,620.2s.8d. (75) The problem of getting the call in would have been of importance under normal circumstances, but the first few weeks of existence had shown the shipowners just how potentially expensive their stand over free labour might be, making the matter of finance a doubly important one. This was illustrated in the anxiety expressed by the Manager to the Chairman of

74. Sh.Fed. Minutes of Proceedings op cit 1 October 1890 p.81

75. Sh.Fed. Documents Report of Finance Committee
12 November 1890

Committees in mid-November over the fact that the first call was rapidly being absorbed by heavy Registry, Legal and Administrative expenses, and the call had by no means been paid up. (76)

The early disputes the Federation was involved in showed that obtaining free labour through the Registry involved 'hidden' costs, the magnitude of which it was difficult to gauge in any particular situation. Having once secured adequate free labour, it often had to be paid higher rates of wages, housed and fed, as well as having to be transported to the point of work and protected once there. The difficulties were exacerbated to an unforeseen extent because of the unwillingness of the Board of Trade to collude as well as by in bending the rules the combined opposition of organised labour. Added to which the Federation did not have, and do not seem to have contemplated setting up, a comprehensive national network of supply. It was only on the 29th October that the Cardiff District Committee suggested that there should be a

"Federation delegate in each port, if possible with a Board of Trade Licence to supply." (77)

76. Sh.Fed. Documents Report to Chairman only from General Manager 18 November 1890 See also Appendix III

77. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.6 op cit 29 October 1890

Another early lesson was that disputes could become lengthy, especially in the case of vessels going coastwise where blockages would follow them from port to port within the U.K. Even in minor incidents the Federation were soon surprised to find how far they might need to go in order to succeed in breaking a strike. For example, a small coaster, the Davro was attempting to discharge its blocked cargo of iron ore by free labour in Liverpool, when it was claimed that the men were intimidated by union delegates and later a crowd. The Manager, G.A. Laws, was present and he

"informed the Owner, that he should have arranged to feed the men on board and not let them go out of the dock gates. I appraised him the Federation would allow the extra expense and also double pay if required for the next gang, and that I would personally see to police protection, and the prosecution of the delegate, my Executive being determined to discharge the vessel where she lay." (78)

At a meeting of the District Committee the following day it was proposed to solve the problem by shifting the vessel to a closed dock, but Laws

"informed the Meeting that the Federation would sooner purchase the steamer from the Owners than admit defeat in that way." (79)

In this case the vessel that would have had to be purchased

78. Sh.Fed. Documents Report to Chairman only from General Manager 22 November 1890

79. Ibid

was only a small coasting steamer, but the threat of purchase was indicative of both of the Federation's determination and the need to succeed.

The need to succeed and the expense that this might involve was part of a vicious circle related to the desire to achieve limited and secure financial support. Although in the case of existing members, unity could be achieved by disciplining them through their P & I Club membership which controlled their insurance cover,⁽⁸⁰⁾ the failure to get an immediate response to the First Call had highlighted the existence of waverers in the ranks. Therefore success was important in convincing the waverers, particularly because their Call was needed to finance that success in order that those still outside the Federation would be attracted to join as soon as the organisation proved its worth.

By the time the Shipping Federation was registered, all but one of the P & I Associations had committed to the organisation. The exception was Liverpool where the shipowners

80. For example, both Mr. Furness and Mr. Pinkney, London shipowners, were strongly opposed to the Shipping Federation's policy, but had to remain members in order to obtain insurance through their Protection and Indemnity Association. See Sh.Fed. Minutes of Proceedings 13 February 1891 passim

81. SH.Fed. Minutes of First Annual General Meeting 12 November 1890 p. 249-50

83. Ibid

already had an Employers' Labour Association.⁽⁸¹⁾ Whilst the membership of the P & I Clubs was fairly easily achieved, the practical loyalty of individual shipowners was not so easy to obtain. These men objected to their vessels being entered under the umbrella of the P & I Clubs, of which they were members. The A.G.M. on 12th November appears to have been mainly concerned with this problem. Since the only way the individual shipowner

"could get out of it [a Federation] was by taking his ships out of the P & I Associations, thereby losing his assurance

It was recognised

"we are certain to have black sheep and there are certain to be shipowners who want to get all the benefit of the association without contributing." (82)

It is indicative of the extent to which the Federation still regarded itself as ^a co-ordinating body with its power base as the P & I Clubs, that the solution put forward by the Federation's solicitor was that

"it mainly rests with the Managers of the Protecting and Indemnity Associations to be stiff in the back, if they are stiff in the back I think that the difficulty will be got over." (83)

81. Sh.Fed. Documents Report to Chairman only op cit 12 November 1890 expressed extreme concern about apathy in the Liverpool District

82. Sh.Fed. Minutes of first Annual General Meeting 12 November 1890 p.9 and 10

83. Ibid

84. Robinson Sir J. *Before and After* (1925) p.261

Managers obviously responded to this idea as one shipowner confirms in his autobiography

"The constitution of the Federation was founded on arbitrary lines through the Protecting and Indemnity Associations. No shipowner could get protection in the Association unless he agreed to join and abide by the rules and policy of the Federation Executive and its committee. Some shipowners chaff at the idea of compulsion and I was one of them, but to jeopardise our protection and indemnity was a risk too great to be undertaken." (84)

Some companies, after initially committing themselves, did in fact withdraw successfully since they were large enough to be self-insuring. Thomas Wilson of Hull was an important case in point. On the other hand, several of the larger companies, particularly passenger liners, did not join the Federation until after it had confirmed its viability.

Whilst these difficulties of finance and unity were important in the early days of the organisation, at least they were internal to the industry and in that sense the Federation could have some direct influence in their solution.

However, as it became obvious that success in any dispute involved them in more than merely ensuring the supply of crews, and the fulfilment of the shipowners obligations where it applied to load and unload vessels, external co-operation and possible financial support became essential. There seems little doubt that they pressured allied employers, such as Dock Boards and Railway companies to actively co-operate, and they were taken aback to find this was not forthcoming

By mid-November, the Federation realised they were involved on a much wider basis than merely overcoming the influence of the N.A.S.F.U.; they faced an

"altered labour problem ... because it is no longer a question of the Shipowners taking their fair share of the responsibility to uphold 'liberty of contract', by obtaining free crews and free Stevedore labour to load or discharge their vessels. This duty was at once recognised by the Executive, and carried out by prompt action and liberal expenditure, in such a way that Federation Owners now stand in the position of being able to perform the part that commercial usage requires of them.

But the Federation is now asked and expected to find free labour to meet the requirements of Dock and Railway Companies whose labourers refuse to work at vessels which have been loaded at Ports where Free Labour is employed.

I may say at once that the Federation as constituted has not the power to cope with this single handed, nor will it be able to raise funds to do more than its own share of the work. It is true I may spend a good deal of money and manage to keep together men to discharge boycotted steamers, but the trouble, delay and expense will be altogether out of proportion to the service rendered, unless the Dock Board, Railway Companies and other employers are ready to join in and accept their full share of responsibility in the matter." (85)

The original 'defensive' objectives of the Federation were proving, in practical application, extremely complex.

Furthermore, they apparently found themselves not only

85. Sh.Fed. Documents Report to Chairman only
18 November 1890

86. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.7 of 1891

87. The Times 21 October 1890

dealing with disputes as they arose, but actively preparing

"for a possible struggle, which at the same time they are striving to avert, by counteracting in every legitimate way the public declarations and combinations of the New Unionist Agitators, who are straining every nerve, to Federate the Seamen, Dockers, Miners and others, so as effectually to prevent the employment of Free Labour.

Your Committee do not wish to disguise the fact, that notwithstanding every effort [consistent with the maintenance of 'Free Contract'] has been made to avoid a conflict, the situation is becoming daily more acute, and a serious strike of Seamen and Dockers in the Bristol and Mersey Districts may occur at any time." (86)

It is not clear on what grounds the Federation foresaw a major confrontation such as is hinted at in the Committee Reports during October and early November. Apart from the minor incidents already discussed, and which were not in themselves unusual, no evidence exists of what The Times referred to in October as an 'Impending Crisis.' (87) The main source of this crisis seems to have been The Times itself. Their series of articles "The Shipping Crisis" provided excellent propaganda for the Shipping Federation, at a time when they were endeavouring to achieve their ends without alienating public opinion, a factor of growing importance in the social climate of 1890. It is impossible to say whether the articles did in fact emanate from the Federation, but the industry seems to have accepted their validity with little regard to the evidence around them.

86. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.7 op cit

87. The Times 21 October 1890

The N.A.S.F.U. in this period acted in no way which would suggest they were 'spoiling for a fight'. To the contrary, after initially welcoming the Federation, Havelock Wilson was careful to point out to his members that they should be circumspect. In a manifesto entitled 'Steady Boys Steady! A Word of Warning', he instructed officers and members to be

"careful of their movements - not to strike the iron till it is hot, and to carefully weigh up the consequences and surroundings of the case before any action is taken." (88)

There was no indication of any national policy of counteraction over free labour by the Union, apart from the idea of a waterside workers' federation. They realised any battle would be a major one and they had learned from previous experience that their success would largely depend on the co-operation of the dockers. At this stage, the Federation of Seamen and waterside workers had only been mooted and was not in formal existence, and Wilson recognised that the waterside unions

"owing to the strikes during the past twelve months, are financially in a weak position, and, in the event of any general strike taking place the burden of the battle would be on the shoulders of the seamen and firemen." (89)

88. Seafaring 4 October 1890

89. Ibid

The branches appear to have taken this advice and merely acted by using boycott tactics where they felt there was some infringement of normal custom and practice, such as signing on board on the specific shipment of free labour crews. It was under circumstances of this kind that the 'Wade Arms Manifesto' was issued on 3rd December, 1890. This action arose out of a prolonged demarcation dispute which had resulted in seamen and firemen being signed on board. Once the dispute was settled the N.A.S.F.U. were able to gain the support of the United Labour Council of the Port of London for a boycott of the companies concerned. It is significant to note that the N.A.S.F.U. did not act against signing on board, although this continued for some two months, until they had the support of the other waterside unions, nor did they see it as a major conflict. The London District Secretary, Mr. Walsh, stated "that there is no intention to initiate a big strike." (90)

The Manifesto stated that as certain

"shipowners of London having broken through the custom of shipping their crews at properly constituted Shipping Offices, and decided to sign on Board to the detriment of unions generally,"

the United Labour Council called upon its members to

"abstain from doing any work either directly or indirectly that will conduce to the sailing of vessels until the owners give an undertaking to use the Shipping Offices and sign no other than members of the N.A.S.F.U." (91)

90. Ibid 13 December 1890

91. R.C. on Labour Group B Vol.I op cit Appendix XIII

The response from other unions was disappointing partly because the dockers were not affiliated to the United Labour Council, and only three branches of the stevedores' union were members and they did not take part. The most important group who did support the seamen was the coal porters who bunkered the vessels and a boycott was successfully initiated on 5th December. Of the three companies affected by the boycott, only one, British India, was a member of the Federation.

Counter manifestos were issued immediately by Messrs. (92) Gray, Dawes and Co., (British India Company) and the Federation declaring their intention to insist on their right to employ free labour. The Shipping Federation, in their 'Notice to Seamen' clearly put the onus for the decision to sign on board on to the men themselves, claiming they would, under the sanction of the Board of Trade

"continue to engage crews on board their vessels until a better spirit prevails, so that engagements may be resumed at the usual offices with safety and convenience." (93)

The matter was confined to the Albert Dock and as has been stated, it appears that only the British India Steam Navigation Company was a member of the Shipping Federation. The evidence of company membership at this stage is unclear

92. Ibid Appendix XXXI

93. Ibid Appendix XIV

since only the lists of P & I Clubs are extant.
Of the other two companies, ^{involved} the New Zealand Shipping Company
and Messrs. Shaw Savill and Co., it was the latter which showed
some interest in the early stages of the foundation of the
Federation, it does not seem to have been clearly committed
at this stage. (94)

In spite of the Federation's limited involvement,
officials were quick to act in this dispute although it did
not fall directly within their purview as set out in their
Articles of Association. The boycott was not the result of

"any course of conduct adopted at the request of the
Executive Council, or District Committee." (Article 29)
which alone gave the right to indemnity. But inasmuch as
the Owners were entirely within their legal rights in signing
crews on board, the Executive at once recognised

"the duty of assisting them to procure labour for
coaling the vessels affected."

This nicely worded justification of their quick response to
the boycott suggests the Federation, and certainly the
Manager, G. Laws, were anxious that they should make a clear
stand on free labour at every opportunity irrespective of
their direct involvement. Furthermore, where possible they

94. Fairplay 21 November 1890 stated that Shaw Savill
had given its adhesion to the Federation, but evidence

wanted the kudos of any victory to accrue to them, not least to achieve the greater unity that was becoming so essential.

Under the regulations of the Federation, the normal procedure would have been for the District Committee to handle this dispute. However, no such Committee had been set up for the Thames region; indeed the District was not defined until mid-November, and the matter was left in the hands of the Manager.

Because the stevedores were at first undecided whether to support the United Labour Council, Laws felt it was publicly

"prudent to give the coal porters all the week to reconsider the matter, before commencing to replace them." (95)

Presumably in the hope that, if the stevedores did not support the boycott, the coal porters would go back to work leaving the seamen isolated. In spite of this apparently reasonable approach

"No time, however, was lost as steps were taken to provide a depot ship, and arrange for free labour, to complete the coaling of vessels in the Albert Dock if required. After some difficulty effective police arrangements were made to protect the free labourers and on Saturday 16th a sufficient number were brought into the docks, and lodged on board the Arawa." (96)

This illustrates that the problem in a port like London was

95. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.12 The Thames Shipping District 23 December 1890

96. Ibid

not so much securing the free labour but the securing of effective dock police protection so that the labour could be used. The coaling of the steamers commenced on the 18th and by the end of the first week 100 free labourers, including 20 sailors and firemen, were employed. During this time the 'Scotland' was set up as a depot ship, presumably on a three month charter, since the free labour was employed for three months on permanent wages.

The firm action taken by Laws was initially effective and by 23rd December he was able to make a report to the Federation Committee stating that

"the 'Wades Arms' Labour Council is reported to have withdrawn the Manifesto, after all the Trades, except the Coal Porters, had gone in, and the latter body are now willing to resume work, if allowed to do so.

Suggested terms for the Coal Porters resuming work are herewith submitted for consideration of the Thames District Committee." (97)

At this point Laws handed the matter over to the newly appointed Committee, but they appear to have mishandled the situation since the dispute was not completely settled and agitation continued.

There are two possible reasons why this was the case. Firstly, having set up a semi-permanent coaling system the Federation was anxious to work out their three month contract with depot ship and men. Also the advantage of having a permanently organised Federation system of labour was

recognised very early by Laws who provisionally negotiated a three year contract on this basis before handing over to the Thames District Committee. This was, of course, a threat to the coal porters, which may have jeopardised their full return to work, and to the seamen who would have been deprived of a valuable boycott weapon. Furthermore, the private coaling contractors seemed unwilling to countenance such a monopoly situation and put forward lower rates per ton. This undermined the chance of any unity among the shipowners who obviously wanted to take advantage of the lower tenders. This caused the Federation to reconsider their commitment to the port of London. In a Manager's Report on the 3rd January, it was stated that unless the shipowners constantly using the Albert Dock consistently used free labour or men at the General Labour terms, the Executive Committee would have to go back on their arrangement.

In addition to this threat of permanent coaling encouraging agitation, the firm line adopted by Laws was not taken up by the District Committee. This committee was the subject of some dissension amongst the Federation members and seems to have been used by the Vice-Chairman of the Federation, Thomas Scrutton, to set up a personal power base within the port. (98)

98. see Fairplay December 1890, January and February 1891
passim

The lack of unity which resulted in London soon became obvious as Fairplay pointed out on 2nd January

"The manner in which it [Federation] is conducted is an entire abnegation of the ordinary rules which govern a well conducted business. Applications are made almost daily to this, that or the other member of the Committee. These applications are entertained and the gentlemen apply to act on his own initiative, writes what he thinks in his own name and says what he pleases." (99)

Not a situation which was likely to bring the London dispute to the speedy conclusion that, under Laws' firm action, seemed inevitable.

There is no doubt the boycott in London, and its outcome, would have been much more serious for the Federation had the dockers and stevedores supported the N.A.S.F.U. and the boycott. This was indeed the case in Hull when just prior to Christmas, 1890 the dockers did support the Hull branch of the N.A.S.F.U. in the blocking of the 'Mary Anning' which carried a Federation crew. When free labour was imported from Liverpool, the dockers responded by blocking a further eight vessels. The reaction was totally unexpected by the Shipping Federation, no doubt based on their London experience and the local press reported that it had

"come upon the owners like a thunderclap as such an extreme step was considered highly improbable."(100)

99. Fairplay 2 January 1891

100. Hull News 18 November 1890

The position was particularly difficult for the Federation since the owners in Hull, especially Thomas Wilson, were not as committed to free labour as their colleagues in other ports would have wished. Not only did they have a special relationship with the local union, but later they were publicly to declare that they would only ship union men, and they left the Federation in 1891. This resulted in the Federation being unable to operate in Hull successfully for the next two years.

This failure in Hull must have increased the concern over the behaviour of the committee in London, and the threat to united action. This was particularly so when at the end of January, the dockers and stevedores began to consider becoming involved in the agitation in London.

"Throughout the month of January 1891 the N.A.S.F.U. had continued to attempt to block ships in the Thames but with little support or success."

The Federation for their part helping to ensure failure by incurring considerable expense

"for prosecutions, and for Police Protection, and from the 22nd to the end of the month, partial strikes of Stevedores and Dockers occurred, but eventually the Metropolitan Police were induced to take charge of the Docks, after which it became possible to employ free labour with safety." (101)

Whilst police action brought an immediate lull, it did nothing to restore calm among the waterside workers. If

anything, the use of the Metropolitan Police and the continued presence of free labour, against which there had already been partial strikes by the dockers and stevedores, caused the situation to deteriorate. By 27th January, when the stevedores sent a deputation to the District Committee it was the Federation's view that a general strike was contemplated.

Before any further steps were taken by the unions in London the N.A.S.F.U. shifted the action to Cardiff, although this seems to have been a local branch decision rather than a national one. Laws regarded this, quite rightly, as

"Another fatal error of ... the Union leaders, in attacking Cardiff, where the firm and dignified declaration of the Bute authorities 'that labour in the docks should be free', at once steadied all waverers, and gave a moral tone to the position assumed by the employers." (102)

In view of the intransigent attitude towards the Union of both the local dock employers and the shipowners since the previous August, it is difficult to understand why the N.A.S.F.U. acted as it did in Cardiff.

It may well be, however, that the local branch felt that its influence was being severely undermined and they had to make some sort of stand. Certainly the arrangements the Federation had made with the Boarding House Masters seem

102. Ibid

to have been especially effective. In November 1890 Havelock Wilson had been caused to write to the Secretary of the North of England Association concerning his recent visit to Cardiff

"I have returned from Cardiff where we have been strengthening our forces because if left to themselves the Boarding Masters' Union there, with the aid of the shipowners would be able to make terrible inroads on our men and it appears that they intend to declare war very soon and once they set the ball rolling there is no knowing where it will stop. So I shall strongly advise you to be prepared." (103)

This was confirmed in the following January by the General Manager of the Federation in the claim that the Shipping Federation had achieved 150 free crews in the Bristol Channel. (104) It would appear, therefore, that unless firm action was taken by the Union in Cardiff fairly quickly their position would be completely undermined. They did act as soon as they were assured of the organised support of the other waterside workers' unions. This came at the very beginning of February when the Federation of Trade and Labour Unions began to operate in the port. Their first united action was on 4th February, when they blocked the S.S. Glengelder, which was found to have a Federation crew aboard. The blocking was achieved by the coal tippers refusing to place any more cargo in her and putting up the shoots. (105)

103. South Wales Daily News 6 November 1890

104. Fairplay 9 January 1891

105. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.14 Cardiff Strike
6 February 1891

The Bute Dock Company responded immediately by instituting legal proceedings against the six tippers for breach of contract. The following day, three more steamers were blocked by the Federated Unions who then attempted to negotiate a settlement. This attempt was treated with complete indifference by the management and a total stoppage of coal loading ensued except on the railway tips because the vessels there were manned by union crews.

By the time the general stoppage had occurred, Laws had arrived in Cardiff, presumably to make sure that the organisation was adequate and that the policy of the Executive Committee would be carried out effectively. Whilst there he attended the District Committee meeting, and although he thought they were dealing with the initial situation satisfactorily, he

"begged owners to remain firm, and prepare to import free Sailors and Firemen if the strike extended." (106)

Later at the Annual Dinner of the Shipowners' Society he addressed the Bristol Channel Shipowners,

"upon the absolute necessity of remaining loyal to the Executive, in which case their interests would be fully protected." (107)

This would seem to illustrate the concern felt by Head Office that the loyalty of the Districts to Executive policy could by no means be automatically assumed.

