

Collective Action in Outport Newfoundland: A Case Study from the 1830s

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Résumé de l'article

Alors qu'elle acquiert une population plus permanente au cours du 19^e siècle, l'île de Terre-Neuve devient le théâtre d'un rapport de force entre différents groupements sociaux pour le contrôle de leur société. A Harbour Grace et à Carbonear, dans Conception Bay, les divisions et les coalitions sociales, sources d'une vibrante culture de résistance, se dessinent suivant l'appartenance ethno-religieuse, les liens politiques, et les classes sociales.

Cette étude s'amorce par un compte-rendu des différentes manifestations populaires collectives ainsi que de leurs adhérents et allégeances respectifs. Elle examine ensuite la violence électorale, lorsque la population tente d'obtenir gain de cause en répondant aux formalités politiques par des moyens plus informels. Vient enfin un volet consacré à la plus importante agitation populaire au cours de cette décennie: la grève des chasseurs de phoques en 1832. C'est alors que les pêcheurs parvinrent à surmonter leurs préjugés sociaux en entretenant des rapports de classe plus conformes à leur condition collective.

ARTICLES

Collective Action in Outport Newfoundland:

A Case Study from the 1830s

Linda Little

GIBBETED CORPSES, ominous letters left by a stealthy arsonist, disguised vigilantes on lonely roads, and boisterous parades of aggrieved fishermen were remarkably common in the Newfoundland outport settlements of Harbour Grace and Carbonear in the 1830s. At least 30 different acts of protest ranging from a solitary cry against injustice to a parade of up to 4,000 striking sealers were recorded over the decade, each one pointing to a strong tradition of Newfoundland resistance.¹

This paper is a case study of the towns of Harbour Grace and Carbonear during the period 1830-1840. The instances of plebeian collective action which occurred during this decade are chronicled and analysed, not as isolated incidents in the history of the towns, but as a series of events in a continuing tradition of resistance. Naturally, the forms of plebeian protest common in the mother country of England and Ireland were transferred to the new colony, as they were familiar and effective,² but also because common symbolism and ritual lent the authority of long-standing

¹Space does not permit inclusion, here, of all 30 incidents. For a complete description see Linda Little, "Plebeian Collective Action in Harbour Grace and Carbonear, Newfoundland, 1830-40," MA thesis, Memorial University of Newfoundland, 1984. There is some indication that Newfoundlanders indulged in a variety of types of collective action throughout the island dating from the earliest settlements. Contemporary accounts include stories of Whiteboys, faction fights, a United Irishman rising, mummifying, wrecking, and food riots. Little, 8-13.

²The literature on protest movements and plebeian forms of protest is extensive. Outstanding works dealing with the English and Irish contexts are: Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh, *et.al.* eds., *Albion's Fatal Tree: Crime and Society in Eighteenth Century England* (New York 1975); and Samuel Clark and James Donnelly, eds., *Irish Peasants: Violence and Political Unrest 1780-1914* (Madison 1983). See also G.C. Lewis, *Local Disturbances in Ireland* (London 1835).

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custom to a relatively new society.³ Protests were recognized for what they were by both the plebeian population and the ruling class when they embodied recognizable forms of resistance such as arson, maiming, anonymous notes, night visits, riots, and parades.

Newfoundlanders formed strong alliances within their communities. Most people identified with their own ethno-religious group; Newfoundland's Irish Catholics and the English Protestants occupied separate worlds in close geographical proximity. Social networks within these religious groupings were tight, encouraging ready organization and collective action. As strong as these ties were, however, they did not *prevent* people from acting together in the wider community to achieve common economic or class goals. The first part of this paper recounts a number of diverse collective plebeian acts, and examines the motives and social loyalties connected with each. The second deals with election violence where the population used informal means to affect change in a formal theatre. The third section is devoted to the largest plebeian disturbance of the decade, the 1832 sealers' strike. Here fishermen transcended their various social biases to work in class ways for their common good.

The towns of Harbour Grace and Carbonear are situated about five miles apart, on the north shore of Conception Bay, 80 miles from St. John's. Economically, the Conception Bay area was a relatively vibrant region of the island, Harbour Grace being second only to St. John's as a mercantile center, with Carbonear close behind. During the 1830s, more than 4,000 people resided in each settlement. This was a new population; permanent settlement had become the norm only from the beginning of the century. In 1836 Roman Catholics comprised just over half the population of both towns. The remainder of the population was mostly Anglican in Harbour Grace, and mostly Wesleyan in Carbonear, but each town had a significant number of people of the opposite Protestant denomination.⁴ Religion was an important factor, not only because of prevalent religious prejudice, but also because religion was indicative of ethnic background as well. The Catholic population was almost totally Irish, specifically from a small region of southwest Ireland, and the Protestant sects were from an equally confined region of southeast England.⁵ The relatively even demographic balance between the two groups made Harbour Grace and Carbonear more volatile than most other areas of the island where settlements were predominantly of one religion or the other. Most of the population was directly involved with catching or processing fish, but there also were small upper and middle classes of merchants, agents, planters and craftsmen. The two settlements were quite similar, but Harbour Grace was slightly more prosperous with a larger mercantile community, better farming, and smaller households.