106. Ibid

107. Ibid

Laws does not seem to have had the same reservations about the Dock Companies, a perfectly justified attitude in view of the actions of the Bute Dock Company. Before leaving Cardiff on the 6th, Laws was informed by the Dock Master that he would be able to obtain sufficient free labour to have all the tips working in the course of the next few days. (108)

It was regarded by many shipowners

"as the best time for a fight with a view to which they have for some months past been actively preparing." (109)

However, to take action over free labour, and so precipitate strike action was not as altruistic as might first be assumed, since the shipowners obtained from the Shipping Federation

"a grant equal to two thirds of the demurrage amount. They therefore stand to lose little, if anything, personally and, in the present unremunerative position of the shipping trade, not a few are said to be likely to find it more profitable to lay up in this way than to continue running their steamers." (110)

Laws was correct in showing concern about the degree of unity which existed amongst the Cardiff shipowners, ^{for} their local association stated that

"certain of their members were not rendering to the organisation that individual moral support which the present crises demand." (111)

108. Ibid

109. South Wales Daily News 5 February 1891

110. Ibid 6 February 1891

111. Journal of Commerce 12 February 1891

The Federation were vulnerable to such disunity particularly when freights were low and ^{it} attempted to counter-act disloyalty by issuing a circular dated 9th February stating that

"the Protecting and Indemnity Association be asked to amend their rules as to provide for the expulsion at any time during the currency of the policy of the said Association of any member who in the opinion of the properly constituted shipowners' association of the country, has committed an act tending to weaken or frustrate the aims and objects of the Shipping Federation." (112)

As far as the practicalities of dealing with the strike were concerned, the District Committee followed the same pattern as London. Free labour was engaged, a shed made into barracks for 40 men, and a depot ship, the Speedwell, was brought into use. By 13th February, Laws reported to the Executive Council that 33 tips and three cranes were in operation but no night work was being undertaken. The exact number appears to be in doubt since four days later the local press claimed only 25 tips were working. (113) Whatever the exact number was, the strike had not brought the port to a standstill by any means, as the Unions had hoped. They had endeavoured to broaden the agitation by approaching the miners and railwaymen on 11th February, but without success. (114)

The concerted action by the unions in Cardiff was

112. News of the Week (Cardiff) 14 February 1891

113. Ibid 21 February 1891

114. South Wales Daily News 6 March 1891

repeated in London in mid-February. The dockers and stevedores' unions saw their position of neutrality in what they considered a seamen's dispute becoming more and more untenable. Hence in London "on 10th February 1891 the storm broke."⁽¹¹⁵⁾ The storm was, however, only a partial one, in the sense that it was confined to certain enclosed docks, and although supported by most dockers, only a few stevedores came out. The importance of the renewed action in London was in the extent to which it illustrated how dependent the seamen were on co-operation with shore workers for any degree of success. Secondly, it was a manifestation of the work of Clem Edwards and his Federation giving vigour to the dispirited dockers' organisations, a manifestation which the Shipping Federation underestimated because they were conditioned to see all problems in terms of the successful development of the N.A.S.F.U. and the personal power of Havelock Wilson. An orientation which made it impossible for them to appreciate the extent to which their actions increasingly alienated the dockers and made some kind of direct clash with them inevitable. For the shipowners the dockers had only to be dealt with in terms of their relationship as sympathetic strikers for the N.A.S.F.U.

At this stage Havelock Wilson was seen, and indeed remained for some, the arch villain,⁽¹¹⁶⁾ and the dockers merely his accomplices. The main aim was seen as the

115. Lovell J. op cit p.139

116. Sh.Fed. Minutes of Proceedings. Chairman's introductory speech 13 February 1891

destruction of Wilson's influence, not only over his own membership, but that of the other waterside organisations. Once that could be achieved the shipowners appeared to feel their victory was certain.

"The gentleman that is giving all the trouble, and that is Mr. J.H. Wilson. Our battle is with the Seamen's and Firemen's Union at present, but through the request that that Union has made to the Federated societies we have a battle with the stevedores and so on, and although it may be the opinion of this meeting that we should get into negotiation with Mr. J.H. Wilson I am afraid that until we get him to withdraw the intimidation to the other societies we are no further forward." (117)

This statement was made following the informal negotiations between the local London Committee Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Laws and Devitt, which were very ill received by the Executive Council membership generally on the grounds that the most important person, Wilson, was not present, and that negotiations should not be part of Federation policy in any case. The negotiations had come about 'accidentally' in that a representative of the leaders of the newly active Federation of waterside workers had 'fortuitously' arrived at the Shipping Federation at a time when the most concerned committee members and officials were present. While the meeting was explained in these terms to the General Meeting, it seems likely that the visit and subsequent deputation might have been at least encouraged by the officials of the Federation.

In view of the fact that there was no Executive Council policy specifically permitting negotiations and every indication that many members would be against such moves it is difficult to understand why the kite was flown at this particular time. It may simply be that it was an exercise in public relations to show that before firmer policies were adopted, every reasonable channel had been tried. More likely it was an attempt on the one hand to neutralise Clem Edwards and his organisation and isolate Havelock Wilson and the N.A.S.F.U. and so make any confrontation a clearly defined one between the Shipping Federation and what they regarded as the real enemy; Wilson's N.A.S.F.U.

This was certainly the light in which it was put by the Chairman and the General Manager when justifying their action to the Executive Council on 13th February. In reporting on the discussion with Clem Edwards, Devitt said

"we told him our position, and he was considerably surprised at some of the statements which we made which he found were not in accordance with what Mr. Wilson had been stating." (118)

118. Sh.Fed. Minutes of Proceedings 13 February 1891 p.15

119. Ibid p.16

120. Ibid p.24

121. Ibid p.74 and 75

In endeavouring to underline the apparent lack of unity between the new Federation and the N.A.S.F.U. Devitt claimed

"Tom Mann told Mr. Walsh N.A.S.F.U. District Secretary to his face that he thought it was a most imprudent thing for him to have put out a claim that his union would not sanction the employment of non-unionists and gave him to understand that the General Trades Union were not inclined to give such a monopoly to Mr. Wilson's Union or to any other Union."

and concluded by saying that he believed the men were honest and "they spoke very fairly".⁽¹¹⁹⁾ A view not shared by the vice-chairman of the London Committee who was also present, he regarded the meeting simply as a 'red herring',

"It was done and held for no other purpose whatever than if possible to stop the firm measures that you are commencing only now to take." ⁽¹²⁰⁾

This attitude was the predominant one, the more militant members sensed that total victory could be achieved providing the shipowners showed only firmness, any sign of negotiation would be regarded as weakness. Certainly the trades union leaders should not be dealt with as this implied recognition; as one Council member put it,

"I say it is useless to negotiate with the leaders; you must negotiate with the men, and you must not negotiate with them too soon. You must wait until they feel the pinch of starvation for that is the only whip we have to make them work." ⁽¹²¹⁾

119. Ibid p.16

120. Ibid p.24

121. Ibid p.74 and 75

But others would not countenance any form of communication and indeed threatened to resign. For example, Mr. Dawes the Chairman of B and I stated

"I say that if there is to be any treating with the leaders of the T.U. I retire from the Federation."

a sentiment that met with the retort

"so would everybody." (123)

In fact, this feeling was not unanimous, and there were protests that the measures being taken were excessive and showed

"such a spirit of animosity prevailing against the men," "no", against the union men shall I say." (123)

but the protestations that this was not the case are perhaps too fulsome to be entirely convincing. Certainly they did not prevent the following resolution being passed.

"That in the opinion of this committee, with a view to freeing the shipping industry and the country from the harrassing and tyrannical regulations laid upon by the seamen's and firemen's union throughout the country, it is essential that the Federation should now insist on its individual members engaging only such seamen and firemen as will pledge themselves to work harmoniously together by accepting the Federation ticket.

That in order to the effectual carrying out of these regulations, this committee recommend that on and after the 18th inst., no member of the Federation shall employ seamen and firemen who do not hold the Federation ticket under penalty of forfeiting the protection and assistance of the Federation.

That this committee recommend that the pledge referred to in page 8 of the Manifesto [that is the pledge] 'that every seaman, by signing, pledges himself to carry out this agreement in accordance with the Merchant Shipping Act and to proceed to sea, etc. shall be the production of the Registration ticket at present in use by the Federation, and which the seamen shall be required to sign.' (124)

122. Ibid p.29

123. Ibid p.49

124. Ibid p.37 and 38. For Manifesto discussed see R.C. on Labour Group B Vol.1 op.cit. Appendix XVI

Thus, in passing this resolution, the Federation publicly declared their commitment to free labour on board ship. It marks the end of any pretensions the Federation may have had of liberal attitudes towards labour; the militant section had successfully moulded the policy of the Federation. Whereas six months previously, the moderate opinion had, after discussion, succeeded in replacing the word "tyrannical" with "unreasonable" in respect of trade union activity, on this occasion "harassing" and "tyrannical" are accepted without comment. Furthermore, the initial resolution in September, 1890 had spoken of the combination "for the purpose of protecting the interests of shipowners" (my italics) whereas in this instance the concern is with rights, albeit legal ones.

The Resolution was a recognition of the fact that the normality to which they hoped to return could only be achieved by institutionalising what they regarded as fundamental to that freedom of contract. They stated their rights within the law to act "as they may think fit" without consideration presumably of the "rights" of labour. Labour could only be made free by constructing a system which deprived the seaman of the right to sail with whom he saw fit. Finally this freedom was to be achieved by insisting that all members of the Federation should only engage free labour using the very weapon of combination which they so deplored in the men. One of their justifications for doing this was stated

by a member of the Council as being because

"we are the actual leaders of the men, you cannot hide that from yourselves. We are the people to look to." (125)

Previous discussions have tended to see in this Resolution the importance of the Federation Ticket from the viewpoint of the seamen. In fact, for the seamen there was nothing new in the Ticket itself, since it had been in use since the previous November. The profound importance of the Resolution lay not in its effect upon the seamen, but in the central directive it gave to the shipowner only to employ men with a ticket under threat of centrally imposed discipline. This finally undermined the idea of an organisation co-ordinating the actions of autonomous P & I Clubs, grouped into district committees, which had been the original basis of the Federation.

125. Sh.Fed. Minutes of Proceedings 19 February 1891 p.40

CHAPTER VIII

"We have scotched the snake, not killed it."

(Macbeth Act III Sc:ii)

The declaration of the Federation ticket ensured, in the view of the Shipping Federation, that a major confrontation would occur with the N.A.S.F.U., a confrontation which they appear to have anticipated earlier and which ironically they needed in order to make their victory explicit and lasting.

"We are about, in taking this step, to join issue with Mr. Wilson. At present the Seamen's and Firemen's Union have been kept in the background. He has put forward all the other unions to fight his battle, and we come to close quarters with Mr. Wilson and his union directly we commence the demand for the acceptance of the Federation tickets ... There will be no peace for us until we have thoroughly fought the Seamen's and Firemen's Union and have got the better of them as we must do." (1)

There was some alteration in the date of the implementation of the resolution which was finally settled as the 23rd February. The intense battle envisaged did not ensue.

The current strikes in Cardiff and London were undoubtedly prolonged by the introduction of the Ticket,⁽²⁾ but in the main there was no co-ordinated or concentrated opposition on the part of the unions. Havelock Wilson publicly railed against the action of the shipowners^{but} no national strike was declared. There were, of course, some local disputes

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1. Sh.Fed. Minutes of Proceedings 19 February 1891 p,94
 2. See for details Lovell J. Stevedores and Dockers. A Study of Trade Unionism in the Port of London 1870-1914 Macmillan 1969

particularly in the North East and in Aberdeen. In the latter case this was as much against the way the ticket was brought in, as against the ticket itself.⁽³⁾ By mid-March it was conceded that local branches could accept Tickets if they so decided; acceptance was eased by the fact that in many ports the preference clause had been withdrawn and the view therefore was

"when the Shipping Federation ticket was so modified as no longer to be dangerous." ⁽⁴⁾

there was no need for further action. This was certainly the case in Cardiff where the resolution ending the strike made just this point.⁽⁵⁾

There was, of course, no guarantee that the shipowners' agreement to waive the preference clause would be permanent.

It is not possible to make any accurate assessment of the cost of strikes directly concerned with the declaration of the Ticket, but the available figures do give some idea of how astronomical the cost would have been had the N.A.S.F.U. response been national rather than limited to a few ports. For example, the cost in Aberdeen was calculated to be £600 and Cardiff £3,000, not including indemnity. The direct cost of £15,000 in respect of the London strike is also worth quoting in this context although it was not directly related to the Ticket.⁽⁶⁾ It is not possible to make any accurate extrapolation from these figures, but they do support the contention that a "thorough fight" such as the Federation had envisaged would have been extremely

3. The Daily Free Press (Aberdeen) 13-24 March 1891

4. Seafaring 28 March 1891

5. Ibid 21 March 1891

6. Sh.Fed. Documents Manager's Report No.18 to First Annual General Meeting 10 March 1891

expensive and placed great strain on the allegiance of individual shipowners.

Even though the action of the Federation can be termed successful in that the use of the ticket became general in most ports, it was by no means universally insisted on by owners. For example, seamen shipping in vessels of Furness, the Liberal M.P. were never required to produce Tickets, although the company remained a member of the Federation, whilst the most important exception was in the Humber ports.

In any event, the degree of success must be measured against the wider economic situation. If the almost united move to free labour was achieved against a background of boom in the shipping industry, when labour was in demand, with concomitant industrial strength, and the owners concerned able to reap the benefits of high freights then the success of the Federation in its first six months would have been remarkable. On the other hand, if the background within the industry was one of declining activity and a fall in freight rates, when compliance with the Federation dictates would not have involved great loss in profits for the shipowner, and there would be fear of unemployment amongst the seamen, then the assessment of the Federation must be modified.

Previous academic research has laid the emphasis on

8. See Cairncross A.A. *Griffiths* 113:1 p.288 notes

the strength of the employers' counter attack

"The customary explanation of the change in the fortunes of the new unions after the initial triumphs is the return of economic depression. 'The expansion of trade which began in 1889' wrote the Webbs, 'proved to be of but brief duration, and with the returning contraction of 1892 many of the advantages gained by the wage earners were lost. Under the influences of this check the unskilled labourers once more largely fell away from the Trade Union ranks.' In fact, however, most of these early setbacks had occurred before the end of 1890, and were the result not of depression but of a counter attack by the employers, who launched their offensive at the height of a boom which continued through 1890 and into 1891." (7)

This interpretation has been based on an acceptance of a boom in the business cycle which, however, does not appear to be valid in the case of the shipping industry.

There are three criteria which can be used to assess the economic climate of the maritime industry; these are profits, level of freights and the amount of tonnage laid-up for lack of demand, all factors which would directly relate to the employment of seamen. As far as profits are concerned, there are no accurate or adequate indices from which conclusions can be drawn. (8)

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7. Clegg H.A., Fox Alan and Thompson A.F. A History of British Trade Unions since 1889 Vol.1 1889-1910 O.U.P. 1964 p.77 and 78.

For similar comments see: Clegg H. 'The Webbs as Historians of Trade Unionism 1874-1894' in Bulletin of the Society for the Study of Labour History No.4 Spring 1962, p.8

1. Ibid 26 September 1890

8. See Cairncross A.K. Graph III:1 p.25A above

The effect on profit was certainly felt by the dock companies as a London dock manager testified

"In the last half of the year 1890 business fell off to a considerable extent, and the dividends earned were less than 1%." (9)

The best indicator of prosperity is the freight rates, and as early as May 1890 Angiers Brothers Steam Freight Monthly Report stated

"Freights since our last report (April) have progressively declined, till they have now reached as low a figure as during the acute depression experienced in 1885 and 1886." (10)

and by September it was reported that

"Profits are very difficult to make in any direction, even with the cheap new steamers." (11)

All the reports from the spring of 1890 make frequent reference to the "depressed conditions of the shipping industry" or to the "lack of real profit over work expenses." (12) These observations were made by those in the industry itself, a fact which would perhaps throw some suspicion on their findings, had these not been confirmed by later researchers. The Board of Trade in 1904 collected data regarding ocean freight rates for the period 1884 to 1903, (13) and the

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9. Royal Commission on Labour Minutes of Evidence Group B Vol.1 (C6708) 1892 Q4856
 10. Fairplay 6 June 1890
 11. Ibid 26 September 1890
 12. See Angiers Brothers Steam Freight Monthly Reports Fairplay 1890 passim and the Shipping Gazette 1890 passim
 13. Board of Trade The Course of Ocean Freights during the Past Twenty Years London 1904

TABLE VIII:1

OCEAN RATES OF FREIGHT - INWARD AND OUTWARD

Statement showing the percentage fluctuations in mean yearly freight rates between the United Kingdom and certain ports abroad during each of the years 1884 - 1894

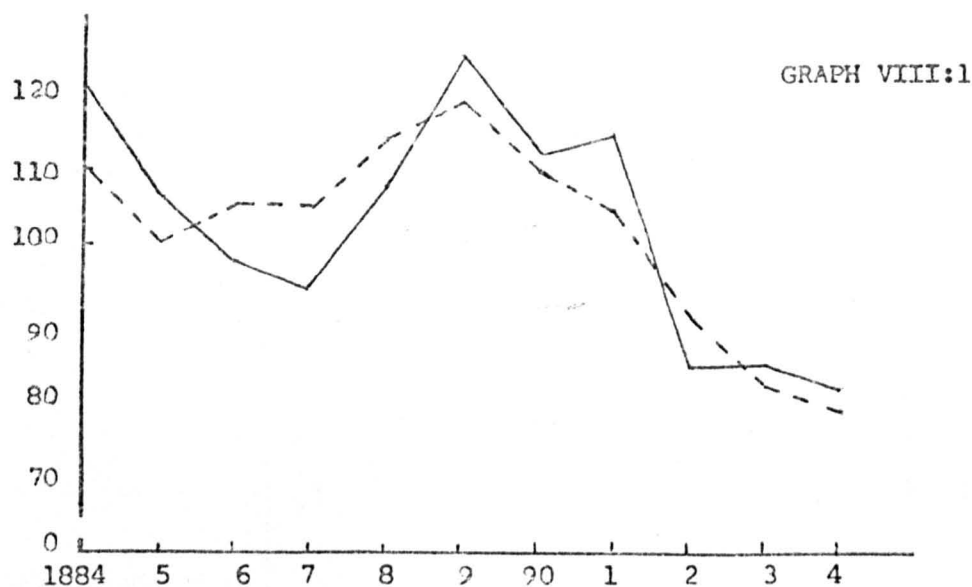
OCEAN FREIGHT RATES			mean of preceding columns
Year	Inward	Outward	
1884	121.7	110.7	116.2
1885	106.9	101.0	104.0
1886	98.0	105.0	101.5
1887	94.6	105.6	100.1
1888	107.3	114.0	110.7
1889	125.4	119.2	122.3
1890	102.8	110.5	106.7
1891	104.4	95.5	100.0
1892	84.3	89.3	86.8
1893	84.8	82.3	83.6
1894	81.2	78.3	79.8

Source:- Board of Trade 1904

"1889 was considered a record year ... From 1889 to 1895 freights fell to something like 60% of their former level." (14)

14. James P. Cyril *Cyclical Fluctuations in the Shipping and Shipbuilding Industries* University of Mississippi 1927 p.84

following Graph VIII:1, related to the decade 1884 to 1894, illustrates the level of inward and outward freights.



OCEAN FREIGHTS 1884-1894

Compiled by the Board of Trade

—— Inward Freight Rates
----- Outward Freight Rates

This highlights the contraction from the peak of 1889 in both inward and outward freights. This is confirmed in Table VIII:1.

James in his study of cyclical fluctuations in the industry shows that

"1889 was considered a record year ... From 1889 to 1895 freights fell to something like 60% of their former level." (14)

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14. James F. Cyril Cyclical Fluctuations in the Shipping and Shipbuilding Industries University of Philadelphia 1927 p.24

TABLE VIII:2

SHIPPING FREIGHTS AND EARNINGS1884 - 1894

Year	Inward Freights (1900 = 100)	Outward Freights (1900 = 100)	Index of Freights (1907 = 100)	Volume of Shipping (1907 = 100)	'Shipping Earnings' (1907 £ = 72.5m)	Disbursements of foreign ships in British Ports (1907 = £10m)
1884	122	155	149	45.4	49.0	2.6
1885	107	138	131	46.0	43.7	2.6
1886	98	147	128	46.0	42.7	2.5
1887	95	156	129	46.7	43.7	2.6
1888	107	160	140	49.8	50.5	2.7
1889	125	168	157	53.3	60.7	3.0
1890	103	165	139	56.4	56.8	3.2
1891	104	135	129	59.1	55.3	3.4
1892	84	119	108	60.8	47.6	3.4
1893	85	109	104	62.5	47.1	3.3
1894	81	109	101	64.6	47.3	3.5

Source:- Cairncross A.K. Home and Foreign Investment 1870-1913 p.176

Cairncross confirms this trend in his analysis of freight indices.⁽¹⁵⁾ His figures show a rise to a peak of 157 in 1889 and a fall in 1890 to 139 and 129 in the following year (1907 = 100). Earnings also decline as illustrated in Table VIII:2.

It should be noted that there is, in addition, some increase in the disbursement of Foreign Shipping in British ports from £3.0 million in 1889 to £3.2 million in 1890, indicating an increase in foreign vessels engaged in British trade, thus putting further pressure on a slack British shipping labour market, which, even in the best years was grossly overstocked.⁽¹⁶⁾

Cairncross's estimates agree with those of Isserlis.⁽¹⁷⁾ These are concerned mainly with Tramp Rates, a not insignificant section of the British fleet at that time. The major difference between general and tramp rates is that the latter generally rose earlier. Tramp freight index (1869 = 100) stood at 65 in 1887 rising to 76 in 1888, 75 in 1889 and falling in 1890 to 64.

Taking the discussion a step further Isserlis compares trade cycle movement with the Tramp freight Index.