³Eric Hobsbawm, "Inventing Traditions," in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge 1983), esp. 1-2.

⁴Census of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1836; *Journal of the House of Assembly*, 1838, appendix, 128-9.

⁵John Mannion, ed., *The Peopling of Newfoundland* (St. John's 1977).

In 19th-century Newfoundland, the cod fishery was the basis of the economy. Merchants outfitted the fishermen on the condition that the fishermen brought their fish to them. After the fishing season was over, the merchant set the price of fish, tallied the amount caught by the fisherman, and subtracted the value of the supplies. The final figure, profit or loss, was registered in the merchant's account book so fishing families could draw their winter supplies from their merchant's store up to the amount earned.⁶ If the family had not earned enough to keep themselves through the winter, the merchants often would see them through by advancing food supplies on credit, thus increasing the family's debt and keeping them in the service of that merchant. The system looked quite simple on the surface, but there were many wrinkles. Cod fishermen could occupy a variety of social positions.⁷ There were "independent" fishing families who owned their own boat and processing facilities, and who brought finished salt cod to the merchant. Merchants also bought raw fish and had it salted at their premises. Thus, there were people who worked on shore for wages or credit, those who owned large, decked fishing vessels which delivered raw fish, and those who worked on those vessels for a share of the catch. The Conception Bay fishery was further complicated by the fact that fishing and salting could take place along the coast of Labrador as well as in Conception Bay.⁸ Bay fishermen who spent the summer months fishing in Labrador and returned to their Conception Bay homes for the winter could also own property in Labrador, which allowed them to catch and salt their own fish, or they could work for others earning wages, credit, or shares.

Also important to Newfoundland's economic life in the 19th century was the seal fishery, which in the 1830s could be expected to provide about one third of a Conception Bay Fisherman's income. In contrast to the cod fishery, the seal fishery had a straightforward organization whereby men hired on board a sealing vessel and worked for a share of the catch; all sealers were essentially equal.⁹ Also, the seal fishery was not always conducted completely through the truck system, as there was a limited history of cash being used for at least partial payment in the seal trade in some areas.

⁶For an account of life at a merchant's counting house see Edmund Gosse, *The Life of Philip Henry Gosse* (London 1890), 48-51.

⁷Little, "Plebeian Collective Action," 56-65.

⁸For a description of the Labrador fishery and its social organization see Philip Tocque, *Newfoundland As It Was and Is In 1877* (Toronto 1878), 258-76; W.A. Black, "The Labrador Floater Codfishery," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 50:3 (1960); Thomas Talbot, *Newfoundland* (London 1882), 2-34.

⁹Contemporary accounts of sealing can be found in Lewis Anspach, *A History of the Island of Newfoundland* (London 1819), 415-23; Richard Bonnycastle, *Newfoundland in 1842* (London 1842), 130-5; J.B. Jukes, *Excursions In and About Newfoundland During the Years of 1839 and 1840* (London 1842), 251-322; Talbot, *Newfoundland*, 15-21; Tocque, *Newfoundland As It Was*, 304-7.

I

A COLLECTIVE ACTION is an act committed for the perceived benefit of a given group of people, and thus requires consensus about what *is* beneficial or just. Usually, many people are involved in such an action, but the size of such groups can vary from two or three to thousands. Acts committed by individuals are also included, provided that they involve an appeal to the community at large, or are meant to reflect the views of that community. The collective actions examined here might or might not have been illegal: their formal legal status was irrelevant to the perpetrators.

The case of Daniel McCarthy in 1830 provides an early example of a popular view of justice that transcended the law. McCarthy was a poor shoemaker who occupied an abandoned fish house with his wife and children as squatters for four or five years.¹⁰ When the building was to be torn down as a fire hazard, McCarthy refused to leave. The magistrate assembled a large body of special constables to evict McCarthy and his family, and pull down the house. McCarthy resisted. Claiming he was armed and would defend himself to the last, he refused the bail offered him if he gave himself up peacefully.¹¹ Magistrate Danson was appalled at McCarthy's lack of respect and reported that he had:

Threatened revenge on all persons concerned and even myself as soon as the *Kerry Men* should arrive from the fishery who would assist him and that before the following winter was over we should have very little to call our own, and intimated that our Houses should not be safe and defied all authority.¹²

The special constables refused to obey the magistrate's order to break open the door and destroy the poor man's house.¹³

The following day the door was unlocked and two regular constables were sent to evict McCarthy. They succeeded only after a desperate struggle in which both constables were wounded. McCarthy, his wife, and stepson were jailed but the magistrate was nervous about a potential rescue by fellow Irishmen, as it was something they had "often the inclination to do,"¹⁴ and because the "Lower Order of persons" in Harbour Grace "were elated at [the] resistance to legal Authority."¹⁵

Although McCarthy had been evicted legally, he still felt it unjust that he should be forced to leave. His claim on the property was that he had lived there several years and had nowhere else to go. The special constables may also have seen the injustice of turning a poor man and his family out of their house in the fall

¹⁰Provincial Archives of Newfoundland and Labrador (PANL), Incoming Correspondence of the Colonial Secretary's Office, GN 2/2, Petition of Daniel McCarthy, 18 March 1831; GN 2/2, Rogerson to Danson, 3 November 1830; GN 2/2, Magistrates' Report, 3 June 1831.

¹¹PANL, GN 2/2, Danson and St. John to Ayre, 1 September 1830; GN 2/2, Magistrates' Report, 3 June 1831.

¹²PANL, GN 2/2, Magistrates' Report, 3 June 1831.

¹³PANL, GN 2/2, Petition of Daniel McCarthy, 18 March 1831.

¹⁴PANL, GN 2/2, Magistrates' Report, 3 June 1831.

¹⁵PANL, GN 2/2, Danson and St. John to Ayre, 1 September 1830.

of the year, and may have been intimidated by McCarthy's threats. In any case, the appeal to the cohesiveness of the Conception Bay Irish community to stand by one of its members who had been wronged had a serious effect. Whether or not the threats would have come to fruition we do not know, but it is clear that both McCarthy and the magistrate believed that they would because of strong Irish Catholic loyalties in the area.

The following spring, passions were aroused over a more directly economic issue. In May 1831, a disturbance was reported at the Harbour Grace mercantile establishment of Hugh William Danson and company.¹⁶ A crowd was moved to action when the firm was declared insolvent, and the fishermen and sharemen Danson employed became anxious about the shares and wages owed them from the seal fishery. Apparently the trustees were unwilling or unable to meet the debts of shares and wages to the fishermen when the firm declared bankruptcy. When the news reached those concerned, fishermen retaliated by "forcibly possessing and rolling upwards of one hundred casks of oil into the street."¹⁷ The men threatened to destroy the oil, but the step proved unnecessary, as the trustees soon assured them that the sharemen would be paid their due that evening. The act was described as "robbery," a "riot," and an "outrage," but the fishermen obtained swift and fair settlement of their grievance. Although the fishermen may have had no legal claim on Danson's oil, they had a moral claim to their wages and it was on this basis that they acted.

The largest and most radical examples of plebeian collective action in Conception Bay during this decade occurred in conjunction with the 1832 sealers' strike. Because of its significance, the strike will be dealt with separately at the end of the paper.

The years 1833 and 1834 were particularly bad ones in the cod fishery, and the demand for poor relief was especially great.¹⁸ Hardship prompted a number of assaults upon local merchant houses. In spring 1833, Thomas Elsworth was arrested for violently attacking, and breaking the counting-house door of merchant Thomas Chancey.¹⁹ A month later, another man walked through Carbonear declaring that unless supplies were given to him and others for the summer, they would fire the stores. After assaulting almost every respectable person he met, he entered merchant Robert Pack's house and "grossly abused" Pack's wife before he was removed. Although the incident took place during the day and in the presence of many, no one attempted to interfere with the man.²⁰ In November 1834, Chancey's

¹⁶PANL, GN 2/2, Ridley to Entendant of Record, 31 May 1831; *Public Ledger*, 3 June 1831; Centre for Newfoundland Studies (CNS), Colonial Office Papers (CO) #194 vol. 95, 95, Prescott to Glenelg, 15 December 1836.

¹⁷*Public Ledger*, 3 June 1831.

¹⁸The administration of relief was a major item of business in the governor's correspondence in 1833 and in 1834. See for example, PANL, GN 2/2, Stabb to Crowdy, 28 May 1833; Harbour Grace Magistrates' Letters, Crowdy to Harbour Grace Magistrates, 25 February 1833.

¹⁹Harbour Grace Magistrates' Letters, file #15, Chancey to Danson, 11 May 1833.

²⁰*Carbonear Star*, 19 June 1833.

premises again were the target of vandalism when a man named Macky broke two doors and forced himself into Chancey's office where he used violent language to the merchant.²¹ When Macky was charged, he refused bail and was not penitent, but instead regretted he had not "gone through the window like a horse instead of going through the doors."²² Sensing strong public support for Macky, the constable who was detailed to escort the prisoner to Harbour Grace jail demanded an entourage of six or eight special constables.