"Apart from minor fluctuations during the latter period (1869-1912) the peaks have occurred in 1873, 1881, 1888, 1900, 1907 and 1912. These may be compared with the peaks for trade fluctuations in general given by Pigou, 1872, 1882, 1890, 1900 and 1907."⁽¹⁸⁾

15. Cairncross A.K. Home and Foreign Investment 1817-1913 Cambridge University Press 1953

16. Ibid p.176

17. Isserlis L. 'Tramp Shipping Cargoes and Freights' Journal of the Royal Statistical Society Vol.10.1 1938

18. Ibid p.75 quoting from Pigou A.C. Industrial Fluctuations (1927)

TABLE VIII:3

THE MEAN ANNUAL OCEAN RATES PER UNIT BY
STEAMSHIP ON GRAIN, FLOUR, BEEF AND PORK

YEAR	CLASS OF GOODS			
	Grain	Flour	Beef	Pork
	SCALE			
	Per bus cts	Per ton	Per fierce cts	Per bbl. cts
1884	7.02	33.05	89.9	75.4
1885	6.40	2.76	77.4	59.1
1886	6.62	2.82	77.9	63.1
1887	5.04	2.22	63.6	51.6
1888	5.28	2.32	74.1	52.1
1889	7.88	3.33	105.2	76.4
1890	4.94	2.44	84.4	64.1
1891	6.28	2.73	95.4	63.1
1892	5.22	2.48	69.6	45.8
1893	4.70	2.26	69.6	49.1
1894	3.82	1.89	58.6	42.3

Source: - North D. Ocean Freight Rates and Movements
Development 1792-1913 in Journal of Economic
History Vol. 15 1955

TABLE VIII:4

FREIGHT FACTORS IN THE LONDON GAZETTE PRICE
OF WHEAT PER QUARTER 1884-1894

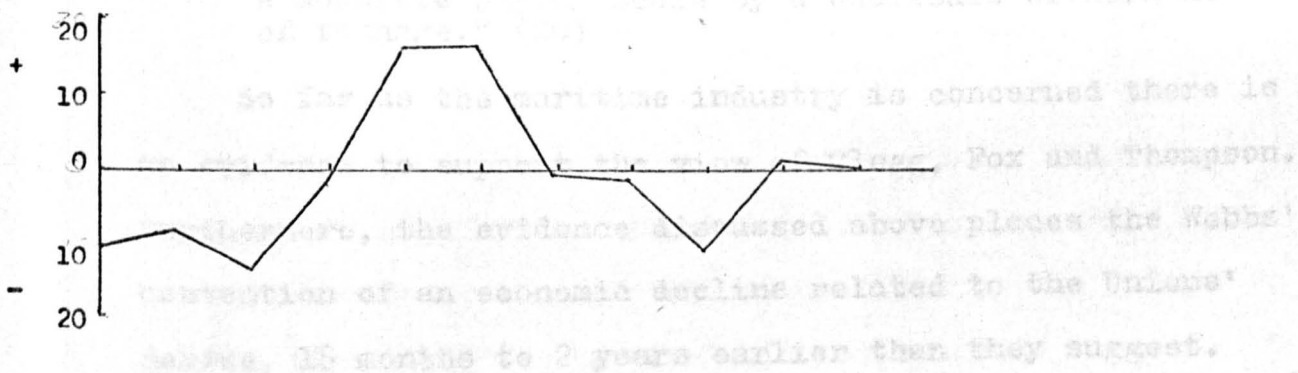
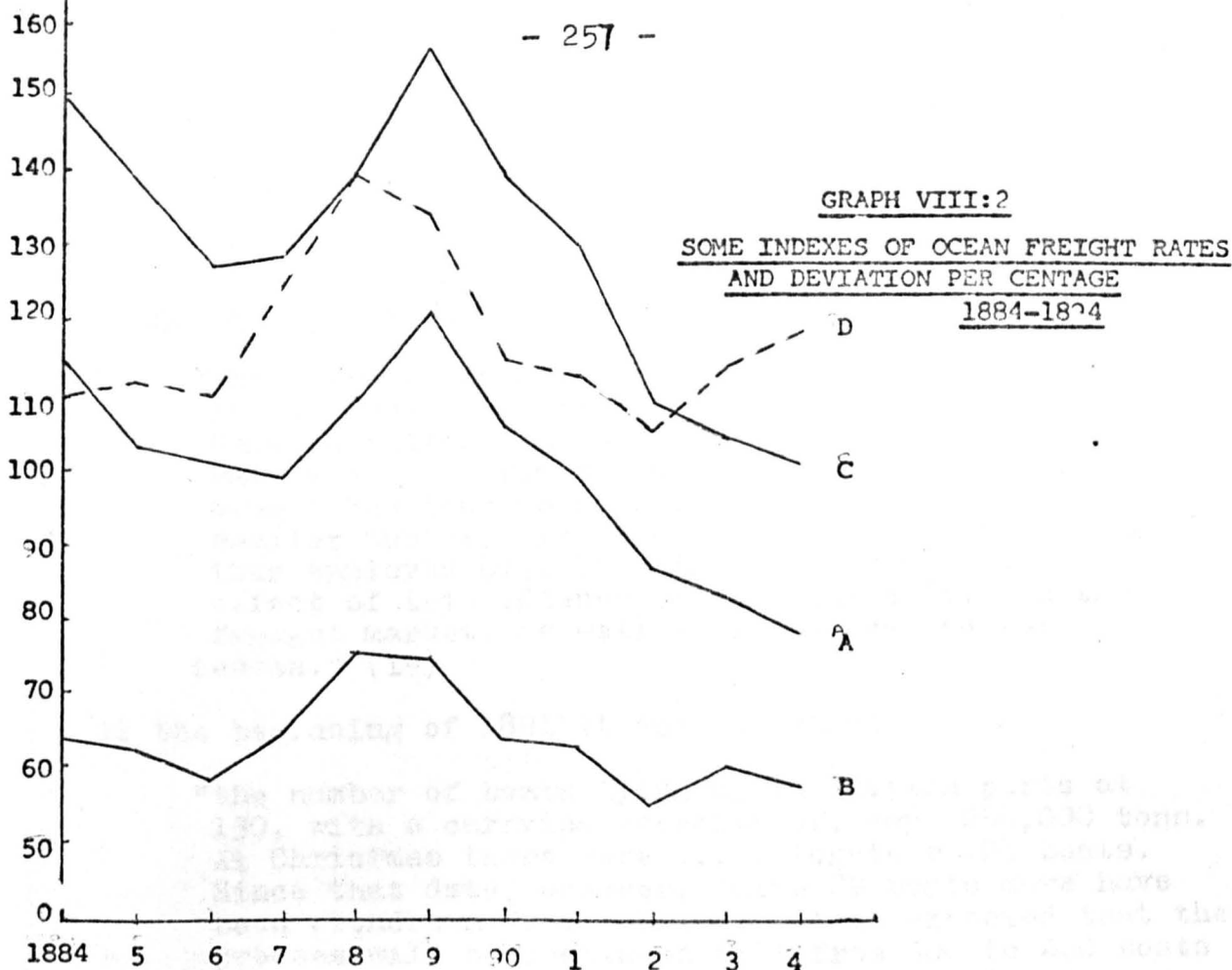
Year	Baltic Factor	Black Sea Factor	(East Coast) American Factor	South American Factor	Australian Factor
1884	3.6	9.0	6.4	-	-
1885	4.9	8.8	6.4	-	-
1886	3.9	8.8	7.1	-	-
1887	4.4	10.0	5.2	12.7	18.2
1888	5.6	13.5	5.3	12.6	18.0
1889	4.8	12.4	8.7	15.5	19.2
1890	3.5	9.7	5.0	15.6	22.3
1891	4.1	9.6	5.7	16.6	18.9
1892	3.6	8.2	5.6	16.7	17.8
1893	4.2	10.2	6.1	14.6	18.2
1894	4.1	11.4	5.7	19.2	24.5

Source:- North D.'Ocean Freights Rates and Economic
Development 1750-1913' in Journal of Economic
History Vol.18 1958

Thus Isserlis argues that the tramp freight rate peak was reached two years before the ^{peak of the} business cycle. This pre-business cycle movement was not confined only to the tramp index, all ocean rates of freight showed similar characteristics. Freight rates for a particular trade, New York to Liverpool, as compiled by the Board of Trade further confirm the early decline as illustrated in Table VIII:3. Later research by North in one commodity, wheat, over a wider range of sources illustrates similar trends from a peak in 1888 or 1889 to a fall in 1890, as shown in Table VIII:4.

Australian prices are the exception, presumably due to the seamen's strike there, and the South American factor rose marginally. The remaining trade, the East Coast of America, which is important to the British market fell dramatically. Hence using freight rates as an indicator of shipping employment and therefore prosperity, there is strong evidence to support the argument for the decline coming no later than the second half of 1890.

The evidence discussed above has been transferred to a simple graph (Graph VIII:2). This reaffirms that all the indices peak by 1889 and 1890 begins a serious decline in shipping activity. The percentage deviator graph makes the same point.



- A. Angiers E.A.V. Fifty Years of Freights 1862-1919 Fairplay London (1920)
- B. Isserlis L. 'Tramp Shipping Cargoes and Freights' Journal of the Royal Statistical Society ci (1938) deviation percentage graph is based on this index.
- C. Cairncross A.K. Home and Foreign Investment 1817-1913 Cambridge University Press 1953
- D. Wickizer V.D. Shipping and Freight Rates in the Overseas Grain Trade. Wheat Studies of the Food Research Institute, Vol XV, No.2 October 1938
- N.B. based on Isserlis

in Shipping and World Competition, London (1962)

A practical manifestation of the fall in freights was a contraction in the demand for tonnage and consequently increased lay-ups as the Newcastle correspondent of the Shipping Gazette reported on 14 June 1890.

"There are today more than 24 steamships laid idle in the Tyne and Wear and others are being ordered home in ballast in consequence of the unremunerative nature of the prompt freights. One firm of ship-owners has four vessels laid idle and others a smaller number. It is estimated that the tonnage thus employed will be slightly over 20,000. The effect of this idleness must soon be felt in the freight market, as well as in the demand for seamen." (19)

At the beginning of 1891 it was estimated

"the number of boats lying up in British ports at 130, with a carrying capacity of, say, 250,000 tons. At Christmas there were ... altogether 101 boats. Since that date, however, quite 29 boats more have been withdrawn from working. It is expected that the process will be continued till from 300 to 400 boats are laid aside. As freights are much below paying figures, and can only be faced up to anything like a moderate paying scale by a wholesale withdrawal of tonnage." (20)

So far as the maritime industry is concerned there is no evidence to support the view of Clegg, Fox and Thompson. Furthermore, the evidence discussed above places the Webbs' contention of an economic decline related to the Unions' demise, 18 months to 2 years earlier than they suggest. Thus

"the first few months of the Federation's existence coincided with a turning of the economic tide." (21)

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19. Sunderland Daily Echo 14 June 1890. For similar comments see Shipping World 1 July 1890. 'Receding Tide of Prosperity'.
 20. Fairplay 2 January 1891
 21. Mogridge B. Labour Relations and Labour Costs Chap.XII in Sturmey S.G. British Shipping and World Competition. Athlone Press (1962)

There can be little doubt that this general slacking of demand for shipping and therefore seamen, was a factor underpinning not only the latter's development, but was crucial in the formative month of the Shipping Federation's devastating attack on the industrial trade unions. A proposition finding support in an unexpected source, the pages of Fairplay March 27th 1891

"Our firm conviction is that if freight had been good instead of bad, and if ships had been in demand instead of the reverse, the Shipping Federation would have fallen to pieces from the apathy of some of its members and the self seeking of others."

implying that had economic conditions been more favourable, creating a demand for labour and strengthening the union's position, many shipowners would have deserted the Shipping Federation rather than suffer a loss of profit due to industrial strife.

The benefit the Federation gained from the economic downturn was not uninterrupted. By the summer of 1891 the owners were becoming anxious to reduce wages, their normal response to a fall in freight rates. Such individual action by the shipowners was, however, inhibited by the existence of the Shipping Federation and its attempts to regulate the labour market. The immediate concern was the effect such action would have on the N.A.S.F.U. since although the Federation Ticket was now being used extensively, the battle to crush the union had not in fact taken place. Even the extent of the use of the Ticket is questionable since the

22. Sh. Fed. Documents Report of the General Purposes Committee to the Anniversary Meeting of the Executive Council 2 October 1891

Report of the General Purposes Committee to the Executive Council states

"... the Registry system, the satisfactory results of which are daily becoming manifest wherever full support is given by affiliated owners." (22)

six months after its apparent full implementation. The apprehension of the revival of the N.A.S.F.U. appeared justified in the same report

"The position of the N.A.S.F.U. union has also been greatly strengthened by the inopportune proposal to reduce wages by concerted action, the main result of which has been to cause a rush of new members and subscriptions, and the payment of arrears by a large number who had declined further contributions for strike purposes." (23)

There appears to be some evidence that this was indeed the case since the number of members affiliated to the T.U.C. rose to 78,400 in September 1891. Whilst the numbers themselves may well not be accurate, it does indicate an increase of 25,000 over the previous year, (see Appendix II) which at the very least can be seen as a movement in the union's favour. Nevertheless, this increase in membership, probably resulting from the pressure to lower wages was not reflected in an increase in agitation and disputes on the part of the seamen. This was no doubt in part due to the fact that the Federation were not anxious to press the wages question at this time, but partly because of the economic situation, and by September 1892, the N.A.S.F.U. only affiliated 20,000 members to the T.U.C.

22. Sh.Fed. Documents Report of the General Purposes Committee to the Anniversary Meeting of the Executive Council 2 October 1891

23. Ibid

It is difficult, when looking at the period from the autumn of 1891 to the spring of 1893, to assess the exact influence of the economic situation, as opposed to the long term working of the Federation, or the strength of organisation amongst seamen. By late 1891 the Federation had achieved a permanency and breadth of action not envisaged a year previously. Registry offices directly operated by the Federation functioned on a nationwide basis. A satisfactory agreement on co-operation and co-ordination had been reached with the Employers Labour Association of Liverpool by July 1891 and they acted on behalf of the Federation in the matter of providing free labour.⁽²⁴⁾ Furthermore, some Districts, such as the Thames, had expanded the Registry to a Free Labour office, so that there was a virtually permanent free labour army which could be called up at a moment's notice.⁽²⁵⁾ Depot ships and all the paraphernalia that the employment of free labour involved, could with the experience

24. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.20 of the General Purposes Committee to the Executive Council 10 July 1891

25. See for example Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.28 of the General Purposes Committee to the Executive Council 2 October 1891. By July 1892 it was stated that such Free Labour offices existed in Plymouth, Southampton, London, Liverpool and Dublin, see Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.31

See also Appendix IV

gained in the winter of 1890 and early 1891 be put into action at the slightest sign of battle. This made it unlikely that localised union agitation could succeed as it would now be met by the national resources of the shipowners, and the economic situation placed a national seamen's strike beyond question.

Quite apart from this defensive policy of the Federation, the Ticket in itself inhibited both the growth and maintenance of the union. The necessity of declaring membership on taking the ticket and registering for employment made it a point of pressure involving possible loss of employment for the individual. For example, in Glasgow, as early as February 1891, the firm of George Smith and Son were making "everyone sign a declaration that he does not belong to the Union."⁽²⁶⁾ Furthermore, in an industry where union organisation was difficult the existence of an inhibitor such as the Ticket might well disproportionately affect those who joined or remained in the Union.

One way the N.A.S.F.U. might retain membership under adverse conditions was in the provision of friendly benefits. The owners were well aware of this and, keen to avoid inclusion in any Employers Liability Act, instituted a Benefit Scheme. It is not really possible to analyse how successful the Federation Benefit Scheme was in counteracting

28. Sh.Fed. Minutes of Proceedings 2 October 1891 p.40

26. Sh.Fed. Minutes of Proceedings 13 February 1891 p.41

the friendly benefit attractions of membership of the N.A.S.F.U. or retaining men on the Register. When the Benefit Scheme was first being discussed it was anticipated that one third of the men taking the ticket would opt for inclusion in the Benefit Scheme.⁽²⁷⁾ The payment on death under the Scheme was to be £25 which was regarded by a shipowner as

"little enough, and if you make it lower you open the door to Mr. Wilson with a rival scheme. If we can, for something like £15,000 or £20,000, provide a recruiting ground for men so as to avoid strikes I hold it is cheap." ⁽²⁸⁾

The Scheme came into operation on 1st January 1892 and it was deemed by one shipowner to show

"that the Federation and shipowners generally have some desire to do something for the seamen ... amidst all the troubles ... which we have had to encounter since the Federation came into existence." ⁽²⁹⁾

he went on to say that in the first six weeks the scheme had "been very largely taken advantage of."

However, it must be remembered that the Benefit Scheme was open to all grades of seagoing personnel and so the response could not directly be related to the inroads it might make in N.A.S.F.U. membership. As the Report on the

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27. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.21 of the General Purposes Committee to the Executive Council 10 July 1891
 28. Sh.Fed. Minutes of Proceedings 2 October 1891 p.40
 29. R.C. on Labour Group B Vol II Q13451

first six months of its operation states

"the first applicants for Benefit Books were Masters and Officers who at once appreciated the value of the scheme ... but seamen generally are now becoming alive to the benefits." (30)

During this initial period a total of 9178 books had been issued, representing a total Benefit Risk of £465,848. (31)

The danger of the scheme was recognised by the N.A.S.F.U. and in South Wales persistent efforts were made by them to get united action with the miners, railwaymen, dockers and others to prevent the implementation of the scheme but without success. (32)

In order to facilitate and strengthen the operation of the Registry Offices, the Shipping Federation were anxious to legalise their function as suppliers of seamen. An application had been made for Registry Officials to be granted Board of Trade Licences in April 1891, but this had been rejected by the President of the Board of Trade. (33)

30. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.41 of the Benefit Fund Committee to the Executive Council

31. Ibid: By April 30 1893, 20,966 books had been issued, 8,978 to Masters, Officers and Engineers, and 11,988 to Petty Officers and Men, representing a risk of £965,693. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.53 31 May 1893.

32. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.31 of the General Purposes Committee to the Executive Council 8 January 1892

33. P.R.O. MT9.428/M2097/1892 Letter dated 21 April 1891

The Department did however agree to the use of an india rubber stamp being used to make an impression on the Articles of Agreement, stating

"Every seaman pledges himself to proceed to sea in the vessel notwithstanding that other members of the crew may or may not be members of any seamen's union." (34)

There was no objection raised to the inclusion of this clause in all ships' Articles which, of course, coincided with the implementation of the Ticket.

When a further deputation of Shipping Federation members went to see the President of the Board of Trade on 10 November 1891, they were told by Sir Michael Hicks Beach that their

"registry officials would not be prosecuted for supplying seamen under the methods that have been hitherto adopted." (35)

As an alternative to the granting of Board of Trade licences, the deputation suggested amendments should be made to the Merchant Shipping Act, 1854, and the President agreed to consider these but thought

"the proper course was for the shipowners to bring in a Bill dealing with these points." (36)

34. Ibid see Letter dated 26 February 1891 from the Shipping Federation and 14 April 1891 from the Mercantile Marine Office Newcastle-on-Tyne.

35. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.31 op cit 8 January 1892

36. Ibid

However, in view of the continuing depressed state of maritime activity it was increasingly the reduction of wages that became the central issue in potential disputes. This made it very difficult for the Shipping Federation to continue to regard wages as outside their purview . It was, therefore, in a dilemma over giving aid to members in such disputes since it had publicly declared from the very first, and constantly reiterated, that "The Shipping Federation has nothing to do with wages."⁽³⁷⁾ On the other hand, it was becoming increasingly evident that having upset the equation of supply, demand and price on the labour market by forming the Federation and manipulating supply, it was inevitable that price bargaining would be affected, since employers could be independent of the local labour market. Hence, sooner or later the shipowners would have had to face the question of the Federation's involvement in wages, although they do not appear to have appreciated this.

In addition, although they had apparently succeeded over the free labour issue in respect of seamen, they had not crushed the union in the way they had intended. What they had done was subdued it with vigilance and immediate reaction to any dispute. If this policy was discontinued, particularly over an issue such as wages, then there seemed every likelihood that the N.A.S.F.U. would again grow in strength, and therefore threaten the free labour success.

37. See R.C. on Labour Group B Vol 1 op cit Appendix 22

Whilst in theory, the stance was maintained that the Federation could not interfere in disputes over the wage question, in practice they appeared to do so. The rationalisation for such action was they they had only become involved where there was coercion on the part of other trades, and therefore were not directly interfering in the freedom of contract between seamen and shipowners. This rationalisation is summed up in Report No.31 to the Executive Council.

"Since last Council meeting on 2nd October 1891 your Executive Committee have continued the policy of defensive preparation approved by you on that date, and have carefully abstained from intervening or even rendering assistance in cases where wages have formed the direct cause of dispute, but wherever such disputes have been aggravated by the coercion of other trades to obstruct freedom of contract, or where members have been forced to resist unreasonable demands (from whatever cause arising) the resources of the Federation have at once been applied." (38)

By April, 1892 the pressure for some reduction in wages and the obvious opposition of the union and the men in general, caused the General Purposes Committee to recommend that the question of wages policy should be considered by the Executive Council

"in view of the depressed state of the shipping trade at present ... as they believe that a national reduction of the standard rate of wages at each port must result from the number of vessels laid up; and from other causes." (39)

38. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.31 op cit

39. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.35 of the General Purposes Committee to the Executive Council 27 April 1892

When the Executive Council discussed the matter, it was suggested, and strongly supported, that the persistent public declaration of non-interference on wage issues should be allowed to drop. As one shipowner put it

"Let that slide a bit because the time is coming when the Federation will have to take up the question of wages." (40)

Shipowners had made claims against the Federation on the grounds that seamen had been brought from a distance to equalise wages, but the Federation only felt able to meet the extra expense when it had been caused by union interference, and the position had to be clarified. At the Executive Council, when the matter was discussed, Mr Yeoman said,

"The original resolution was that expenses consequent upon bringing men from a neighbouring port, a near port, not across the country to combat the keeping up of wages locally should be borne by the Federation. We were not told so by Resolution, but as you know there was something about 'winking the other eye', and the local societies were to do what in their judgement was right and the Federation should bear them out and pay them back the expenses they had incurred ... that is the position."

Chairman That is exactly what is laid down in the Report." (41)

The Registry officials in each District were also now required to tabulate local rates of pay so that they could be circulated to the Central office and all Districts to avoid the expense and trouble of shipmasters offering higher than the local rates.(42)

40. Sh.Fed. Minutes of Proceedings 27 April 1892 p.8

41. Sh.Fed. Minutes of Proceedings 26 October 1892 p.15

42. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.38 of the General Purposes Committee to the Executive Council

While in theory the policy of the Federation concerning non-interference in matters directly concerning wages remained unchanged, there was now no practical hindrance to acting in disputes where wages were involved. The confusion to which such nicely defined spheres of action led is summed up by the following statement in a report to the Executive Council

"While as a general principle non-interference in the wages question has been strictly adhered to ... a neutral attitude had undoubtedly operated in restraint of the natural law of supply and demand ... the Union leaders calculating upon the inactivity of the Federation, were able to coerce the majority of the seamen and prevent any general acceptance of the terms offered... Notably in the Humber district, where the Union delegates had enforced against outside vessels a surcharge of five or ten shillings a month above the rates at which their members served on vessels owned by a large Hull Shipping Company. In this case your Executive intervened to equalise rates." (43)

The apprehension that the Shipping Federation increasingly expressed as to the effect of reducing wages appears to have been soundly based. Whilst, when addressing the Annual Conference in October 1891, Havelock Wilson admitted the Union had, in 1891, gone through one of its most critical periods,⁽⁴⁴⁾ and later acknowledged a large falling off in membership and revenue following the strikes of that year,⁽⁴⁵⁾

43. Ibid

44. Seafaring 10 October 1891

45. Journal of Commerce 4 October 1892

he did claim signs of revival in the early autumn of 1892

"as a result of the shipowners' reducing wages the seamen in almost every port in the country are flocking back to the union. In some of the northern ports during the past month [September] many of the branches have doubled their income." (46)

It is possible of course that Havelock Wilson's election as Member of Parliament for Middlesborough in July, 1892 created a degree of prominence which might have been a fillip to union membership.

The effect of the depressed economy on union membership during 1892 was two edged. Undoubtedly the actual or threatened reduction in wages by shipowners benefited the union, however reductions in other trades could have very damaging repercussions; for example, the miners' strike in Durham in the spring of 1892, which was supported by the N.A.S.F.U.⁽⁴⁷⁾, was disastrous.

"Over 7,000 of our good financial members for over 12 weeks were thrown out of employment. This was a very serious matter as far as the financial position of our union was concerned, for not only had we a loss of revenue through such a large number of men being thrown out of employment, but we had also to provide protection money; because the shipowners, knowing that there was a large number of men out of work, commenced to reduce the wages of the few men who had the privilege of being engaged." (48)

However, as long as even a nucleus of the N.A.S.F.U. remained in operation, the fear of regeneration, especially through a dispute over wages, remained. The Federation had

46. Ibid

47. Sunderland Daily Echo 12 April 1892

48. Journal of Commerce 4 October 1892
See also Appendix II

not had the anticipated 'battle to the death' with the N.A.S.F.U. which they felt they needed to crush the union, and so bring peace on their terms. In spite of their continued success over the issue of free labour in the majority of ports, except on the Humber, the N.A.S.F.U. survived. As one shipowner put it, misquoting Macbeth

"you see we had thought the snake was killed ... It is apparently only scotched." (49)

Perhaps the main reason why the Federation had failed to kill the snake by the summer of 1892 was because it had misjudged its nature. The period under discussion saw the realisation that the snake was in fact New Unionism, as manifested in the Dockers' Union and other waterside organisations, rather than merely the N.A.S.F.U. The majority of strikes officially discussed by the Shipping Federation from spring 1891 to the end of 1892 (see Appendix IV) relate to dockers for the most part and were either over the issue of free labour or the introduction of new technology such as steam winches. (50)

It soon became obvious, therefore, that the setting up of Registry offices and the declaration of the Ticket did not ensure that they were "masters of their own business",

49. Sh.Fed. Minutes of Proceedings 27 July 1892 p.17

50. In spite of the preponderance of dockers' strikes, the N.A.S.F.U. was still regarded by the Shipping Federation as one of the main instigators of disputes.
(Manager's Report to Third Annual Meeting May 1893)

Indeed by the time the Ticket had been implemented, the Shipping Federation were aware that there was a great deal more to 'sailing' than ensuring an adequate crew. The shipowners were, of course, vulnerable to any dispute which disrupted the loading and discharging of the vessel. If they were to effectively establish freedom of contract, the Shipping Federation had to widen their sphere of operation to cover these areas of commercial activity. This was a task made more difficult because rather to their surprise they did not necessarily have the support of other employers, for example, dock and railway companies, in their free labour battle; furthermore, the increasing efficiency of the F.T.L.U. with their threat of a national programme made unity on the part of employers essential.

The strike involving the City of Cork Steam Packet Company is a good example of the problem the Shipping Federation faced in this respect. This strike arose over the employment of a stevedore in Cork who showed a preference for free labour, and may have been exacerbated by the introduction of steam winches in the port. (51)

Whilst the strike was eventually settled in the Company's favour with the use of free labour thus enabling

"them to establish firmly the principle of free contract, not only with their crew but with the ship and wharf labour required for the loading, discharging, and landing of cargoes at Cork, London, Liverpool, Bristol and other places." (52)

51. Seafaring 17 January 1891 and February passim

52. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.21 of the Legal and Indemnity Committee to the Executive Council 10 July 1891

it lasted three months and was estimated to have cost the Company £7,071 and involved indemnity on eight steamers. (53) Since there was no District organisation in Southern Ireland ad hoc arrangements had to be made for the importation of free labour which resulted in the Federation being claimed against for both ship and shore labour. The Federation agreed to take a liberal view but insisted on "adhering to the general principle that the company must be compensated as shipowners only." (54)

There was a similar incident in Dublin in July when the Shipping Federation attempted to learn from their previous experiences and suggested

"without delay an agreement should be entered into with the Merchants Protection Association as to the basis upon which the free labour introduced into the port is to be retained and paid for." (55)

Nevertheless, there was dissension over how the expenses should be shared and the Shipping Federation appears to have borne a large proportion of the cost. The free labour on this occasion was imported from the Thames District.

The situation was, therefore, sufficiently complicated when the shipping company acted as their own wharfinger but when independent docks companies were involved the problems could be almost insurmountable. For example, in a dispute in Hull in 1892 the Dock Company refused to insist

53. Ibid

54. Ibid

55. Sh.Fed. Documents Letter from C.Laws, Secretary to the General Manager reporting on the Dublin Strike
20 July 1891

on its own men loading vessels when they were involved in a sympathy strike. As a result the Federation imported free labourers, only to find that they were not permitted to use dock company cranes and appliances to unload vessels. However, the Federation sought Counsel's opinion as to the Company's responsibility under the Docks Act and an order of mandamus was applied for on the grounds that the Act "compelled the Company to provide men to carry out the work." (56) This ^{tactic} seems to have been successful since the boycotted vessels were loaded by the Dock Company men and allowed to sail. (57)

To some extent the Federation were the victims of their own success, since they found themselves the potential focus of a national free labour policy. There had been overtures from several large employers' associations to discuss methods of affiliation or co-operation over the matter of free labour. Whilst the Shipping Federation were anxious to keep within the limits of shipping, they set up a sub-committee to consider the problem. They recognised the advantage of a permanent free labour 'army' such as was

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56. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.36 of the Legal and Indemnity Committee to the Executive Council 27 April 1892
57. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.38 of the General Purposes Committee to the Executive Council 27 July 1892

already established in the Thames District and

"if adapted to the requirements of Railway and Dock Companies, where constant work can be obtained, such an extension of the Free Labour Bureau system would afford the surest guarantee against disturbance of the shipping trade by irresponsible agitators." (58)

Some of the Registries were converted into Free Labour offices, and employers directly connected with shipping were approached with a view to extending the scheme, but in July it was stated

"on account of the much easier conditions of the labour market, no practical combination for an extension of the system has yet been arranged." (59)

However, a statement by the F.T.L.U. in August that they intended launching a national programme for new and better conditions, particularly with regard to the employment of Union men only, appears to have given the scheme new impetus. The General Purposes Committee felt it unlikely the threat was capable of implementation, but nevertheless expressed the view that

"no reasonable precautions should be omitted and that renewed efforts should be made to strengthen and perfect the Free Labour Office system." (60)

By this time the scheme had developed into a national one which was to be known as the British Labour Exchange and was

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58. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.31 of the General Purposes Committee to the Executive Council 8 January 1892
 59. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.38 op cit
 60. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.43 of the General Purposes Committee to the Executive Council 27 October 1892

intended eventually to include other sections of employers as well as shipping.⁽⁶¹⁾ It was recognised that the plan was an ambitious one and it was not proposed that the scheme should commence before January 1893.⁽⁶²⁾ Although the Shipping Federation undertook the initial planning, the British Labour Exchange was to be a distinct organisation of all interested employers committed to

"absolute freedom of contract between employer and employed." (63)

The New Unions, and especially the F.T.L.U., were therefore presented with a challenge which, even in their debilitated condition, could only be ignored at their peril.

The important issue was the control of the supply of labour. As far as the employers were concerned, the main object of the scheme was to secure the supply of labour in order to reinforce the policy of freedom of contract in order to 'regain' control over the supply of labour. This was, however, only part of their aim in setting up the British Labour Exchanges, they were also seen as a socially acceptable way

61. Sh.Fed. Minutes of Proceedings 26 October 1892 p.24 and see also The Times 1 July 1892 for discussion of similar scheme at the Congress of Chambers of Commerce held in London.

62. Ibid p.27 and 28

63. The Times 1 November 1892

2. Sh.Fed. Minutes of Proceedings 11 April 1893 p.3
Referred to as 'Formal' below

CHAPTER IX

THE HULL STRIKE

The strike which took place in Hull in April and May 1893 was the direct result of the establishment of a British Labour Exchange in the port at the end of March and the insistence of strict adherence to shipping Federation policy over free labour. The idea of a labour exchange was not in itself new, indeed such a scheme had been recommended by Tillet and the Royal Commission on Labour in July, 1891,

"that in every district there should be a labour bureau, a labour registry supported by the State, and controlled and managed by the State." (1)

The important issue was who should control such a registry.

As far as the Shipping Federation was concerned this was not in question; control should be firmly in the hands of the employers. It was seen by them as a method of reinforcing the policy of freedom of contract in order to 'regain' control over the supply of labour. This was, however, only part of their aim in setting up the British Labour Exchanges, they were also seen as a socially acceptable way

"to break this Union, not by any illegitimate means, but by the proper and legitimate means which have been suggested to us previously and which we are now putting into operation by the formation of a free labour bureau ." (2)

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1. Royal Commission on Labour Minutes of Evidence Group B Vol.1 (Cmd 6708) 1892 Q3598.
 2. Sh.Fed. Minutes of Proceedings 11 April 1893 p.3
Referred to as York I below

The establishment of a bureau in Hull and the subsequent strike must be seen in this light. Hull was not only a stronghold of the Dockers' Union, which had lost ground elsewhere,⁽³⁾ but was generally regarded as a port which employed union men only. The Shipping Federation had attempted to make a stand over free labour there on several occasions without success, not least because the major employer, Thomas Wilson and Son, was not a member. The Secretary of the H.S.M.F.A.A. pointed out in 1892

"So far as Hull is concerned we are troubled very little with the Shipping Federation. One of the largest shipowners in the kingdom, I believe, Mr. Wilson, will not have anything to do with the Federation. He said that he would rather treat direct with the men in any case." (4)

In view of the Federation's unsatisfactory experience in the port, the General Manager advised the Executive Council that in Hull they should not do anything that would

"make a general strike unless you can bring in Messrs. Wilson." (5)

There have been a number of interpretations as to why Charles Wilson recommitted his company to the Federation in 1893. A contemporary suggestion, made by Clem Edwards writing on the Hull strike,⁽⁶⁾ was that difficulty over

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3. Brown R. Waterfront Organisations in Hull 1870 - 1900
op cit p.66
 4. R.C. on Labour Group B Vol.II (C6295) Q13825
 5. Sh.Fed. Minutes of Proceedings 8 January 1892 p.52
 6. Edwards C. 'The Hull Shipping Dispute' Economic Journal iii
(1893)

obtaining maritime insurance had forced his hand. Whilst there may have been some pressure of this kind, there is no evidence of an overt threat at this particular time. Furthermore, for the two years since leaving the Federation, he apparently had no trouble in underwriting his own insurance cover. Another suggestion has been that the blacking of some of the Company's keels following a dispute over their refusal to collect arrears of union dues led Wilson to change his attitude.⁽⁷⁾ It had previously been the Company's practice to collect back subscriptions in this way, and when the practice was discontinued in the case of these vessels, the Dockers' Union members refused to complete their unloading. This incident was not in itself a major one and previous similar occurrences during 1892 had been dealt with quite adequately without the need to turn to the Federation for help.

It seems more likely that there was no single causal factor but rather that Charles Wilson was subjected to a number of influences and pressures which culminated in his decision to unite with his fellow shipowners in the free labour 'fight'.

As a starting point Charles and his brother Arthur throw some light on the matter by stating why they left the Federation in 1891. In the first place, the Company

7. Brown R., Waterfront Organisations in Hull 1870 - 1900 op. cit. p. 68
Clegg H.A., Fox Alam and Thompson A.F. A History of British Trade Unions since 1889 Vol. 1 1889-1910 op.cit. p80

was not firmly committed to the Federation free labour policy which emerged in the autumn of 1890. Following an incident in Hull that winter over free labour crews, it was agreed that not only would Thomas Wilson ship union crews, but that Charles Wilson would endeavour to persuade the other employers to do likewise.⁽⁸⁾ A year after breaking with the Federation Arthur Wilson wrote

"We [Wilsons] retired from the Shipping Federation last year thinking we could arrange our differences with our men directly with less friction." (9)

There had always been a tradition of a close paternalistic relationship between Wilsons and the H.S.M.F.A.A. and the other local unions, and the shipowners in general appear to have been relatively sympathetic to unionisation.

Also a reason for retaining independence appears to have been the financial cost of Federation membership.

Charles Wilson later admitted

"that we were paying considerable sums for which at the moment, whether we were right or wrong, we thought we were not getting quid pro quo ... my objection then was that we had a large amount of tonnage in the Federation, and the large Liverpool Shipping Companies had not joined, and I think that objections has been justified by what has happened since, as the Liverpool Companies have joined on different terms from the original terms." (10)

Undoubtedly the financial considerations must have

8. Eastern Morning News 29 December 1890
Hull Daily News 3 January 1891

9. Eastern Morning News 29 April 1892

10. Sh.Fed Minutes of Proceedings 2 June 1893 p.37

weighed heavily since the Call for a firm of that magnitude would have been a very substantial sum. Such an outlay would hardly have been justified in terms of individual return since the firm was large enough to withstand most commercial vagaries, and they had already proved their ability to 'manage their own affairs.'

This obstacle was in fact removed⁽¹¹⁾ in the autumn of 1892 when the Shipowners Association of Liverpool joined the Federation on special, cheaper, terms. It is significant therefore that Charles Wilson did not avail himself of this precedent to obtain similar concessions until the following February, which would suggest that finance was not the major factor in rejoining.

Of course, the summer and autumn of 1892 would not perhaps have been the most appropriate timing for negotiating terms with the Federation in view of the August election. Although he must have been sure of a large majority, it is unlikely he would have wished to raise an issue so contentious in Hull.⁽¹²⁾

The timing of Wilsons' return to the fold appears to have been a mixture of personal and commercial pressures. At this time both Charles and Arthur Wilson must have been looking towards the end of their active commercial careers, being 60 years and 57 years respectively; the firm had only recently been made a private Limited Company⁽¹³⁾ and the

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11. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No. 43 of the General Purposes Committee to the Executive Council 27 October 1893
 12. Pelling H. Social Geography of British Elections 1885-1910 (1967)
 13. In the Shipping Gazette 28 April 1893 it is stated that 'there have been rumours for some time that Messrs. Wilson [Charles and Arthur] intend retiring from their business'.

death of their brother David in February 1893 might well have complicated the financial structure of the Company. Furthermore, Charles Wilson was deeply involved in the rate war between the Hull and Barnsley Railway and the North Eastern, and their competition for control in Hull, particularly of the dock system and its development.

The emergence of an independent minded labour movement and its leadership must have been challenging to Charles Wilson's paternalistic liberal approach to labour matters. He maintained a deliberately personal interest in the lives of his employees and the working people of Hull in general. He acted on the assumption that all labour problems could be overcome, by fair leadership and direct reasoned discussion, and the tradition in the port until 1893 had proved the viability of these assumptions. He had found that he and his managers could work in relative harmony with the established unions in Hull, and especially the H.S.M.F.A.A. Although he was sympathetic to trades unions, he was somewhat suspicious of the 'enthusiasm' of the New Unionism. For example, whilst chairing a meeting of the Dockers Union in Hull in November 1891, he stated

"He had as they knew ... employed as many men as possible so as to do the most possible benefit to all concerned. They were labourers, and it was their duty to do the best they could for themselves and those who were dependent on them." (14)

He had, however, taken care to point out earlier

"that the Dockers Union was a comparatively new movement - that if he might say so they were an army of recruits - and they knew that recruits wanted a good deal of drilling." (15)

14. Eastern Morning News 21 November 1891

15. Ibid

The concern he would have felt that the unionism of the unskilled would upset the status quo in Hull must have grown with the power of the Dockers Union in the port. Hull was the best organised port in the country and it had the bulk of the Dockers Union national membership. During 1892 they had become a powerful group on the Trades Council, apparently intent on adopting a more aggressive approach to labour matters.

He made this point in the spring of 1893, and it illustrates the frustration he felt with these developments.

"My own firm whether rightly or wrongly, gave a little support to these men. But what have we found out in the last eighteen months? - that they have gradually been encroaching. The men who were our own dock labourers have been made their leading men and their authorities, and month after month that state of affairs has gone on with increasing friction and it certainly is not very pleasant to have your own dock labourers coming into your office and saying "if you do not concede this, all the men will strike."

Even

"supposing for the sake of peace and quietness you think "After all it is not a vital matter," and you do concede it, then a few days afterwards or a few weeks or a few months another proposal is made with the same result." (16)

This 'encroachment' and the incidents in which it was manifest cannot be regarded as anything more than petty irritations in themselves. However, they must have added weight to any existing pressure from other shipowners and employers, (17) and their cumulative effect was given significance by the gloomy economic background.

16. Sh.Fed. Minutes of Proceedings 11 April 1893 p. 29 (York I)

17. For example the local seed crushers and millers employed free labour

Hull appears to have been exempt from the national decline in shipping activity which had begun in 1890 for

"inward tonnage in 1891 was the highest ever with wheat imports reaching new record levels. Tonnage outwards also increased compared with 1890, coal exports being particularly large, and shipbuilding was very brisk." (18)

This dispensation from the effects of depression did not last beyond the summer of 1892. By September there had been pressure for a reduction in seamen's wages by 10%, but this was rejected out of hand by both the national and local unions.⁽¹⁹⁾ In December it became obvious to both unions that they could no longer resist a reduction in wages. The decision to do so was only arrived at after

"a long and rather stormy discussion"

and

"in consideration of the bad state of trade ... the best condition we can get with the Shipowners be accepted." (20)

Unemployment was reaching serious levels by this time.⁽²¹⁾ This was confirmed by the Eastern Morning News in January, 1893,⁽²²⁾ when it was found that there was considerable general and real distress with only two days work a week available for 2000 men with almost a quarter of Hull owned ships, and some of the largest, laid up. Sentinel wrote in the Hull Daily News that there was "a depression in trade the like of which has not been seen in years."⁽²³⁾ a situation

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18. Brown R. op cit n. 1 p.53, quoting the Annual Report of the Hull Chamber of Commerce and Shipping 1890-91.
 19. Minutes of the Joint Committee on Wages 14 September 1892 in the Minute Book of the H.S.M.F.A.A.
 20. Minutes of the H.S.M.F.A.A. 21 & 28 December 1892
 21. Eastern Morning News 24 December 1892
 22. Ibid 25, 26 and 27 January 1893
 23. Hull Daily News 21 January 1893

made worse by the extremely harsh winter.

Concern about the long term effects of the depressed economic situation must have been exacerbated by the extent to which Hull felt itself to be a port under threat. After a period of rapid expansion in the 1860s and 1870s there was a period of retardation as witnessed by the census and trade figures. (24)

Whilst it remained the third port in the country, its position was not unassailable with the growth of ports such as Glasgow, and the imminent development of the Manchester Ship Canal.

By February 1893, therefore, it needed little to tip the scales in favour of rejoining the Federation. It is not clear whether Charles Wilson made the first approach, or if the General Manager pressed his advantage at a time when he knew Wilson to be vulnerable. There was a meeting of the Hull employers at the Chamber of Commerce on 25 February, to which Laws was invited and

"It was freely stated that the position had become so intolerable that further concessions to the Unions were impossible without handing over entire control of shipping business already hampered to an unbearable extent." (25)

It appears to have been at this meeting that Charles Wilson was finally convinced that his company should rejoin the Federation. He later said

"Mr. Laws came to Hull and by his explaining to us the wonderful results of the working of the Shipping Federation in other ports we came to the conclusion that our only hope was to join the Shipping Federation." (26)

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24. Brown Lucy M. 'Modern Hull' in A History of the County of York Vol.1 Ed. Allison K.J. in Series of Victorian History of the Counties of England O.U.P. (1969)
25. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.50 and Manager's Report to Annual General Meeting 2 June 1893
26. Sh.Fed. Minutes of Proceedings 2 June 1893 p.