All four direct attacks on the merchants' establishments suggest sympathy among the fishermen and a detached hostility towards the "respectable" and merchant community. Each protest suggests that principle, rather than desire for personal gain, was at stake: those who work hard all year deserve to receive enough to live on.

Burial customs and an accepted standard of respect for the dead were enforced by plebeian action when necessary in Conception Bay. Dissection and gibbeting were punishments used in Britain and her colonies for crimes considered particularly obnoxious.²³ Dissection played a dual role, supplying surgeons with cadavers for medical research while providing a dreaded punishment for the masses.²⁴ The mutilation and display of human bodies, regardless of the atrocities the criminal may have committed, was considered thoroughly repugnant by the plebeian population.

Public distaste for the exhibition of human corpses was no less prevalent in Newfoundland. In early 1834, a man named Peter Downing (or Downey) was convicted for the brutal murders of a school teacher, his infant son and a servant girl. For his crimes Downing was sentenced to be hanged and dissected. Whether that dissection ever took place is not clear, but the governor arranged for the body to be displayed in chains near the scene of the crime.²⁵

On the evening of 29 April 1834, a large crowd assembled in Harbour Grace to cut down the gibbeted body of the murderer.²⁶ In an act of defiance, the partially decomposed body was paraded through the town, past the Court House, and dropped on the doorstep of a magistrate, Dr. Stirling, along with a note which read:

²¹ *Carbonear Star*, 26 November 1834.

²² *Carbonear Star*, 26 November 1834.

²³ In Hay, *et al.*, eds., *Albion's Fatal Tree*: see Hay, 50; Linebaugh, 81; Winslow, 163. Burial rights and the place of burial were also important enough to spark action. In Ireland, Whiteboys executed and buried by the state sometimes had to be buried in quicklime to prevent families from claiming the corpses. James Donnelly, "Pastorini and Captain Rock: Millenarianism and Sectarianism in the Rockite Movement of 1821-4," in Clark and Donnelly, eds., *Irish Peasants*, 132.

²⁴ See Linebaugh.

²⁵ CNS, CO 194 vol. 27, Cochrane to Stanley, 15 March 1834.

²⁶ PANL, GN 2/2, Stark to Crowdy, 12 May 1834. The only estimate as to the size of the crowd puts it at "at least 1000 men."

Downing was hanged at the beginning of April when most of the working male population was away at the seal fishery. The body was cut down a month later when the sealing vessels were arriving back from the ice. It is reasonable to speculate that the men arrived back from sealing to find the offensive body displayed, and immediately united to cut it down.

Dr. S.

This is your man you were the cause of bringing him here take and bury him or Look Out should you be the cause of allowing him to be put up again we will mark you for it so do your duty and put him out of sight

truly

A friend

Anon Carbonear²⁷

The body was buried immediately at the Court House, and no attempts were made to have the incident investigated or the body gibbeted again.²⁸

In the nearby town of Port-de-Grave a similar incident occurred around the same time.²⁹ A planter named Snow was murdered by his wife, her lover, and a servant. The three were convicted and ordered to be dissected and hung in chains. They were hanged, but the obnoxious dissection and exhibition of the bodies was not carried out in this case. Although the Port-de-Grave surgeon was anxious to have the bodies for anatomical studies, the local Catholic priest interceded, claiming that the sentence of dissection and display had been remitted. The surgeon was unable to acquire them as specimens because a large and angry crowd surrounded the jail when he went to collect them. The crowd was successful in intimidating the surgeon, who made only token scratches on the necks of the bodies before giving them up to the crowd. The surgeon thus fulfilled his obligation to carry out his part in the sentence and avoided angering the large crowd. The subsequent funeral was reported as being "more like that of Martyrs than Felons," as the Port-de-Grave people celebrated their victory in preventing the display of the bodies.³⁰

Widespread public disgust toward a gibbeted corpse is thus evident. The anonymous note to the Harbour Grace magistrate demanded that plebeian concepts of justice be respected; "Do your duty and put him out of sight," the letter instructed. The people used their numbers effectively to challenge the authorities and enforce their standards of decency.³¹

An interesting contrast to these two examples of disgust about the exhibiting of corpses is found in the case of John Moxley's burial. Here religious loyalties challenged the popular beliefs regarding decent burial. On 28 February 1838, John Moxley of Carbonear died of self-inflicted wounds after the "cares and afflictions of the world became too much for him."³² An inquest was held and the family was granted a warrant to bury the body in the regular manner. Moxley, however, was a Catholic and as a suicide had died in a state of mortal sin; his body was refused

²⁷PANL, GN 2/2, Stirling and Danson to Crowdy, 30 April 1834, (encl).