What is quite certain is that as soon as the Federation could be sure of Wilson's adherence, and unity in Hull with the support of the Dock companies for their free labour policy, they immediately started to implement their plans to establish a British Labour Exchange. The Labour Bureau Agreement for Hull was approved by the Executive Council on 28 February and a local Committee was set up on 4 March, of which Arthur Wilson was chairman. (27)

On the morning of 20 March a free labour bureau was opened and the following announcement posted about the docks.

"To Working-men - The employers of labour in connection with the docks and shipping at Hull have determined in order to facilitate the conduct of the business of the port, in employing labour in future, to give preference to men who are registered at the British Labour Exchange ... and all respectable, steady workmen are invited to register their names, free of expense, and thus secure preference of employment." (28)

It was reported that the employers did not expect this to antagonise the unions, but the latter took the view that, should the bureau be successful, a dispute was inevitable. The sanguine attitude of the employers was in part based on the assumption that the high levels of unemployment in the town would ensure a ready adherence to the Exchange by a large number of labourers, particularly with the inducement of preference. If they could secure a substantial number of men, then their task would be a relatively easy one; they could implement their free labour policy knowing they had an adequate supply of alternative local labour. If, on the other hand, the response was only limited, and their

27. Sh.Fed. Minutes of Proceedings 11 April 1893 p.5 (York I)

28. Eastern Morning News 21 March 1893

declaration not universally applied, then it would be rendered virtually meaningless.

The unions, on the other hand, appeared confident of the solidarity of their members and the events of the first day supported this view, when only about eighty men registered.⁽²⁹⁾ It was also reported that on the Tuesday (the following day) the office was "not so brisk" as on the opening day.⁽³⁰⁾

There was an immediate response from the local branch of the Dockers Union on the day the bureau was opened; a mass meeting was held which was incensed by the employers' move, and the fruit porters resolved to refuse to handle Wilsons' cargo if they attempted to break up the union by employing free labour. As a result of this, some sectors of the local press felt a struggle was imminent.⁽³¹⁾ It was under these circumstances that the local branch of the Dockers' Union sent for their General Secretary, Ben Tillet. He took a more circumspect attitude, saying

"He did not want the men in Hull to be at all anxious about the starting of this Labour Bureau. First of all they must avoid it. It would die itself; but they must not get angry and take any action unless they had definite instructions from their leaders. He did not want them to lose their level headedness."⁽³²⁾

His prophecy that the bureau would die was based on some evidence and was not just wishful thinking. Unless the

29. Ibid

30. Hull Daily News 25 March 1893

31. Ibid

32. Ibid

employers could get adequate free labour their hands were tied. When the Exchange first opened, men at the Albert Dock were told they would not be allowed to work until they took the Federation 'ticket', they declined, and "were allowed to proceed without further notice being taken." (33)

The dispute at this stage centred on the dockers. It was not until 28 March that the local seamen became concerned, stating that should the dockers take action and strike, the seamen would support them. (34) The Council of the Federated Trade and Labour Unions, connected with the Humber Ports, met on 27 March. (35) It was reported that after a lengthy discussion the following resolution was unanimously adopted.

"This Federation of trade and labour unions ... hereby pledges itself to resist the action of the so-called Free Labour Exchange, as its object is to undermine and smash our trades unions, which have done so much to improve the condition of the workers." (36)

For the employers, the position was a difficult one. Having made their stand they had no alternative but to carry it through, but to be successful this necessitated a more

33. Ibid

34. Minutes of the H.S.M.F.A.A. 28 March 1893

35. The societies represented were:- N.A.S.F.U., H.S.M.F.A.A., Engine and Cranemen's Society, Coal Miners' and Fitters, Lightermen and Watermen, Gasworkers (Hull and Hessle), Railworkers' Union, Millers, Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, Dockers and the National Labour Federation.

36. Hull News 1 April 1893

positive overt response from labour. Either there must be substantial support from the men for the bureau, thus severely undermining the hold of the Union; or there must be complete rejection of the declaration, thus implying some form of dispute which would justify the employers' use of imported free labour. Since the first response had not been forthcoming, it was necessary to press the free labour policy. In a letter to the local newspapers, Charles Wilson stated he was quite ready to

"meet the men, if they wish it, as it will be most serious if free labour is imported." (37)

Since the lack of local response made importation more likely, the local Labour Bureau Committee were quick to justify their stand, and offer reassurance that they did not intend to use the Exchange to reduce wages and hoped the decision they had come to would be supported by "the public opinion." (38) The manifesto, issued to explain their position, stated

"For some time past the aggressive and annoying actions of those responsible for the direction of the Dockers' Union in Hull have been of such a nature as to seriously interfere with the free conduct of the Shipping, Commercial and other manufacturing operations in the Port ... For the information of the public and at the same time those most concerned - the workmen themselves - a few recent cases of the action of the union are set out below." (39)

37. Ibid

38. Ibid

39. Eastern Morning News 1 April 1893

In the main these were incidents which the employers regarded as direct interference with commercial freedom and management. For example, dockers objecting to crews working winches or opening bags of wheat in the hold, or attempts to create union shops in the saw mills and some factories. The incident, also mentioned, which has since come to be regarded as the precipitatory cause of the subsequent strike,⁽⁴⁰⁾ was the stoppage of the coal keels belonging to Wilsons, which had in fact taken place over a month earlier on 20 February.

Whilst this was undoubtedly one incident, along with many others, which influenced Wilsons to rejoin the Federation, and consequently the setting up of the Labour Exchange, it did not directly precipitate the strike. The keels, in fact, were left undischarged for almost five weeks without any action being taken by the employers. As Mr. Gregson, Secretary of the Labour Bureau Committee pointed out.

"It was not convenient at the moment to take action; it was left over for five or six weeks." (41)

However, the employers were anxious to illustrate how right they had been to open the Exchange and declare for free labour, and such an incident played into their hands. They

40. Clegg H.A., Fox Alan and Thompson A.F. op. cit p.80

41. Sh.Fed. Minutes of Proceedings 11 April 1893 (York I)p.5

undoubtedly saw the advantage of claiming the incident as the cause, as the following exchange between Gregson and Wilson illustrates:

Mr. Gregson: "The immediate cause of the strike arose from two very simple things - one was the barges ... some barges belonging to the firm Wilsons

Mr. C. Wilson "I think we had better say that really was the cause of taking action." (42)

Shortly after the strike Wilson again confirmed this point

"We thought then the time had come to have some positive data to go upon, and we purposely, to some extent left those barges as an evidence of the result of the Dockers' Union action." (43)

The second of the two incidents Gregson referred to as the cause may be seen to have more direct implications for the strike; however, this was not referred to in the manifesto. The SS Provincia, apparently a Shipping Federation vessel that regularly traded in Hull, became involved in a dispute over the allocation of stevedores. She had, at the end of February, been addressed to the firm of Messrs. Atkinsons in Hull, whose stevedore was Crosland. On her return a few weeks later she was consigned not to Atkinsons but to Messrs. Thomas Wilson whose stevedore was Coleman. (44) This change in allocation resulted in the dockers withdrawing their labour and refusing to discharge the vessel. (45)

42. Ibid

43. Sh.Fed. Minutes of Proceedings 2 June 1893

44. The intimation in reports is that the vessel had previously been consistently consigned to Messrs. Atkinsons, and it may well be more than coincidence that the consignee was changed to Messrs. Wilson at this particularly sensitive time.

45. Express 1 April 1893

The reason for the action was the existence of an agreement between the Stevedores' Association, consisting of nine firms, and the Dockers' Union to which they were affiliated. This was a five year agreement which provided for the specific allocation of vessels trading regularly in Hull to particular stevedore firms; failure on the part of stevedores to comply resulting in a fine of £30. An agreement which would, of course, provide for a fair share of work and labour and, for the stevedore, price stability. The system appears initially to have been accepted by the shipowners, but they were now anxious to break it in the interests of their right to freedom of contract. (46)

The Provincia lay undischarged for three days, when it was planned to move her to the Albert Dock to be discharged by free labour. It was necessary to make the move since this dock was enclosed and so the free labour could be properly protected. However, attempts to move the vessel were thwarted by the refusal, firstly of the captain of the tug, and later by the crew when they discovered that free labour was to be used. (47)

The Hull dockers were incensed by this action, no doubt aware of the threat of importation of labour, but Tillet was

46. Sh.Fed. Minutes of Proceedings 11 April and 2 June 1893 p.38

47. Hull News 1 April 1893

still anxious to avoid precipitate action.

"He wanted to avoid a conflict, and was willing to meet the employers round the conciliation board, and discuss matters with them, with a view to arrival at a pacific settlement, but they would resist with all their strength the attempt which was being made to smash their union and reduce wages." (48)

This course of action was that traditionally followed in the port, particularly by Charles Wilson, and he had already offered to meet the men. At a branch of the Dockers' Union consisting mainly of Wilsons' employees, a resolution was passed expressing

"their anxiety to avoid any calamity to labour ... and request that he Wilson shall call a meeting to consider the question at issue at the earliest possible opportunity." (49)

A similar desire was voiced by the Hull Trades and Labour Council. However, Charles Wilson was only prepared to meet his own men, but he did wish to

"avoid, if possible, the loss they will sustain from the action of their leaders." (50)

If anything, the dominant attitude among the leadership was one of circumspection. At a meeting of the labour movement on 1 April, Councillor Millington, President of

48. Eastern Morning News 30 March 1893

49. Ibid

50. Ibid

the Hull Trades and Labour Council, "hoped that they were not going to sound any severe battle-cry."⁽⁵¹⁾; the meeting was intended to make attempts at conciliation; Tillet, in his address, urged the men

"to be well controlled ... and not to do anything unless instructed,"

a point reiterated by the local branch secretary.⁽⁵²⁾

Havelock Wilson was also present at this meeting, and whilst he claimed that "he did not believe in fighting" and was "as peaceable a man as they would find anywhere," he was more openly convinced that a struggle would ensue.

"He hoped sincerely, however, that no fight would take place, but, if it did, then he said - whether dockers, sailors or firemen - they should roll up their sleeves and take a holiday until the thing was removed from their midst." ⁽⁵³⁾

The problem the dockers' leaders faced was how to avoid precipitate local action that would result in defeat, thus undermining the viability of the national organisation, since at this time its strength lay in Hull. Furthermore, the Union's funds were low, and financing any substantial strike would be difficult, if not impossible. It was important, therefore, to ensure the active support of the F.T.L.U. so that if a dispute became inevitable there would be a united front on the part of labour.

The conciliatory note may have been struck to some extent to gain time for the federated union to commit themselves, since such decisions had to be made by each individual affiliation. In addition, of course, the labour leaders were just as aware as the employers of the need for a reasonable attitude in order not to unduly antagonise

52. Ibid

53. Ibid

'public opinion.'

While the labour leadership was apparently attempting to conciliate, the employers were finalising their plans for the ultimatum due to come into force on 4 April. If they were to import labour, then considerable preparation was necessary in terms of accommodation, food and protection. However, at this stage the employers Committee do not appear to have

"anticipated at this time that a large number of men would be required." (54)

A point confirmed during the strike by an Assistant Secretary, Cuthbert Laws, (55)

"The employers had not expected a general strike, and were not prepared for it and were, therefore, somewhat at a disadvantage." (56)

This implies that the employers assumed, with the high unemployment in Hull, that once they had shown firmness of purpose there would be a fairly general acceptance of the situation by the dockers; and furthermore, any strike was unlikely to spread widely in the port.

The preparation was undertaken with the participation of the Shipping Federation, with George Laws present throughout. On Easter Monday, 3 April a full meeting of the Labour Exchange Committee was held to decide the tactics for the following day. It was argued that

"Mr. Chas. Wilson should address a meeting of the men, requesting them to agree to the following three conditions, viz.,

1. The British Labour Exchange in Hull to be kept open.
2. No objections to be raised against any workman on account of him belonging or not belonging to any Union.
3. Foremen and shipping clerks to be independent of the Dockers' Union." (57)

54. Sh.Fed.

55. The son of G.A. Laws

56. Eastern Morning News

57. Ibid

If these conditions were not accepted, the Federation would import 250 labourers from London to work the boycotted vessels.

The reason the terms were to be presented in this way was apparently because Charles Wilson felt

"rather bound to his men to meet them and consult with them on the situation." (58)

It is interesting to note that the wording in the report of the Committee meeting refers to Wilson "addressing a meeting" of the men, whereas he is reported as using the words "consult with them." This is an illustration of the dichotomy with which Wilson was faced. His paternalistic liberalism which dictated personal consultation and negotiation, was under pressure; now he had joined the Shipping Federation he was committed to their stance which had always been one of 'no negotiation' under any circumstances. He was later anxious to assure his colleagues of his new found loyalty that the meeting was

"not a conference with them but their acceptance of the terms they had to accept." (59)

This confusion of attitude and approach was one which Wilson found extremely difficult to resolve throughout the dispute.

It was arranged that Charles Wilson would address the men on the afternoon of 4 April. He appears to have thought he would be addressing only his own men, which would number two or three hundred; he was however faced with a very large

58. Sh.Fed. (York 1) op cit p.7

59. Ibid p.8

crowd, estimated variously as between 4,000 and 5,000 by the Federation and the local press made a moderate estimate of 6,000 or 7,000 people. (60)

Having first made clear that he was speaking on behalf of all the employers in Hull, he stated that

"we will be masters in the management of our own business."

He then went on to outline the three conditions on which they intended to manage their own business, and which could not be negotiated. In an apparent attempt to moderate the tone of the statement he reiterated the moves were not of his choosing.

"You may look upon me as a friend or an enemy, but, at any rate, you cannot help admitting this, that I have spent my business life in Hull trying to find employment for the working class of Hull - and that I was - and you must also bear this in mind, the last of all to join the Shipping Federation, hoping that it would be entirely unnecessary." (61)

He concluded by saying

"They were now going to try an experiment. They did not ask the men to leave their union, nor did they ask for any reduction in wages; but they did ask that those who did not wish to be in the union should not be prevented from working." (62)

Tillet made a reply to Wilson's speech the same evening at a public meeting. He rejected the employers' "terms" but he again warned the men to

"keep cool and to behave as a disciplined body."
and that work should continue normally on the following day. (63)

60. Ibid and Eastern Morning News 5 April 1893

61. Eastern Morning News 5 April 1893

62. Shipping Gazette 7 April 1893

63. Eastern Morning News 5 April 1893

Following the importation of several hundred free labourers who commenced unloading the ships of Messrs. Wilson and Messrs. Bailey and Leetham, the situation deteriorated. Groups of dockers began to take independent action, but they were firmly ordered back by the union officials on the promise of a ballot on the strike issue that evening, the 5th April. Voting was to take place at the individual branches on the question "Were they in favour of a strike - yes or no?" There was an overwhelming majority, 3,500 to 5 in favour of strike action. (64)

The importation of free labour in this hostile situation necessitated protection, initially by the police. In addition to this, Messrs. Wilson went direct to the Home Office to request military assistance, and on the afternoon of the 6th, eighty 1st Royal Dragoons and one hundred and twenty Royal Scots arrived in Hull. (65) On the same day it was arranged for sixty five additional policemen to be sent from Leeds and twenty five from Nottingham. (66) These actions antagonised the local authority, who rightly regarded law and order as their province; however they also made efforts to initiate negotiations.

64. Eastern Morning News and Hull Daily News 6 April 1893
and Shipping Gazette 7 April 1893

65. Eastern Morning News 7 April 1893

66. The Bradford Observer 7 April 1893

On the same evening there was a mass meeting of the seamen and firemen. The secretary of the H.S.M.F.A.A. emphasised the unity of all sections of the working men in the port and that the dispute had been forced upon them.⁽⁶⁷⁾ It was unanimously resolved to stand by the Dockers' Union, and to refuse to accept the Shipping Federation ticket.

On the morning of Friday the 7th a group of Aldermen and Councillors, including the Mayor, persuaded Charles Wilson to meet representatives of the F.T.L.U. that afternoon in order to attempt conciliation and avoid the conflict which was becoming inevitable.⁽⁶⁸⁾ At this meeting Wilson repeated the three conditions laid down at the beginning of the week. The F.T.L.U. spokesman, Tillet, conceded that union men would work with non-unionists, and that the foremen and shipping clerks could secede from the Dockers' Union, providing they had an absolute right to form an alternative organisation. These concessions were only made on the condition that there was

"no systematic organisation of free labour conducted by the employers, and with the expenses borne by them." ⁽⁷²⁾ (69)

67. Eastern Morning News 7 April 1893

68. The Yorkshire Post 8 April 1893. The F.T.L.U. representatives were Havelock Wilson (N.A.S.F.U.), Ben Tillet (Dockers' Union), Mr. Maloney (Dockers' Union), Mr. Chesterfield (Dockers' Union) and Mr. Bird (Lightermen)

69. Ibid. Yorkshire Post 8 April 1893

This was a condition with which the employers could not agree, even had they wished to negotiate, since the establishment of the British Labour Exchange had been precisely so that they could regain their control over the supply of labour and commercial freedom. The Labour Exchange not under their control would not serve their purpose at all. As Charles Wilson pointed out, the unions unwillingness to work with those "belonging to an organisation connected with the employers ... knocks the whole thing on the head." (70)

The outcome of the meeting was reported to the Labour Exchange Committee by Charles Wilson and the Secretary later wrote to the men's leaders regretting

"that the proposals submitted are not of such a character as to justify a reference to the Board of Conciliation." (71)

As far as the employers were concerned the three points were not negotiable. This refusal ensured a general strike in the port.

"Sooner than was expected, even by those who anticipated further developments, the dockers' dispute in Hull has suddenly grown into a general and serious strike." (72)

This was the result of a conference of the F.T.L.U. when it was decided to 'block' all the vessels in the port and not only Messrs. Wilson and Messrs. Bailey and Leetham, as had previously been the case. It was estimated that about 6,000 men were on strike; these included members of the dockers,

70. Sh.Fed. (York 1) op cit p.25

71. The Yorkshire Post 8 April 1893

72. Ibid

lightermen, watermen, coal trimmers and seamen and firemen from both the national and local unions. By this time, Havelock Wilson felt the response to the employer should be a national one,

"if they would keep the pot boiling next week in Hull he would go to Liverpool, Cardiff, Glasgow and elsewhere, and light a flame there. A strike in these places would give the Federation a little more work to do. Should they embrace the opportunity? They might not have this opportunity again for many years." (73)

It is against this background that the Executive Council of the Shipping Federation met in York on 11 April to discuss the Hull Strike (the first York meeting). This was an emergency meeting called at the request of the Hull District Committee and was the point at which the strike assumed national significance. The meeting was unusual in the sense that it was the first time a meeting had been called specifically to discuss a particular strike. The normal practice was for these to be handled entirely by the District Committees, albeit in line with central policy and often with the assistance of the General Manager. This was also their first venue outside London, but this may reflect as much on the practicalities of gathering a group of shipowners together in an emergency as on the importance of the meeting.

The Hull Committee had been surprised at, and perhaps shaken by the speed and size of the unionists' reaction to their ultimatum and the importation of free labour. Therefore the strategy that had been agreed with Laws on 3 April

was now quite inadequate. The Committee needed confirmation of their position now that the magnitude of the task was such that there would be need for a substantial increase in the number of imported free labourers, and consequently additional financial backing. Primarily they wanted the Shipping Federation to

"entirely endorse and approve of the three points which have been laid down." (74)

but they were also, as the Chairman pointed out

"awaiting our instructions as to whether there shall be any interviews with the men's leaders." (75)

The meeting gave approval to the three points since these were completely in line with accepted policy. They were, however, concerned more with the question of negotiation or conciliation. One of the reasons for their anxiety that their first principle of no negotiation should not be breached, must have been the knowledge that this was the approach most preferred in the past by Charles Wilson. In fact in this meeting he appears to have hardened his attitude considerably.

"I was almost afraid we should have to say that the determination we had come to was that we must, to put it in expressive language, "Smash up the union," but afterwards I thought I was perhaps hardly wise in having gone so far as that. But really that seems to me to be what it comes to." (76)

Both Hull Committee and Charles Wilson personally were

74. Sh.Fed. (York 1) p.22

75. Ibid p.15

76. Ibid p.28

under considerable pressure to at least meet the men. As the secretary of the Committee reported, they had been approached on several occasions by the Mayor, the Chairman of the Watch Committee and other leading citizens who

"represented to us very forcibly, with all the power with which it can possibly be urged that it is a mistaken policy not to see these leaders of the men ." (77)

Wilson was particularly embarrassed by these approaches as they were made by personal political colleagues. (78)

The Executive Council were adamant that on no account would they sacrifice their principle of no negotiation, and they would not even countenance any interviews with the union leaders. Their previous experience of strikes had shown that

"this strike is running a normal course. We have had a very high temperature; now it has reached a crisis, and we have always found that when the men were beaten the leaders wanted to cover their own retreat, and tried to be the means of bringing about a settlement. Now, our experience has shown us that it is a great mistake to have anything to do with the leaders under these circumstances." (79)

Demands for conciliation were regarded as a sign of weakness on the union's part, whilst this may have been true as a general statement of past experience, in the case of Hull it was perhaps a misinterpretation.

By the same token, agreement to conciliation could be regarded as a sign of weakness on the part of the employers. There was also the fear that if there was any sign of

77. Ibid p.9

78. Ibid p.22 and 23

79. Ibid p.15 and 16

compromise, strikes might result in other ports.

"What Hull does will be quoted afterwards when the next fight takes place. The fight is in Hull today, it may be in West Hartlepool tomorrow." (80)

Havelock Wilson had, of course, already formalised this threat, but in general the employers present at the meeting gave it little credence. This was mainly on the grounds that once freights began to fall and the union could not prevent wage reductions, the men fell away.

Although they did not think that it would turn into a national strike they were clear that it was a national issue. This was in part because the national Executive Council of the Shipping Federation had become so overtly involved in what had previously been a local strike, as their well publicised presence in York emphasised. If the unions were to be 'beaten' nationally then they had to be beaten in a well unionised port, such as Hull. Furthermore, the method by which the unions were to be totally undermined was the British Labour Exchange, the dispute at Hull was its first major challenge and therefore had to be won. As the Chairman stated,

"This Hull strike has assumed very great importance and the Executive feel that it must be won at all hazards and at all costs, and that having won it, as win it we will ... There is no fear that having won this battle it will not only be the means of stopping strikes which have begun but preventing others from beginning." (81)

Whilst nobody doubted that there would be victory, there was some disagreement as to the length of the strike and

80. Ibid p.42

81. Ibid p.92

what it would involve in terms of the amount of free labour and finance. One shipowner said

"My own opinion is that with a little firmness two or three days will end the whole thing ... the Unions are absolutely out of funds ... they are half starving; their wives and families are starving." (82)

Others were not so convinced of the inevitability of the strike ending without considerable further action on the part of the Federation. One plan was to "smother it [Hull] with men and you will soon get over the difficulty."

With 1200 free labourers already in the port it was anticipated that a further 3000 would be required to achieve this. When this figure was put forward, Laws was dubious of the practicality of the scheme. In the first place it had already been shown that free labour was not necessarily easily recruited or retained, and secondly, although some thought that the free labourers could "protect themselves," it was recognised that importation on this scale would involve a high cost in terms of maintenance and protection.

In this respect it is perhaps significant that the closing item on the Agenda was the subject of making an additional Call. It was initially put forward as a formal question, since a Call was the requisite collateral for borrowing from the Bank.. The estimate at this time was that with the £8000 they still had from the last Call in September 1892, £23,700 would probably cover them

"through to the end of the year [September 1893] on our establishment expenses only and such claims as we have yet to liquidate." (83)

82. Ibid p.90

83. Ibid p.94

See also Appendix III

However, without the Hull Strike, Laws calculated they would need a further £2000 or £3000 as a loan from the Bank by September. It was agreed that if the 3000 men were imported they would need more, hence the need for a Call. The urgency for making provisional arrangements to borrow is illustrated by the fact that the Call was made at this meeting, arranged specifically to discuss the Hull Strike, rather than the usual quarterly Executive Council meeting which was only six weeks away. The meeting agreed to make a Call of 1d per ton, which was a further indication of their determination to be firm and "win at all costs." A communique was issued to the Press which included the Meeting's final resolution.

"that whilst expressing every sympathy with the men, no further communication should be held with the Union leaders, and that it should be publicly intimated that the employers are ready to give work to such suitable men as there may be vacancies for who are prepared to take the free labour ticket, whether they are members of the union or not." (84)

The Press was also officially informed that the meeting

"regarded the victory at Hull as certain, having regard to their past experience in other ports." (85)

The Union leaders were still prepared to conciliate in spite of the firm stance which had emerged from the Shipping

84. Ibid p. 79 and for example, Eastern Morning News 12 April 1893, Daily Chronicle 12 April 1893

85. Ibid

Federation at York. The Federated Trades Council attempted to arrange a conference with 'friendly employers' in order to "make such arrangements as will permit the resumption of work." However, no employers responded to this approach and the Conference did not take place.⁽⁸⁶⁾ The Council also issued a further manifesto encouraging the 1500 men on strike to stay united and reminding them that they should not return to work until instructed by the Disputes Committee.⁽⁸⁷⁾

The employers implemented their plan to bring large numbers of free labourers to the port and it was estimated that 1431 were in the town by the morning of 12 April and that there were 481 local men employed in this way. The military remained and whilst the infantry left, the number of cavalry were increased, and there were naval vessels in the Humber.⁽⁸⁸⁾ Their presence was the subject of a question and attempted adjournment debate in the House of Commons, initiated by Keir Hardie. He was informed by Mr. Asquith that the military presence had been authorised by the Secretary of State, so that order would be maintained in Hull and in no way to assist the shipowners in breaking up trades unionism. There was insufficient support for an adjournment debate.⁽⁸⁹⁾ The display of force was condemned both locally and nationally.

86. Eastern Morning News 12 April 1893

87. Ibid

88. Ibid 13 April 1893. The increase in the numbers of cavalry had been requested at the Shipping Federation in York on 11 April 1893.

89. Parliamentary Debates Fourth Series Vol.XI 1893 Column 117 and 118.

The representative of the Daily Chronicle wrote

"The longer I am in the town the more am I astonished at the action of the local authorities in sending for the military and naval forces of the Crown to take part in a strike on the side of the employers. For that is what it really amounts to." (90)

whilst the Daily News pointed out

"The plain fact is this - that two or three disturbances which have already happened were scarcely worth mentioning." (91)

The employers were quick to respond to criticism, particularly in regard to questions in Parliament, and issued a statement on 12 April, saying that their

"sole aim and object is to enforce the elementary right on their part also to combine and to employ both free and organised labour without let or hindrance. That is to say both the employers and the workmen to have the unconditional right to free labour." (92)

The supporters of the military in the port claimed that it was only their presence which prevented serious disturbances. Nevertheless, this argument was somewhat weakened when they went on to point out

"that the docks were unenclosed, and extended along the bank of the Humber for more than three miles, rendering sufficient oversight and control very difficult." (93)

thus lending credence to the view that the military were there to provide protection for the free labourers which could hardly be regarded as an impartial act.

90. Daily Chronicle 11 April 1893

91. Daily News 11 April 1893

92. Eastern Morning News 13 April 1893

93. Ibid

The situation in Hull had reached an impasse, the employers were managing to work some vessels but only at a substantial cost for importation of free labour and its protection, whilst the unions gained increasing support. The coopers and all men engaged in outdoor work at the Albert Dock had joined the strike, as had a number of flour millers and the oil millers. The Deal Carriers at a mass meeting, declared their intention to "stand firm to the bitter end," and if possible to organise national action. Men had struck in Cardiff as well as some in Swansea, and in Hartlepool it was the intention to block all ships. At the beginning of the second week of the strike the hydraulic workers also decided to take action; an important decision since this seriously affected the working of the lock system.⁽⁹⁴⁾

In the meantime the employers were endeavouring to solve one of the problems that had indirectly contributed to the strike; the allocation of stevedores on the basis of their agreement with the Dockers' Union. Several meetings took place in the early days of the strike, but with little success. On 13 April, the Union of Independent Stevedores made it clear that they could not comply with the demands of the employers who then threatened that stevedores would be imported from London to take their place.⁽⁹⁵⁾

The employers and union leaders continued under pressure to conciliate, usually under the auspices of the Mayor. A lengthy correspondence took place to this end during the

94. Ibid 14 April 1893

95. Ibid

second week of the strike without success. As the letters printed in the Eastern Morning News of 17 April illustrate, the two sides remained entrenched in their stated positions, the main issue of contention being the continued existence of the British Labour Exchange under employers' control. Raymond Brown states⁽⁹⁶⁾ that the proposals put forward by the Federated Trades Union of Hull Executive Committee in this correspondence were a virtual surrender. They are in fact basically no different from the proposals put forward following the meeting with Charles Wilson on 7 April before the strike really got under way. The only difference of emphasis was that the impartiality of the British Labour Exchange was stressed. Previously a Labour Exchange had been implicitly agreed to, providing it was not controlled or financed by the Shipowners; now its control by an independent agency was demanded. Neither a major change in stance nor a surrender to the shipowners.

A further pressure was, of course, the threat that the Hull dispute would develop into a national strike. This was a strategy to which Havelock Wilson was committed and he had left Hull soon after the strike started to get support from other areas. However, in this he was not really successful; it was reported that in Cardiff, his first port of call, and Newport, some steamers were stopped,⁽⁹⁷⁾ but there was little response elsewhere.

96. Brown R. Waterfront Organisation in Hull op cit p.77

97. Eastern Morning News 13 April 1893

A resolution was passed by the Albert & Victoria Dock men on 15 April that a strike should commence at 6a.m. the following Monday. However, this did not take place as a mass meeting was called in London to discuss the matter by the F.T.L.U. Clem Edwards, addressing the meeting, repeated the point made by other leaders that independent sectional action would be of no avail and that only united, co-ordinated national action could be certain of success. Furthermore, a conference of the representatives of the unions that went to make up F.T.L.U. had been convened for that day "in order to decide what action should be taken as a body." (98)

It was just at this point that it seemed possible a way would be found to break the deadlock in Hull. A meeting was held in the House of Commons, at the personal rather than the official invitation of the President of the Board of Trade, Mr. Mundella. This appears to have been a spontaneous rather than a pre-arranged meeting, since both Charles Wilson, in a contemporary, confidential report, and Havelock Wilson in his autobiography, maintain that whilst they were talking in the lobby with Alderman Woodhouse, an ex-mayor of Hull, Mundella happened to walk by and suggested a meeting to discuss the Hull situation. (99)

Those present at the meeting were the President of the Board of Trade, Mr. C.H. Wilson M.P., Sir Albert Rollit M.P.,

98. Eastern Morning News 17 April 1893

99. Sh.Fed. Minutes of Proceedings 19 April 1893 (York II)
p.7 and 8
Wilson J.H. My Stormy Voyage through Life op.cit. p.274

Alderman J.T. Woodhouse, Mr. Havelock Wilson M.P., Mr. J. Burns M.P. and Mr. Llewellyn Smith (Labour Commissioner of the Board of Trade.) The meeting lasted over two hours, but draft proposals were "agreed to for submission to the interested parties and a truce in the hostilities was recommended." (100)

The text of the proposals was as follows:

- "1. We, the unionists, are prepared to work with non-unionists, provided they are such of their own free will, no inducement or preference of employment to be offered.
2. No objections will be raised to the foremen and shipping clerks severing their connection with the Dockers' Union provided they are allowed the right to organisations of their own choice if they think fit.
3. The British Labour Exchange Registry and Shipping Federation tickets not to be forced upon the men, nor shall registration with any association whatever be regarded as a necessary condition of or give preference for employment." (101)

The proposals did not contain any specifically new points, what they did attempt to do was integrate the proposals from both employers and the trade unions in order to provide a basis for negotiation. Emphasis was laid on the fact that no inducement or preference would be offered to free labour, and the fact that, although the British Labour Exchange was to remain open, registration was not to imply preference. On the other hand, the link between the employers and the British Labour Exchange was apparently to remain, there being no reference to its impartiality as required by the trade unions. During the House of Commons

100. Eastern Morning News 18 April 1893
Shipping Gazette 21 April 1893

101. Ibid

discussions there had been some suggestion that the Exchange should be transferred from the Shipowners to the Board of Trade. It seems very unlikely that the time would have been right for such a move as the government was only making tentative forays into the industrial relations field as illustrated by Mundella's introduction of the bill providing for conciliation and arbitration into labour disputes into the House of Commons, when he stated that the bill was "of a tentative character, elastic in its provisions and voluntary in its operation." (102)

The truce referred to necessitated concessions from both sides, on the one hand the cessation of the importation of labour, and on the other the prevention of any extension of the strike. It was felt initially that these terms formed a positive basis for negotiation and indicated "a greater willingness on the part of C.H. Wilson to negotiate." (103) This optimism was extremely short lived. Although an authorised statement from the House of Commons claimed that following an explanation of the terms of the draft agreement to a meeting of the Shipowners in Hull by Sir Albert Rolit and Alderman Woodhouse

"the terms were favourable received and in Hull the prospects for an amicable settlement are regarded as hopeful." (104)

102. Eastern Morning News 18 April 1893

103. Shipping Gazette 21 April 1893

104. Ibid 19 April 1893. The minutes of the Shipping Federation Executive Committee meeting on 18 April 1893 are not extant.

105. Shipping Gazette 21 April 1893
Eastern Morning News 18 April 1893

the Shipping Federation would not countenance them. A meeting of the Executive Committee of the Shipping Federation was held in London on the 18th and in an interview with the Press afterwards, Laws stated

"We repudiate the whole thing. We have no connection with this House of Commons business - this ministerial interference with labour. The whole thing is monstrous. Its ultra vires, its illegal." (105)

It was arranged that a meeting of the Executive Council would be held in York the following day, the 19th, in order to meet the Hull Committee. The union, for their part, did seem prepared to give the proposals some consideration but the result of their deliberation was rather pre-empted by the Shipping Federation decision and the subsequent York meeting. Tillett however, declared that the strikers "will not abate one jot." (106)

The Shipping Federation were certainly in no frame of mind to make concessions when they met at York. Laws' statement of the day before appears to have accurately reflected their mood. The Parliamentary negotiations went directly against the agreed policy of the previous meeting and the very respectability of the negotiations, including as they did the President of the Board of Trade, and the venue placed the Shipping Federation in a somewhat invidious position. Furthermore, the presence of Havelock Wilson not only undermined their first principle of refusing to

105. Daily News 19 April 1893. The Minutes of the Shipping Federation Executive Committee meeting on 18 April 1893 are not extant.

106. Shipping Gazette 21 April 1893
Eastern Morning News 18 April 1893

negotiate with trade union leaders, since it gave their recognition, but since they were anxious to make it clear that the issue was confined to shore workers, they regarded this involvement as an impertinence.

The Chairman commenced the meeting by pointing out that the Federation had agreed to support the Hull committee.

"no matter what the consequences were. It was also distinctly understood at that meeting that there were to be no further interviews, or negotiations of any other description, and further that the matter was not now an individual matter ... but one which concerned the whole of the shipowners of the United Kingdom represented by the Shipping Federation." (107)

Charles Wilson in reply maintained that the House of Commons meeting was not pre-arranged and when approached by Mr. Mundella

"I can hardly see that I could resist the request of the President of the Board of Trade without it being publicly known ... in all probability it might have damaged our cause with the country at large if I had refused." (108)

Wilson and other members of the Hull Committee reminded the Executive Council of the intense local pressure they were under to negotiate. However, they received no quarter from their fellow shipowners.

The first formal resolution passed by the meeting made it

"distinctly understood that they were not in any way parties to the calling of the above informal meeting at the House of Commons ." (109)

107. Sh.Fed. (York II) op cit p.2

108. Ibid p.9

109. Ibid p.21

The Chairman then made the very important point that, in terms of the philosophy of the Shipping Federation, Charles Wilson did not understand the enormity of what he had done in agreeing to the draft proposals. In giving up the clause 'freedom of contract to employ such men as they deem suitable.' and to agree to the removal of any preference he had

"surrendered our liberty of choosing what men we think fit. It means we are to undo everything that has been done in the Federation up to the present time." (110)

Nevertheless, whilst the Council condemned Parliamentary interference and rejected the draft proposals as they stood, they did discuss them to see

"how far the so-called agreement will go towards furnishing anything like a basis." (111)

The reason for this appears to be some recognition of dissension in the Hull ranks over the Federation stance which is illustrated by the statements of a director of the Hull Dock company and a representative of the timber trade. The former stated

"we have to stand all the hurt of it. We have no interest whatever in the Federation. We are fighting it out with them to the best of our ability but we must not be asked to fight it out forever." (112)

110. Ibid p.20

111. Ibid

112. Ibid p.69

While the latter supported

"The timber trade which I represent has joined the Federation, more with a view of assisting in a general movement, ... than from any absolute necessity on its part, and it has been attacked and its labourers have been taken from it simply because it did join the Federation, not because there was any quarrel between the leaders of the labourers and the timber trade ... Now the strain upon the timber merchant and I dare say other merchants and manufacturers, would be so great if this strike continues ... it would be simply impossible that we should sustain it, and I would ask that it should be considered whether the timber trade and other trades leave the Federation, the Federation will be so far weakened that it may be beaten by the men." (113)

Not surprisingly this point was ignored by the meeting. It does indicate how essential it was that the battle should be won in Hull, since it was only with a wide base of support from employers that the British Labour Exchange could hope to succeed.

The main burden of the discussion at the meeting was around the issue of preference, whether the final resolution should include explicit references or whether it should be only implicitly referred to under the umbrella of freedom of contract to employ such men as were deemed suitable. The meeting was divided between the two views. On the side of explicit reference there were those who felt that if this was what was intended, it should be honestly stated, and others who saw it as an opportunity of making the defeat of the men more sure. On the other side there were those who saw the advantage of the broader statement, because it allowed them freedom to employ labour other than through

the registry, and there was also a group who saw it as a means of settling the dispute. These groups were not, of course, mutually exclusive.

The advantage of clearly stating preference, which was the principle on which the Labour Exchange actually operated, was that the victory, when it came, would be more complete. However, the disadvantage would be, as one member of the Council pointed out, a prolongation of the strike by some two or three weeks,⁽¹¹⁴⁾ a sacrifice which some members thought quite worthwhile.

The broader statement gave the individual employer much greater freedom, as an employer stated

"I have not abrogated my freedom contract. I have freedom of choice, and I intend to exercise that according to my own sweet will." (115)

Of course it also meant that there was less commitment to the imported labour than there was under any preference clause which could be the basis of their permanent employment.

The employers generally saw the imported labour as only a temporary expedient and were not anxious to retain their services. In the main the reason for this was the inefficiency of the labour since "you want 4 or 5 unskilled men to do the work of a skilled man"⁽¹¹⁶⁾ and the men sent from London were regarded as "most imperfect"⁽¹¹⁷⁾ since they only did

114. Ibid p.99

115. Ibid pp.95

116. Sh.Fed. York I p.52

117. Sh.Fed. York II p.72

"on an average about one-third of the work of an ordinary Hull docker." (118) In the event those who supported the use of the broader statement won the day.

In deciding the final wording of the communique there was concern to stress that the dispute and its settlement was concerned with shore labour. There were several reasons for this. In the first place, they did not want any confusion with the Federation ticket which applied only to seamen and was an issue which they regarded as settled in 1891. Furthermore, under the Merchant Shipping Act 1854 s147 the Shipping Federation were prevented from supplying seamen and they wanted to ensure that they could not be accused of acting in breach of this section. (119) Finally it provided an opportunity to discredit Havelock Wilson as a spokesman for the unions involved in the disputes, since the matter did not directly concern his union members. This was particularly important as he was the leader most involved in attempting to bring about a national strike, and such a strike of the seamen at this time would have been disastrous for the Shipping Federation. Rather unrealistically he was regarded by some as having

they "engineered the strike from the beginning and that he is the man who has put the torch to the fire and set Hull in flames." (120)

118. Sh.Fed. Minutes of Proceedings 2 June 1893 p.40

119. See Parliamentary Debates Fourth Series Vol XII 1893 Col.112 and 113.

120. Sh.Fed. York II p.116

The statement issued at the end of the meeting made it clear that

"these terms apply to in-shore workers only, including stevedores, lumpers, and lightermen." (121)

and then went on to state

"The following are the three proposals passed in reply to those formulated at the meeting in the House of Commons as a memorandum for a basis of negotiation:-

1. Unionists agree to work with non-unionists. Employers will engage any suitable men who are ready and willing to work in harmony with other men, whether belonging to a union or not. Employers to be at liberty to engage any stevedore, whether a member or connected with any union or not.
2. No objection to be raised to the foremen and shipping clerks severing their connection with the Dockers' Union provided they are allowed the right to organisations of their own choice if they think fit.
3. The British Labour Exchange to be kept open, the employers insisting on entire freedom of contract in employing such men as they deem suitable." (122)

This differed in two main respects from the employers' previous statements. Firstly, they refer to the problem of the stevedores directly, no doubt because they had been unable to resolve their dispute over allocation of work in direct negotiation with the stevedores themselves. Secondly, they expanded the clause relating to the British Labour Exchange to include the clause "employers insisting on entire

121. Shipping Gazette 21 April 1893

122. Ibid

freedom of contract in employing such men as they deemed suitable" because of the emphasis that had been placed on 'no preference' in the House of Commons draft.

This statement put an end to any hopes of an early settlement. The second House of Commons meeting, which Mundella had arranged in the hope that the draft proposals would provide a successful basis of negotiation was cancelled since, as Laws stated

"the Federation had had no official notification of it, and would not be in any way represented at it. If the conference wished to bring the dispute to a satisfactory conclusion, they would have to remember that the right of the masters to combine was just as strong as the combination among the workers." (123)

Charles Wilson sent his apologies to Mundella and Tillet gives this as the reason for the meeting not taking place. (124)

Not unnaturally, the strikers in Hull were frustrated by the intransigence of the Shipping Federation, especially as hopes had been raised by the House of Commons initiative. This frustration seems to have been manifest in some violent incidents which were only shortlived, (125) but brought in their train increased protection in the form, for example, of 150 mounted police from London bringing the total number of extra policemen in Hull to 350. (126)

No doubt the men's desperation was also related to their state of destitution. There had been fairly regular strike

123. Ibid 28 April 1893

124. Ben Tillet's diary 25 April 1893

125. For details see Hull press 21 to 24 April 1893 passim

126. Shipping Gazette 28 April 1893

pay of 6/- per week, but obviously funds were running low and the leadership made plans for outside assistance.⁽¹²⁷⁾ It was at this time estimated that 12,000 men were involved in the dispute.