²⁸PANL, GN 2/2, Harbour Grace Magistrates to Crowdy, 30 April 1834.

²⁹CNS, CO 194 vol. 87, Cochrane to Stanley, 15 March 1834.

³⁰*Ibid.*

³¹PANL, GN 2/2, Stark to Crowdy, 12 May 1834; CNS, CO 194 vol. 95, Prescott to Glenelg, 15 December 1836 (encl.).

³²*Carbonear Star*, 7 March 1838. Moxley left a widow, eight children, numerous debts, and an estate worth only £5. This may account for his slashing his own throat with his razor.

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interment in the Catholic cemetery. The body was to be buried in the Anglican graveyard at the direction of Stark, the coroner and magistrate, and it was carried there, accompanied by about 100 people.³³ News of the burial circulated rapidly and 30 or 40 Anglican church parishioners immediately assembled to prevent the indignity of having a Catholic body, rejected by the Catholics themselves, buried in their churchyard.³⁴ The body was not buried that evening, as frozen ground kept the gravediggers busy for two days, but the intent was clear. The following day, the minister could not get the people to enter the church for worship and had difficulty restraining the crowd. Tension was heightened by the continuing work of the gravediggers, but the minister was able to keep the peace by appointing a committee to deal with the matter.³⁵

The law dictated that the coroner had the authority to direct the interment of anyone's body who had died of suicide in any burial ground which, looking to the religion of the deceased person, he considered expedient.³⁶ Anglican church parishioners were not as concerned with the laws on the books as they were with their consecrated churchyard being used for burying the corpses of Catholics, especially of sinners. The grave was finished and the body buried on 4 March, but that same night the body was dug up and carried off about three quarters of a mile from the churchyard.³⁷ The coffin was badly abused and the head and shoulders of the body were visible. The constables believed, on the basis of threats and intimidation that the people from the Anglican church had removed the body..³⁸ The body was retrieved and buried again by the constables according to the original warrant.

On 9 March the grave was again opened and the naked body dragged out of the coffin and off over the snow. It was believed that the corpse had been tossed into the sea until it was found again, five days later, at nearby Crocker's Cove.³⁹ A constable reported that he had met 150 men carrying the body, wrapped in mats, back to the churchyard in Carbonear.⁴⁰ Who these men were is unknown. They may have been Catholics insisting on a burial for their co-religionist. They may have been Anglicans who felt the insults to the body had gone too far and were willing to make concessions. This is possible in light of the earlier affair over the public display of Downing's body. Whatever the reasoning the corpse was dropped at the churchyard but

no person in Carbonear, for love or money would help to bury the body, either in the Churchyard or assist in carrying it back in the Woods for interment.⁴¹

³³PANL, GN 2/2, Collings *et al.* to Crowdy, 4 March 1838.

³⁴PANL, GN 2/2, Collings *et al.* to Crowdy, 4 March 1838.

³⁵PANL, GN 2/2, Collings *et al.* to Crowdy, 4 March 1838.

³⁶PANL, GN 2/1/41, Crowdy to Stark, 9 March 1838.

³⁷PANL, GN 2/2, Stark to Crowdy, 8 March 1838.

³⁸PANL, GN 2/2, Stark to Crowdy, 8 March 1838, (encl.).

³⁹PANL, GN 2/2, Stark to Crowdy, 12 March 1838; PANL, GN 2/2, Stark to Crowdy, 15 March 1838.

⁴⁰PANL, GN 2/2, Stark to Crowdy, 15 March 1838.

⁴¹PANL, GN 2/2, Stark to Crowdy, 15 March 1838.

The constables had a new coffin made (for the sake of decency) and buried the body privately that night. The coroner received a threat that the body would be left at his doorstep but he continued to insist on having Moxley buried at the originally proposed site.⁴² The following night the corpse was disturbed for the last time, this time by Moxley's friends. Four of them dug up the coffin and buried it back in the woods where it likely would not be interfered with again.⁴³

The Anglicans were undoubtedly and understandably upset by the idea of having their consecrated ground used to bury the bodies of people rejected by their Catholic neighbours. The rumour of the burial sparked instant reaction in the crowd which assembled to intervene. They were willing to trust legal and peaceful means for redress of their grievance, but when this failed and the body was buried anyway, the Anglicans were forced into direct action. The authorities were shocked by such acts, but although the magistrates claimed a vigilant search would be made for the perpetrators, no one was ever apprehended. The retrieval of the body following the second incident may have indicated that the Protestant community regarded the discarded, exposed body as indecent treatment; however, their refusal to bury the body in the churchyard and the continuing threat of disinterment suggests the original objection was sustained. Apart from the original attempt to have the body buried, and possibly to have it brought back from Crocker's Cove, Catholic participation is not reported. No attempt was made to guard the body and it was Catholics, in fact, who ultimately dug up the corpse to have it buried elsewhere. One can only speculate, but it seems plausible that the Catholics too, recognized the injustice of burying Moxley in the consecrated ground of the churchyard.