By the end of the month, the Shipping Federation maintained that they had imported 2,500 free labourers into the port,⁽¹²⁸⁾ and even if there had been a substantial number of local free labourers, it would have been impossible to work the port at anything like its normal level of activity. The Shipping Federation were anxious to create the impression of normality. In fact, the port was getting progressively congested due to the lack of lighters. This meant the vessel could only be unloaded on the quay, and there was no cargo leaving the quays to be taken to mills and factories up the river. In these circumstances the way to create an impression of activity was to avoid

"delay in the sailing of the weekly boats. That is a necessity. If you delay the weekly boats or the mail boats the strikers will at once say 'the port has got blocked; we are winning.'" ⁽¹²⁹⁾

Keeping the weekly boats operating could be a problem in Hull since the H.S.M.F.A.A., whose members were mainly employed in that trade, were fully supporting the strikers. In an interview with the Daily Mail on 27 April, Charles Wilson denied that there were any problems in the docks.

127. For example, see appeal for assistance from Dockers' Union dated 19 April 1893, published in the local press

128. Sh.Fed. York II p.133

129. Ibid p.136

He maintained they had only 'delayed ordering the necessary men in order to give the Hull dockers a chance'. Since the dockers had shown no inclination to return to work, this suggests there may have been difficulty in obtaining sufficient free labourers. He also complained about the attitude of the Eastern Morning News, which was showing greater sympathy for the strikers, by saying it was 'creating very great indignation in the town.'

In addition to the increasing problems of keeping the port open the employers were continually being subjected to pressure to accept some form of conciliation or negotiation. There was condemnation in the national press, apart, of course, from The Times, for example, in the Daily Chronicle of 21 April and the Leeds Mercury, and later in the Shipping World

"The Shipping Federation prolonged this industrial war by declining to treat with the leaders and officers of the men's organisations." (130)

At a local level there were instances such as a ratepayers' meeting held on 4 May where a resolution was passed condemning the Municipality for

"putting the town to unreasonable expense by employing extra policemen and military, and having taken a one-sided part in the industrial struggle." (131)

The town council, for their part, expressed the view that the employers should meet the representatives of the dockers.

"One party of the dispute have been conciliatory from the commencement, and had offered to concede three-fourths of their position. The Shipping Federation, however, will have none of it, they rely on their enormous wealth and influence to extract their own terms." (132)

130. Shipping World 1 June 1893

131. Eastern Morning News 5 May 1893

132. Report of Council Debate in Eastern Morning News 5 May 1893

On the same day there was a debate on the strike in Parliament and Mr. Asquith, whilst attempting to be impartial, said,

"I am only giving expression to the universal feeling which prevails in this House when I say that we earnestly hope a means may be found to speedily put an end to the dispute, and that a grave responsibility will rest on the shoulders of either party if they refuse to adopt reasonable means for that purpose." (133)

The Hull Committee of the Shipping Federation issued a manifesto "in view of the persistent misrepresentations which are made in regard to the attitude of the employers in this dispute." They concluded by saying their proposals were based on the principle of reciprocal freedom and they felt they could

"submit them with confidence to the judgement of the public and the scrutiny of every fair and impartial mind." (134)

The situation remained initially unchanged and during the second week in May, following a meeting between the Hull Committee and some members of the Executive Committee of the Shipping Federation on 9 May, the view

"was firmly expressed that the Federation cannot in any way depart from the principles laid down at York." (135)

On the same day, Charles Wilson sounded a slightly more optimistic note when he said

"we should be glad to receive overtures from the men." although he did add that any agreement would have to be "on our terms." (136)

133. Parl. Debates Vol. XII op cit Col. 92 and 93

134. Eastern Morning News 5 May 1893

135. Shipping Gazette 12 May 1893

136. Ibid

For the men's part, they seemed prepared to continue the struggle providing some form of strike pay was forthcoming.⁽¹³⁷⁾

However, on 10 May Tom Mann, Honorary President of the Dockers' Union, made an opportune visit to Hull and gave two conciliatory addresses. These attempted to 'take the heat' out of the local situation by discussing the wider issues and aims with which the trade unionists should concern themselves. He made two points which appear significant in terms of the negotiation which later led to settlement of the strike. Firstly, he made it clear that if the Federation would give a written undertaking that they had no intention of "taking any step whatsoever to destroy the union" the men would be prepared to go back to work, and secondly, a point more directly for the men

"it would not matter much to them what particular phraseology might be used -- they had trades unions at heart." (138)

These suggestions by Mann, although little different from the views expressed by Tillet on 8 April, opened the way for public moves to bring the strike to an end. The problems which emerged in the ensuing days reflected more the efforts to save face on both sides than insurmountable factors in the negotiation. On the one hand the Shipping Federation, following their Annual General Meeting in London on 12 May, sent a further 300 free labourers to Hull on a month's contract, and the local committee still

137. Ibid

138. Ibid

declined to treat directly with the men, insisting that all communication took place through a third party, the Mayor, whilst the men's Disputes Committee took umbrage at this involvement of those not directly implicated in the dispute, and maintained the final conditions of the settlement could only be decided by a joint committee of employers and workmen. Nevertheless, on 13 May the employers had a lengthy meeting and following this, in a letter to the Mayor, restated the three main points, known as the 'York terms', but offered an explanation of Clause 3, concerning the British Labour Exchange.

"that neither registration at the British Labour Exchange nor membership of any union shall in itself carry with it either preference or prejudice in regard to employment." (139)

This explanation did not emerge directly from this meeting, however. It had been submitted to the Shipping Federation Executive Committee on 12 May by the Hull Committee when they

"submitted terms of settlement offered by the men, who had agreed to the three York conditions intact, with an explanation of Clause 3 which your Executive conceded." (140)

The 'explanation' was in fact an amendment which had been agreed at a private meeting between Mr. Grotian, a Hull shipowner and members of the employers' committee and Tom Mann on 11 May. Ben Tillet wrote in his diary of the

139. Hull Daily News 13 April 1893

140. Sh.Fed. Documents Report 50 General Purposes Committee to Executive Council 2 June 1893.

strike, in an entry dated 11 May, after stating the explanation, exactly as worded above, that "Mr. Grotian is pledged to amendment" and that it had been agreed to by Tom Mann and Tillet himself, subject to "ratification and confirmation".⁽¹⁴¹⁾ This would suggest considerable private negotiation had taken place unofficially to ensure a basis of agreement before any public statements were made, a wise precaution after the fiasco of the House of Commons draft agreement. In fact, as early as late April there are reports of Mann having lengthy meetings with Sir Albert Rollit M.P., in the hope of finding some basis for negotiation.⁽¹⁴²⁾ It is also of note that neither Ben Tillet or Charles Wilson seem to have been conspicuously involved in this discussion, no doubt because their previous public stance made any compromise difficult.

Following minor manoeuvres for position, the men's Dispute Committee wrote to the Mayor on 16 May that they were prepared to accept the three conditions in the employers' letter of the 13th "together with the explanation contained therein."⁽¹⁴³⁾ Once this agreement had been made the way was open for the employers to countenance direct meetings with the men in the form of a joint committee to settle local details. From this point the strike reverted to being a local one, since the Shipping Federation could retire 'gracefully' from its official involvement since it could argue that, in spite of the explanation, the three

141. Ben Tillet's diary op cit

142. Eastern Morning News 21 April 1893

143. Hull Daily News 20 May 1893

clauses agreed as matters of principle at York had been accepted by the men.

The negotiation continued over the local issues for a few days more; these mainly concerned the details of the return to work and which groups of workers should be required to sever their connection with the Dockers' Union. Whilst this category was enlarged in relation to the employers' previous demands to include dock gatemen, weighers, bookers, gangsmen, berthing masters and assistant berthing masters, the employers did concede that dock foremen and assistant dock foremen could retain their union affiliation. (144)

Final agreement was reached on Friday, 19 May and work recommenced on Tuesday, 23 May.

The implications of the strike and its settlement were not immediately clear to either side. The employers had to face the problem of the enormous expenses of their campaign which could not be regarded as an unqualified success since they had, at least publicly, to sacrifice preference which was central to their philosophy, and perhaps more important, the efficient working of the British Labour Exchange.

A large part of the cost arose from the employment of free labour. Charles Wilson calculated

"that a free labourer, instead of costing about 4/6d a day cost from 9/- to 10/- a day without taking into account the cost to someone or another of housing him. Consequently we came to the conclusion that the cost of free labour was about six times as great as the ordinary labour." (145)

144. Eastern Morning News and Hull Daily News 20 May 1893

145. Sh.Fed. Minutes of Proceedings 2 June 1893 p.40

Whilst there are no available detailed accounts of the Hull strike, it is possible to make some estimate of the overall cost to the Federation. This, however, ignores the direct cost to the individual employer and the indirect loss through the dislocation of trade. In June 1893 the Finance Committee reported that it was estimated

"that the total strike expenditure together with the amount required to provide indemnity for members upon usual terms, will be about 3d per ton." (146)

A 'normal' call was raised on 1d per ton and netted in the region of £25,000. In September the same committee stated that the Legal and Indemnity had passed claims amounting to £19,233.19s.10d. (147)

In addition to indemnity claims, there had been an amount advanced from the Federation head office on account of the strike, which stood, in September, at £32,741 9s 3d. (148)

Apart from the question of the expenses of a major strike involving shore labour, the experience at Hull had also illustrated the problems of working amicably with shore based

146. Sh.Fed. Documents Report of the Finance Committee to the Executive Council 2 June 1893

147. Ibid Report No.59 of the Finance Committee to the Executive Council 29 September 1893. The following February the Legal and Indemnity Committee (Report No.66) reported that a further amount of over £10,000 had been agreed in respect of the strike. Some claims were still outstanding at this stage.

148. Ibid Report No.59. This does not include the cost of the extra police, estimated at £9,000 for which the local authority would be responsible, nor does this include the cost of the military. See The Times 1 June 1893.

employees in the employment of free labour. This was, of course, a basic requirement to the success of the British Labour Exchange.

For example, the Hull and Barnsley Railway and Dock Company in the report of their half yearly meeting, (149) stated that

"they had thought it their duty to join the Shipping Federation ... but they must confess to extreme disappointment that the action of the Federation had not been as liberal towards them as it ought... their Company and the Hull Dock Company could have stopped the strike at any moment but they relied on the liberality and good feeling of the Shipping Federation. If they did not come to a satisfactory settlement their dockers might not in the future, be handed over to the Federation without an absolute guarantee for their own protection." (150)

A director commented "they appear to have been bitten by the Shipping Federation." (151) A year later the claims of both this company and the Timber Association were still in the process of arbitration. (152)

The employers certainly did not initially share the view of the Times editorial which stated

"At Hull, as elsewhere, the New Unionism has been defeated, but nowhere has the defeat been so decisive or the surrender so abject." (153)

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149. Report of the Hull and Barnsley Railway and Dock Company 1893 in Ben Tillet's diary op cit
150. Ibid
151. Ibid
152. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.71 of the Legal and Indemnity Committee to the Executive Council 10 May 1894
153. The Times 20 May 1893

There was no reference to the success of the strike in either the Report of the General Purposes Committee on 2 June 1893 or in the published report of the same date in

Fairplay. As a later report stated

"The extent of the New Union defeat was at the time uncertain, and its far reaching effects have only lately been verified by admission of the leaders at their Trade Meetings ... one labour paper describing New Union supporters as 'demoralised and scattered by the devastating effect of the late dispute.' " (154)

This highlights one reason why the employers initially underestimated the impact of the strike; they had not realised the extent to which labour was demoralised and exhausted both financially and spiritually. For the dockers a defeat in Hull was virtually a national defeat since their main strength in terms of membership and finance lay in that port. An example of their demoralisation was the relative ease with which the employers were able to implement preference of employment for non-unionists within a few weeks of the end of the strike.⁽¹⁵⁵⁾ It is possible this had always been their intention, in spite of the 'explanations' in the settlement, particularly if the discussion over the advisability of overtly declaring in favour of preference at the second York meeting is taken into account. Furthermore, the Hull Dock Company had issued passes to the men which they were compelled to sign and by which the holder agreed to work with union and non-union men, an important condition as

154. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.57 of the General Purposes Committee to the Executive Council 29 September 1893

155. Eastern Morning News 10 June 1893
Hull Daily News 8 June 1893

imported free labourers were still working out their contracts in the docks. (156)

For the unionists not directly involved in the dispute over the British Labour Exchange, but who struck in sympathy, such as the seamen and firemen, the outcome of the strike was even less satisfactory. In Hull

"they freely expressed their dissatisfaction with the settlement." (157)

A dissatisfaction which must have been intensified when they found that in Hull for the first time preference was being given to non-unionists, or those who took the Federation ticket. (158) The local H.S.M.F.A.A. felt unable to make any stand against this move and it was agreed that "in regard to the ticket men use their own discretion." (159) There were attempts at several ports, including Hull (160) either to regain lost ground over wages or prevent further reductions, but these met with little success.

The Shipping Federation were correct in their assessment that

"The effects of the Hull Strike reacted severely on the National Amalgamated Sailors' and Firemen's Union, several of the steadier branches of which seceded." (161)

An example of the last point was the secession of the Grays (London) branch of the N.A.S.F.U. whose secretary, Mr. Mercer

156. Shipping Gazette 26 May 1893

157. Ibid

158. Eastern Morning News 12 June 1893

159. Minutes of the H.S.M.F.A.A. 23 May 1893

160. Shipping Gazette 26 May 1893

161. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.57 op cit

approached the H.S.M.F.A.A. under the guise of the New Seamen's Union, London, expressing the hope that they would work harmoniously together, an approach which was favourably received. (162)

The extent to which the Shipping Federation still regarded Havelock Wilson and the N.A.S.F.U. as the major protagonist is illustrated by their statement that the severe effects of the Hull Strike on the Seamen's Union meant they had

"ceased to supply the funds by which the earlier dockers strikes had been fomented, this removing the main source of disturbance and the controlling influence with the riverside workers." (163)

It is certainly true that the weakening of the affiliated unions meant that the F.T.L.U. could no longer act effectively. For example, the H.S.M.F.A.A. had resolved not to federate with any but local union with localised finance, (164) thus undermining any idea of effective national action. This potential loss of strength was extremely important because it was only unity of action, and the failure of labourers to respond to the British Labour Exchange through loyalty to their Union organisations that the Hull strike had lasted so long.

It is perhaps ironic that by the time the Shipping Federation became fully aware of the victory of their campaign

162. Minutes of the H.S.M.F.A.A. 27 June 1893 and Journal of Commerce 10 July 1893.

163. Sh.Fed. Documents Report No.57 op cit

164. Minutes of the H.S.M.F.A.A. 23 May 1893

on behalf of the British Labour Exchange and free labour, its main objective the control of the supply, had become irrelevant. The decline in maritime activity had resulted in mass unemployment and hence an overstocked labour market; the unions were defeated and in no position to make the employment of free labour an issue, even had they wished to do so.

* * * *

The extent to which the Shipping Federation were in a position to re-establish freedom of contract was not, for the seamen, the most important outcome of the Hull strike. The N.A.S.F.U. had had to come to terms with the Federation Ticket in 1891 and although it was used more strictly in some ports after the Spring of 1893 the position was only marginally changed. The three most important factors in the outcome of the strike were that the Union, and in particular Havelock Wilson, were dispirited by the lack of a national response to the threat of free labour; secondly the decimation of the dockers' union and consequently the F.T.L.U meant that the seamen lost the support of their allies without which much of their industrial strength was dissipated. But perhaps the most serious outcome for the long term development of the Union was the financial burden the strike placed on an already weakened organisation. In the autumn of 1893 it was stated that the N.A.S.F.U. had liabilities of just under £4000 with a declining income due in part to loss of membership and in part to

"The present serious lockout of the miners [which] had most seriously affected the union reducing the weekly income by 50%" (165)

The union attempted to overcome its difficulties by a series of retrenchments and re-organisations. The number of

165. Journal of Commerce 14 November 1893 also see

North Eastern Daily Gazette 14, 15 and 16 November 1894

officials were drastically cut, branches were closed and entrance fees were reduced to encourage recruitment. (166) These economies culminated in the voluntary liquidation of the N.A.S.F.U. in December 1894. The motivation for this was to avoid the union being compulsorily sold up to meet the creditors. Immediately following the liquidation a new union was formed with the same officials and membership but unencumbered by debt. (167) This new organisation was known as the National Sailors' and Firemen's Union which became the National Union of Seamen in 1926.

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166. Report of the Sixth Annual General Meeting of the N.A.S.F.U.
29 and 30 October 1894
Seamans Chronicle 14 July 1894 also see Appendix IIA
167. Journal of Commerce 15 December 1894

CHAPTER X

CONCLUSION

The significance of the Hull strike lies in the extent to which it clearly illustrated how fundamental the issue of free labour had become for both the shipowner and the unskilled by 1893. Since the unskilled, by definition, had no skill to bargain with they were dependent on effective unionisation to provide industrial strength which the acceptance of free labour would completely undermine. For the employers the establishment of the principle of free labour ensured they retained control of the supply of labour, or in their terms freedom of contract.

The crucial threat of an alternative labour force which free labour implied was not initially recognised by the N.A.S.F.U. At the time of its formation the assumption was that their membership would be respectable seamen and, as with the New Model unions, skill or at least experience would be the basis of their industrial strength. This was not as naive an assumption as later experience might suggest. Work in a sailing ship did require skill and considerable experience, and in a bargaining situation this was strengthened by the fact that many ports specialised in particular trades making substitution of labour less easy. Furthermore since previous experiences of unionisation had been at a

local level, where there was an inherent community of interest and suspicion of 'strangers', the threat of the use of alternative labour had been minimised.

It was only when the organisation achieved something approaching national coverage that the full implications of the technological changes the industry had undergone, especially in the years since the 1870s, were realised. The shift to steam, and the development of a three departmental structure, facilitated the use of alternative labour and undermined the homogeneity of the labour force. The union, and particularly Havelock Wilson recognised that to be successful in any major dispute it was vital to achieve effective nationwide organisation of seamen and to ensure at the very least the co-operation of other waterside workers.

However, the rapid growth of the union, from 670 in November 1888 to 60,000 in May 1889, in part due to favourable economic conditions and wage gains and partly a reflection of pervasive discontent, presented the union with considerable problems. To have created an efficient branch structure to absorb this massive membership in six months and co-ordinate a national policy was virtually impossible. The original organisation had, in line with its Amalgamated status, placed much emphasis on branch autonomy, since wages were negotiated locally, and this could only weaken central control at a time of enormous increases in membership. These difficulties

were exacerbated by the fact that the new members had little if any experience of union organisation and were, undoubtedly, attracted by the immediate opportunity to increase wages. This made retention of allegiance a problem, one already inherent in a seagoing membership, once wage rises had been obtained. The individual member was less likely to be committed to the abstract threat posed by an alternative labour force and, therefore, less committed to the union once the main objective of the N.A.S.F.U. had shifted from improvements in conditions to the establishment of union ships or crews.

It was in response to this broadening of the N.A.S.F.U objectives that the shipowners were prepared to subordinate their individual interests to the central authority of the Shipping Federation. Their preparedness to do so was based on the recognition that the resource of labour could no longer be used unhindered, Unionisation of seamen could be tolerated providing their only concern was conditions and wages, and in some areas were even encouraged locally. However this ceased to be the case when the unions placed constraints on what the shipowners regarded as their inalienable right to freedom of action in respect of labour. A right which was to be valued with the growth in the size of the capital unit, the price of which was primarily set internationally, whilst the variable cost of the efficient use of labour, under the control of the individual shipowner, was increasingly the basis of competitive advantage. The

shipowner equated profitable commercial operation with 'freedom of contract' that is the right to use labour as he thought fit. To a lesser extent there was evidence that the state was more prepared to infringe the liberty of the shipowner than had previously been the case.

The formation of the Shipping Federation was intended ostensibly as a united defensive measure against the 'encroachment' of the N.A.S.F.U. Its main method of operation was to organise sources of free labour thus ensuring their control over supply, and the employment of which would be an overt declaration of their intention to employ whomsoever they wished.

The implementation of this single and apparently simple aim proved more complex than even the most ardent supporter of the Federation anticipated. The ready allegiance of all shipowners was not forthcoming, since the Federation had little to offer the large company in ports such as Liverpool and Hull; these firms had the resources to deal with any union interference, and indeed some saw the unions as a means of obtaining reliable crews. In addition the assumption that there was a ready source of labour, eager to be employed and anxious to be 'free' proved to be a miscalculation. It was soon apparent the district based, self-financing, organisation initially envisaged was impracticable. A centralised authority with a nationwide system of recruitment of labour, and access to a permanent free labour force that could be used anywhere in the country, was essential if the Federation

were to succeed. This was to prove an expensive operation and disputes, where they arose, were costly.

The early success of the Federation consolidated its position and increased membership but even though the Federation Ticket became theoretically compulsory for seamen in February 1891 it was only introduced piecemeal. To some extent the Federation needed a major confrontation in which the N.A.S.F.U was obviously defeated and the principle of free labour firmly established if it was to put a decisive end to union interference.

By the time the Ticket was established for seamen the shipowners had come to realise that their commercial freedom could be as easily impeded by shoreworkers as it could be by seamen. To ensure their 'freedom' they needed to apply their free labour principle to the waterside workers, and particularly the dockers. This necessitated the co-operation of the Railway and Dock Companies in the crusade and this was by no means always forthcoming. The expense of the Federation's operations were such that the shipowners were anxious that other employers should bear their full responsibility, particularly once the F.T.L.U. threatened co-ordinated national action. It was to this end that the idea of the British Labour Exchange was developed so that the right of freedom of contract could be established comprehensively nationwide by all employers of the unskilled, and success in Hull, where the unions remained best organised, was essential to its adoption. Ironically by the time the

Hull strike was over the economic depression was such that there was no need, or opportunity, to make the principle of free labour an issue since the consequent plentiful supply of labour made union action little more than an idle threat.