The incident demonstrated accepted burial customs and an understanding of what was fair and decent regardless of what the laws allowed coroners to order. Disregarding these accepted customs resulted in plebeian demands for redress through legal channels; when these were denied direct action was taken.

Arson was a popular and effective means of protest, as it offered the possibility of wreaking heavy damage upon carefully selected targets with little effort or risk of detection. In May 1834, a Harbour Grace merchant and planter, John Nuttall, was the victim of this form of plebeian attention. On 2 May, Nuttall received a letter advising him, "for his own good [to] drop the persecution of Michael Kief" (or Keefe), and allow him to assist his "starving Family Crying for Bread."⁴⁴ Four days later Nuttall found a less conciliatory note wrapped around a stone thrown into his yard:

You persicuting in solvent Scounderell... we will levell your wifes property... we put up with you to long... We are watching your movements... we will Make You Suffer For it....⁴⁵

⁴²PANL, GN 2/2, Stark to Crowdy, 15 March 1838.

⁴³PANL, GN 2/2, Stark to Crowdy, 16 March 1838.

⁴⁴PANL, GN 2/2, Harbour Grace Magistrates to Crowdy, 8 May 1834, (encl.). Michael Keefe was a fisherman who owed £35 to Nuttall. When he fell behind on his yearly £8 payment he was prosecuted and imprisoned. Peter Roberts, "The Harbour Grace Elections 1832-61," M.A. thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1969, 9. For a full text of the three notes sent to Nuttall, see Appendix A.

⁴⁵PANL, GN 2/2, Harbour Grace Magistrates to Crowdy, 8 May 1834, (encl.).

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The author or authors not only were offended by Kief's inability to relieve his starving family, but also by some undisclosed venture of Nuttall's to win a large amount of insurance money. After a third note warning of an impending arson attack, Nuttall's cooper came to him with the news that someone was trying to burn down his premises.⁴⁶ A hole in the side of his store suggested evidence of an incendiary's half-hearted attempt. The magistrate reporting the incident believed it was part of a plebeian conspiracy, and described it as one act in "a system of terror and alarm" instituted by "one side" of the population.⁴⁷

The arson attempt at Nuttall's followed a similar attempt on the newly established cholera hospital in Harbour Grace. A European cholera outbreak in 1832 caused fear in New World ports almost immediately. Mobs gathered to oppose facilities to harbour cholera victims of the 1830s epidemic in Saint John, Quebec, and Niagara.⁴⁸ During epidemics in the next two decades, hospitals were destroyed by fire or vandalism by crowds in P.E.I., Saint John, Quebec City, and London, Ontario.⁴⁹ In Harbour Grace in 1834, a boat and crew were hired to operate a quarantine facility, and provisions were made for a cholera hospital. No sooner was the hospital established than someone broke one of its windows, and an arson attempt on the structure was discovered.⁵⁰ The community was dedicated to keeping the dreaded disease away from their town. By burning the cholera hospital, they hoped to force the infected victims to go elsewhere.

When cholera did hit Newfoundland in 1855, mass public opposition to the local sheltering of victims was immediate in Harbour Grace. When two people died of the disease, authorities claimed:

we could not get possession of the house to which we carried the stranger without the presence of soldiers, and now we hold it in fear of its being burnt down in the night.⁵¹

Maiming was a popular form of plebeian protest, often used on animals to prevent encroachment of livestock onto cultivated land. Maiming, especially in the form of ear cropping, also was used to deter humans from unpopular actions. In the spring of 1835 Henry Winton, outspoken editor of the leading Tory and anti-Catholic newspaper, the *Public Ledger*, fell victim to this ruthless sanction.

Winton was a well-known figure in Newfoundland who, through his aggressive journalism, had made many enemies, especially among Catholics. Several times he had been rewarded for his obnoxious editorials with notes and placards claiming the people "would set a mark upon him and have his life."⁵² When a St. John's mob attacked his house on Christmas Day 1831, troops were needed to quell

⁴⁶PANL, GN 2/2, Harbour Grace Magistrates to Crowdy, 8 May 1834, (encl.).

⁴⁷PANL, GN 2/2, Stark to Crowdy, 12 May 1834.

⁴⁸Geoffrey Bilson, *A Darkened House: Cholera in Nineteenth Century Canada* (Toronto 1980), 111-2.

⁴⁹Bilson, *Darkened House*, 111-2.

⁵⁰PANL, GN 2/2, Parkin to Crowdy, 30 April 1834; PANL, GN 2/2, Parkin to Crowdy, 2 May 1834.

⁵¹Bilson, *Darkened House*, 136.

⁵²Select Committee on Newfoundland, 1841, Capt. H. Geary, 99; *Public Ledger*, 2 June 1835.

the crowd.⁵³

On the afternoon of 19 May 1835, Winton was riding from Carbonear to Harbour Grace when he was ambushed at Saddle Hill by a small band of people with painted faces.⁵⁴ He was pelted with stones, knocked from his horse, and beaten about the head. Winton's attackers then filled his ears with mud and gravel, and used a clasp knife to cut several pieces from his right ear and sever the left one entirely. They then ran off into the woods, leaving their bloodied victim on the road to find his way to town as best he could.⁵⁵

Support for this act was widespread among the plebeian population. The governor complained that it was:

a matter of open triumph and rejoicing to the Catholics of low degree, even female servants and children expressing the greatest satisfaction.⁵⁶

Despite a reward offer of £1,300, pardon for the accomplices, protection, and free passage out of the country, no one came forward with evidence against the perpetrators. No one was ever charged with the offence, and the reward remained unclaimed. Longstanding traditions of peasant violence provide against their own detection by imposing severe sanctions, often death, upon informers.⁵⁷ This element of popular culture well might have accounted for the reluctance of anyone to claim the reward despite the fact that half of the populations of Harbour Grace and Carbonear were Protestant, and supposedly Winton sympathizers.

This was not the end of the Winton affair. On 13 May 1840, five years after the incident involving Henry Winton, another man was ambushed on Saddle Hill and had his ears cut off. Herman Lott worked as an overseer for Winton in his St. John's printing shop where the *Public Ledger* was published. Lott was travelling alone from Harbour Grace to Carbonear, and as he crossed Saddle Hill, four men with black crepe over their faces ran out of the woods.⁵⁸ The men knocked him down and dragged him into the woods. After a violent scuffle Lott was knocked out, and when he awoke he had been robbed of seven dollars and had portions of both ears cut off.⁵⁹

The governor issued a proclamation offering a £300 reward for the capture of Lott's assailants as soon as he heard of the incident.⁶⁰ The magistrates examined

⁵³Select Committee on Newfoundland, 1841, R. Job, 56 and T. Cochrane, 10.

⁵⁴Neither of the victims was certain about the number of assailants but the number five seems the most likely. PANL, GN 2/2, Harbour Grace Magistrates to Crowdy, 20 May 1835; PANL, GN 2/2, Stark to Crowdy, 19 May 1835.

⁵⁵PANL, GN 2/2, Harbour Grace Magistrates to Crowdy, 20 May 1835, (encl.).

⁵⁶CNS, CO 194 vol. 90, Prescott to Grant, 29 May 1835; See also PANL, GN 2/2, Brenton to Crowdy, 20 May 1835; Harbour Grace Magistrates' Letters, file #13, Danson and Buckingham to Simms, 2 June 1835.

⁵⁷Lewis, *Local Disturbances*.

⁵⁸PANL, GN 2/2, Harbour Grace Magistrates to Crowdy, 15 May 1840, (encl.).

⁵⁹*Carbonear Star*, 20 May 1840.

⁶⁰PANL, GN 2/1/43, Crowdy to Danson, Power, and Stark, 18 May 1840.

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as many witnesses as they could find in their attempt to discover the culprits. They found that on the day of the maiming, four men were seen running from Carbonear to Saddle Hill, two of them wearing hats painted green under the rim.⁶¹

The green hats were considered significant in light of the story publicized after the ear cropping. On 20 February 1840, Herman Lott had been abducted by a gang on the streets of St. John's, blindfolded, and taken to a room for questioning about Winton. Lott had little to say about Winton that his captors did not already know, but they issued a warning to Winton through Lott. They claimed that Winton had slandered the Irish in Newfoundland but that:

he and others like him would perhaps find out that there was a RIBBON SOCIETY in this contry equally as terrible as ever it was in Ireland and that he (Mr. Winton) would soon find his house too hot for him.⁶²

There was little doubt, at least among the authorities and the conservative press, that Lott's maiming was the result of a widespread Irish Catholic conspiracy.⁶³ In this case, as in Winton's, no one was apprehended for the crime.

The Winton and Lott maimings graphically illustrate the lengths to which the Irish Catholic community would go to avenge the insults hurled at it by the Tory press. Although substantial rewards were offered, no Catholic would break ranks to report the culprits, and no Protestant would risk revenge. To a great extent, people still associated themselves with their ethnic backgrounds and worked to maintain those ties.