The years 1887 to 1894 saw proof that the seamen were responsive to, and capable of, permanent national organisation and witnessed the commitment of shipowners to a collective policy for the employment of labour, thus fundamentally altering maritime industrial relationships. Whilst it can undoubtedly be argued that the decline of the N.A.S.F.U. followed upon the setting up of the Shipping Federation this should not be taken as conclusive proof of cause and effect. The formation of the Federation coincided with and was to some extent dependent upon an economic downturn in shipping activity. Its success was, therefore, underpinned from the beginning by economic factors which made membership more attractive to shipowners and would have, regardless of any employer activity, weakened the hold of the union over its members. It is impossible to assess the importance of the economic downturn but it is, perhaps, significant to note that in the next prolonged boom, in 1911, the N.S.F.U. was regenerated from a small nucleus despite the fact that the Shipping Federation had been operating a free labour policy for twenty years.

APPENDIX I

SEAMEN'S TRADE UNIONS 1824 TO 1888

DATE (Known to exist)	TITLE	COMMENTS	SOURCE ⁽¹⁾
1824	Seamen's Loyal Standard Association	-	Report for the Select Committee on Combination Law. 1825 - p.382
1851	Sunderland Seamen's Union	-	Collection of Hand Bills and Posters in South Shields Public Library Vol.1
1851	Seamen's United Protection Society (South Shields branch)	Conference 14 September attended by 12 branches	Rules for 1859
1862	North Shields Seamen's Protection Society	Members' contributions amounted to £287.2s2d.	Annual Statement 1861-1862
1866	Liverpool Seamen's Protection Society	500 Benefit members	<u>The Times</u> 10 September 1867
1871/2	Hull Firemen's Mutual Association	-	Fletcher B. 'A Local Union in the Era of New Unionism' p.10
1872	London Seamen's Mutual Protection Society	-	R.C. on Labour C.6708 Q 7606
1872	Amalgamated British Seamen's Protection Society	Branches in Liverpool (1878) Union of the Bull	Taplin E.L. <u>Liverpool Dockers and Seamen</u> p.55
	"	South Shields, Sunderland and Seaham	<u>The Times</u> 16 May 1879
	"	Middlesborough and Hartlepool	<u>Sunderland Daily Echo</u> 14 Jan. 1880
	"	Became suspect	See R.C. on Labour Appendix LCV and T.U.C. Report 1881
1871/2	Hull Firemen's Mutual Association	-	Fletcher B. op.cit. p.11

DATE	TITLE	COMMENTS	SOURCE
1873	United Shipping Trades Council Liverpool	Membership varied from 2740 (high 1875) 970 (low 1881) 'little known'	T.U.C Reports 1873 to 1881 See Taplin E.L. op.cit. p.55
1879	Liverpool Seamen's and Firemen's Bowl Union later became	-	Taplin E.L. op.cit. p.44
1880	Seamen and Firemen's Union (Liverpool branch)	-	Ibid p.55
1879	North of England Sailors and Seagoing Firemen's Association	Founded 30 April 1879 formed branches on North East Coast during late 1880s	<u>Sunderland Daily Echo</u> 1 May 1879
1880	Hull Marine Firemens Mutual Association.	May have continuous existences since 1871/2	Fletcher B. op.cit. p.11
1881	Hull Seamen's Mutual Association	-	Ibid
1881	United Kingdom Sailors and Seagoing Firemen's Association	-	<u>Sunderland Daily Echo</u>
1884	United Seamen and Firemen's Society - South Shields	-	<u>Sunderland Daily Echo</u> 25, 28 March 4 June 1885
1886	Seamens and Firemen's Vigilance Association. London	-	R.C. on Labour Q 2025
1883	"A Seamen's and Firemen's Society" (Aberdeen)	Existed a short time 1883-5	Buckley K.D. <u>Trade Unionism in Aberdeen</u> p.30
1886	Bristol Channel Ports Seamen's Defence League	-	<u>Bristol Times & Mirror</u> 27 & 28 April 1886
1887	Hull Seamen and Marine Firemen's Association	Amalgamation of the two Hull societies	<u>Minutes of Hull Seamen and Marine Firemen's Amalgamated Association</u>
1888	United Mariners' Benevolent Society	-	<u>Liverpool Daily Post</u> 12 & 14 Sept. 1888 and <u>Commonweal</u> 22 Sept. 1888
1888	Seamen's Union (Goole)	-	<u>Sunderland Herald & Daily Post</u> 23 July 1888

(1) SOURCE:- For full source see Bibliography.

APPENDIX II

SUMMARY OF AVAILABLE DATA ON THE MEMBERSHIP AND FINANCE
OF THE NATIONAL AMALGAMATED SAILORS' AND FIREMEN'S UNION
OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND 1887 - 1894

APPENDIX II A

ESTIMATES OF MEMBERSHIP AND NUMBER OF BRANCHES
N.A.S.F.U. 1887 to 1894^(a)

DATE	MEMBERSHIP	BRANCHES	COMMENTS	SOURCE
<u>1887</u>				
Nov.	205	-	-	Sunderland Herald & Daily Post 23 Nov.
Dec.	237	-	-	Sunderland Daily Echo 13 Dec.
<u>1888</u>				
Sept.	500	-	As date of Congress	T.U.C. Report
Sept.	-	3	-	'Seafaring' April 27, 1889
Nov.	670	-	-	Weekly Echo & Times 2 Nov. (Sunderland)
Nov.	-	4	-	'Seafaring' 3 Nov.
<u>1889</u>				
Jan.	10,000	-	-	Commonweal 12 Jan.
Jan.	10,000	-	-	Sunderland Daily Echo 21 Jan.
Feb.	7,000	-	-	Commonweal 2 Feb.
Feb.	12,000	23	-	Justice 23 Feb.
Feb.	35,000	-	-	Commonweal 28 Feb.
Mar.	40,000	-	-	Sunderland Daily Echo 4 Mar.
Mar.	40,000	-	-	Labour Elector 22 Mar.
Mar.	50,000	45	Only 28 actually listed.	'Seafaring' 30 Mar.
Apr.	54,000	35	-	'Seafaring' 27 Apr.
May	65,000	-	-	'Seafaring' 18 May
June	70,000	46	-	'Seafaring' 1 June
June	60,000	-	-	'Seafaring' 8 June
July	60-80,000	-	'gross exaggeration'	Labour Elector 6 July
Sep.	65,000	-	As date of Congress	T.U.C. Report
Oct.	-	47-51	-	'Seafaring' 4 Mar. 1890
Dec.	70,525	-	Claimed to be exact	Audited accounts as submitted to Registrar of Friendly Societies.

DATE	MEMBERSHIP	BRANCHES	COMMENTS	SOURCE
<u>1890</u>				
Aug.	70,000	-	-	Sunderland Herald 9 Aug.
Aug.	65,000	-	-	Sunderland Herald 16 Aug.
Sep.	58,780	-	As date of Congress	T.U.C. Report
Oct.	85,000	52	-	A.G.M. Report N.A.S.F.U. 'Seafaring' 18 Oct.
Dec.	60,000	-	-	Registrar of Friendly Societies Report.
<u>1891</u>				
Jan.	60,000	-	-	Fairplay 16 Jan.
Jan.	80,000	-	-	Journal of Commerce 29 Jan.
Sep.	78,400	-	As date of Congress	T.U.C. Report
Nov.	40,000	-	Evidence J. Havelock Wilson	R.C. on Labour Group B Vol.1 Q 9388
Dec.	20,000	-	Approximately	Registrar of Friendly Societies Report.
Dec.	-	80	Based on number of branch accounts	Annual Report N.A.S.F.U.
<u>1892</u>				
June	18,000	-	-	Fairplay 2 June
Sep.	20,000	-	As date of Congress	T.U.C. Report
Oct.	-	31	Based on number of delegates A.G.M.	Journal of Commerce 4 Oct.
Oct.	20,000	-	"approximately"	Shipping Gazette 28 Oct.
Dec.	20,000	-	Claimed as exact	Registrar of Friendly Societies Report.
<u>1893</u>				
Jan.	20,000	-	-	Shipping Gazette 6 Jan.
Apr.	18,000	-	-	Fairplay 7 April
Sep.	20,000	-	As date of Congress	T.U.C. Report
Nov.	-	30	Based on number of delegates A.G.M.	North Eastern Daily Gazette 14 Nov.
Dec.	15,000	-	Claimed as exact	Registrar of Friendly Societies Report.

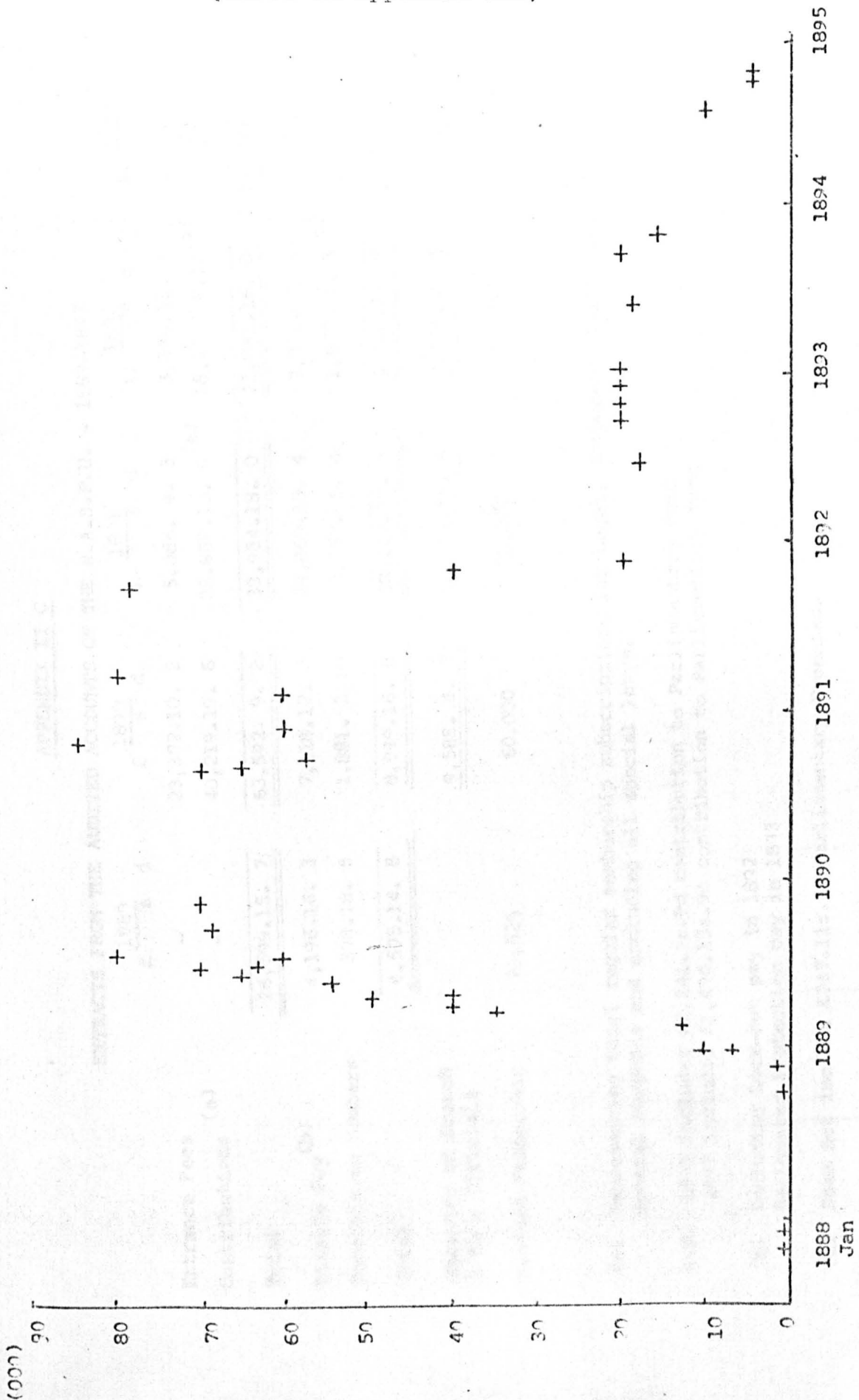
DATE	MEMBERSHIP	BRANCHES	COMMENTS	SOURCE
<u>1894</u>				
July	-	11	Based on number of branch reports	Seamen's Chronicle 11 July
July	10,000	-	-	Fairplay 13 July
Aug.	"a few thousand"	-	-	Seamen's Chronicle 11 Aug.
Sep.	5,000	-	As date of Congress	T.U.C. Report
Sep.	5,000	-	-	Fairplay 28 Sep.
Oct.	-	13	Based on number of delegates to A.G.M. Largely concentrated on North East Coast	A.G.M. Report N.A.S.F.U.

N.B.

- (a) As with all membership figures, these must be treated with caution; with reference to seafarers it must be remembered the figures may be distorted by:-
- 1) Special provisions for a seagoing membership, e.g. Rule IX Clause 9 "Any member who is three months or more in arrears of contributions shall be out of compliance ... If any member be six months in arrears he shall be struck out from the list of members."
(N.A.S.F.U. Rules October 1891)
 - 2) The use of Privilege Cards discussed in the text.

APPENDIX IIB

A SCATTERGRAPH OF ESTIMATES OF MEMBERSHIP OF THE
N.A.S.F.U. 1887 TO 1894
 (based on Appendix IIA)



APPENDIX II C

EXTRACTS FROM THE AUDITED ACCOUNTS OF THE N.A.S.F.U. - 1889-1893

	1889 £ s d	1890 £ s d	1891 £ s d	1892 £ s d	1893 £ s d
Entrance Fees	-	23,372.10. 2	5,086. 4. 3	3,594.11. 2	2,651. 7. 2
Contributions (a)	-	40,219.19. 6	28,868.13. 9 ^(a)	18,451. 4.10 ^(a)	9,447. 7. 6
Total	<u>26,599.15. 7</u>	<u>63,592. 9. 8</u>	<u>33,954.18. 0</u>	<u>22,045.16. 0</u>	<u>12,098.14. 8</u>
Dispute Pay ^(b)	4,196.16. 3	7,118.12. 2	24,869.18. 4	2,770. 7. 6	544. 1. 7
Benefits to Members	378.18. 5	1,881. 3.10	3,253. 1. 4	1,670. 5. 3 ^(c)	1,099.18. 8
Total	<u>4,575.14. 8</u>	<u>8,999.16. 0</u>	<u>28,122.19. 8</u>	<u>4,440.12. 9</u>	<u>1,643.18. 8</u>
Salaries of Branch & H.Q. Officials		<u>9,588. 4. 7</u>	<u>10,909.14. 4</u>	<u>9,779. 0. 5</u>	<u>6,929. 5. 1</u>
Audited Membership	70,525	60,000	20,000	20,000	15,000

(a) Representing total regular membership subscriptions for Legal, Shipwreck, Death, Sick Fund and General Purposes and excluding all special levys.

N.B. 1891 includes £2,241.9s.9d contribution to Parliamentary Fund
1892 includes £1,490.15s.9d contribution to Parliamentary Fund

(b) Including Lock-out pay in 1892
Designated Protection pay in 1893

(c) Does not include £247.11s.6d Parliamentary Expenses.

APPENDIX III A

DETAILS OF TONNAGE REGISTERED WITH THE SHIPPING FEDERATION AND CALLS PAID NOVEMBER 1890 TO JULY 1893

<u>DATE</u>	<u>NOVEMBER 1890</u>	<u>10 JULY 1891</u>	<u>8 JANUARY 1892</u>	<u>27 JANUARY 1893</u>	<u>12 MAY 1893</u>
<u>TONNAGE REPRESENTED</u>					
Steam	4,014,210	5,184,182	5,298,432	5,810,899	5,773,129
Sail	1,017,061	1,193,913	1,018,190	1,376,854	1,380,986
Total	5,031,271	6,378,095	6,316,622	7,187,753	7,154,115
E.L.A. (Liverpool)	-	723,716	705,666	744,046	705,666
Wilsons	-	-	-	-	148,116
GRAND TOTAL	5,031,271	7,101,811	7,022,288	7,931,799	8,007,897
CALL DATE ^(A)	1st Call Due November 1890	2nd Call Due April 1891	3rd Call Due October 1891	4th Call Due September 1892	5th Call due 1 May 1893 6th Call 4 July 1893
Amount of Call Actually collected	<u>£23,231.19s.8d</u>	<u>£22,277.18s.11d</u>	<u>£23,920.16s.3d</u>	<u>£26,300.0s.0d</u>	<u>£49,948.0s.0d</u>

(A) The Call was 1d per ton on steam tonnage registered and ½d per ton for sailing tonnage.

SOURCE:- Shipping Federation Minutes of Proceedings and Reports of the Finance Committee.

APPENDIX III B

EXTRACT FROM THE STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS OF THE SHIPPING FEDERATION
 FOR ITS FIRST ACCOUNTING PERIOD
 SEPTEMBER 1890 TO SEPTEMBER 1891

INCOME

TO FIRST CALL		
Amount received		£23,231.19s.8d
TO SECOND CALL		
Amount received	£22,277.18s.11d	
Amount outstanding (a)	£1,196. 9s. 2d	
	<hr/>	
		£23,474. 8s.1d
TO THIRD CALL		
Amount received	£1,252.15s. 0d	
Estimated amount due 4th October	£20,747. 5s. 0d	
	<hr/>	
		£22,000. 0s.0d
To Employers Labour Assoc.	£ 665.14s.2d	
To interest and discount	£ 197. 0s.1d	
	<hr/>	
		£69,569. 2s.0d
	<hr/>	

- (a) The main item in this total is the payment due from Thomas Wilsons of Hull which appears to have remained unpaid as the company left the Federation early in 1891.

EXPENDITURE

Expenditure at Districts (including cost of free labour, indemnity claims, salaries and rent.)	£45,298.11s. 8d
Central Office	£ 4,390.10s.8d
Travelling Expenses	£ 1,682.15s. 1d
Legal and Professional charges	£ 1,518.12s. 0d
Depreciation office furniture	£ 117. 6s. 8d
Formation expenses	£ 412. 0s. 0d
Balance	£16,149. 5s.11d
	<hr/>
	£69,569. 2 s. 0d
	<hr/>

APPENDIX IV

DETAILS OF DISPUTES AS REFERRED TO IN SHIPPING FEDERATION DOCUMENTS AS FROM FIRST ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING MARCH 1891 TO DECEMBER 1892

WHERE	REFERRED TO IN REPORT DATED	CAUSE	METHOD OF SETTLEMENT AND COST WHERE KNOWN
Cork - City of Cork Steam Packet Co.	10.3.1891 and 10.7.1891	'Political' Loading and Discharging (steam winches)	Free Labour, expenses for which were £7071. Strike lasted 3 months.
Dublin	20.7.1891 7.8.1891 27.8.1891	Dockers object third tally clerk, spreads as corn porters object steam winches and union men unloading	50 free labourers sent fully equipped from the Thames District, also from Glasgow. Cost £3,200 Dublin area organised by Federation.
Derry	5.9.1891	Quay labourers (unionised) object to steam cranes. Imported free labour made strike general.	Free labour imported. Steam established.
Bristol (July)	2.10.1891	Free labour employed by stevedores	Thames Free Labour imported - strike collapsed.
Swansea (August)	2.10.1891	Dockers v. Free Labour	
Dundalk (August)	2.10.1891	Dockers' strike	Collapsed when free labour offered from Dublin
Whitstable (August)	2.10.1891	Seamen's and Dockers' strike	Settled by Thames District
London - Hermitage & Carron wharves (September)	2.10.1891	Labourers strike (over union agreement to prevent permanent hands)	Free Labour settled it
Mersey (September)	2.10.1891	Refusal to discharge E.L.A. vessels	Free Labour settled it
Hull - Victoria Docks	2.10.1891	Increased pay for labourers 1d per man (General Strike called 1.10.1891)	Did not really take off - Federation not involved - wages.
Dublin (November 1891)	7.1.1892	Corn porters re steam winches	Lasted 10 days - Registry Office made over to Free Labour - timely notice given.

WHERE	REFERRED TO IN REPORT DATED	CAUSE	METHOD OF SETTLEMENT AND COST WHERE KNOWN
Mersey (November/ December 1891)	27.4.1892	Labour market disturbed 23.11.1891 - 15.12.1891. Steamers boycotted by dockers because of free labour	Employers Labour Association acting as Federation agents - no general strike because of threat of free labour.
Newcastle (January)	27.4.1892	Dockers strike re new stevedore appointed	No question of wages involved therefore Federation offered help from Thames but obtained from Forth district. Strike lasted two weeks.
	27.4.1892	January, February, March - quiet	N.A.S.F.U. have no money, are losing members.
Hull (April)	27.4.1892	Coal tippers - re free crews Isis and Rosalind - General Strike if free labour imported by Dock company	Attempted to get Hull organised with Free Labour. Legal advice re Hull Docks Co.'s responsibility.
Hull (May)	27.7.1892	Dockers disturbed throughout.	Order of Mandamus applied for but docks took courage, free labour withdrawn after problem solved.
Swansea (May)	27.7.1892	Dock strike	Collapsed as free labour supplied
Belfast (May)	27.7.1892	Union v. Freeman (Dock Labour)	Free Labour
Bristol (May)	27.7.1892	Grain porters strike	Free Labour
Cheshire (August)	27.10.1892	Striking barge and saltworkers objected to free labour	Salt Union applied to Federation for assistance - joined Federation as a result.
Swansea (September)	27.10.1892	Timber carriers not work with free men.	Receivers pleading strike clause not get other labourers. Federation had to send gangs from London - after notice to Home Secretary re police protection.
Bristol (November)	27.1.1893	Deal runners strike. Vessels blocked	Timber Merchants Association of Bristol approached Federation - they offered labour on guarantee of costs (in order to encourage cargo receivers to do their bit - strike clause saddles ship- owner with liability) Free Labour settled strike.

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