Because there were strong feelings of loyalty toward religion and ethnicity, people could rally quickly and effectively when needed. Plebeian action, however, was in no way restricted to ethnic issues. The incidents of collective action examined above varied greatly in their form and purpose. Some dealt with issues that affected the whole community and others affected the lives of only a few. Those responsible ranged from the hundreds of people reportedly involved in the retrieval of Downing's body, to the individuals who committed token acts of protest against merchants. But what all these incidents had in common was an underlying appeal to a common idea of justice or plebeian rights. Through traditional plebeian methods of resistance, people could render the authorities impotent by non-cooperation. In this way there was a certain plebeian influence in social relations. The result was not anarchy (as the respectable community often feared) but rather the enforcement of a slightly different conception of what was just and what the duties of the authorities were.

⁶¹PANL, GN 2/2, Danson and Stark to Crowdy, 20 May 1840.

⁶²*Public Ledger*, 22 May 1840.

⁶³CNS, CO 194 vol. 108, Prescott to Russell, 22 May 1840; PANL, GN 2/2, Danson and Stark to Crowdy, 11 June 1840; *Times*, 27 May 1840; *Public Ledger*, 19 May 1840; *Public Ledger*, 22 May 1840.

II

NEWFOUNDLAND ELECTIONS provided a formal outlet for democratic expression, but this expression often assumed traditional plebeian forms. The wide franchise which allowed all male householders to vote after one year's residency helped interest the island's labouring population in politics. The form and content of electoral disturbances are significant, not only as a chapter in continuing plebeian resistance, but also in the way they demonstrate the balance between the formal institutions of the propertied classes, and the informal avenues open to working people. Although elections were held in Conception Bay in 1832, 1836, 1837, and 1840, only the election of 1836 and the by-election of 1840 were accompanied by popular disturbances.

Newfoundland had basically two political viewpoints which solidified into parties as the 1830's advanced. The liberals were associated with the reformers, the Catholics, and the working men, while the Tories were associated with the Protestants and the old merchant elite. The conservatives believed that the island should remain in the hands of the fish merchants, who had most to gain by the island's prosperity, and therefore were the most likely to govern well. The liberal party, on the other hand, espoused the ideas of democracy, Catholic rights, and the development of various sectors of the economy.

In 1836 seven candidates ran to fill the four available seats. By the end of the election only the four liberal candidates were still in the race and so were elected. When Robert Pack and James Power, the two most popular candidates, both declined the honour of standing for office, they were induced to run as representatives by more informal means. A contingent of 40 or 50 working-class men marched from Harbour Grace and Carbonear led by a "respectable" party of two priests, two merchants, and a publican.⁶⁴ The band marched to fife and drum music and carried banners through the streets to the homes of the men, and finding them, the crowd pressed them to stand as liberal candidates in the election.⁶⁵ Both men addressed the crowd and agreed to the request this time.⁶⁶ The band, having been satisfied, paraded the lower street for some time and then dispersed.

Informal means were used to subtract names from the candidates' list as well as to add to it. On 2 November 1836, the *Carbonear Star* printed a notice from Thomas Newell, a conservative candidate, declaring his withdrawal from the race due to an attack on his house. He did not describe the attack but claimed:

The people of this Bay have no protection but the mighty arm of Him, who saved last night, my life and the life of my little ones.⁶⁷

⁶⁴*Public Ledger*, 1 November 1836; *Carbonear Sentinel*, 27 October 1836.

⁶⁵*Public Ledger*, 1 November 1836.

⁶⁶It was generally acknowledged that Pack and Power were in a coalition with the two other liberal candidates; Brown of Harbour Grace, and Godfrey of Brigus. PANL, GN 2/2, Harbour Grace Magistrates to Crowdy, 24 October 1836.

⁶⁷*Carbonear Star*, 2 November 1836.

After the polling began, the other two conservative candidates, Ridley and Prowse, were also forced to withdraw because of violence.

The election was conducted by a roving poll which began in Harbour Grace on 1 November. On 31 October a large number of men and women met at Saddle Hill where they joined an "immense concourse" of people from Carbonear.⁶⁸ They marched into Harbour Grace with bands playing and, armed with sticks, paraded through the streets of the town, displaying their support for the liberal candidates, or (according to some) intimidating the populace.⁶⁹ The following day, several hundred men, some carrying sticks and bludgeons, marched from Carbonear to escort Pack and Power to the Harbour Grace polls. They had signs and banners and one man, Roger Thomey, had a green ribbon around his hat and a green sash around his waist.⁷⁰ At the polls they met Thomas Ridley, a Tory candidate, and his supporters, who were planting their banners nearby. The liberal supporters shouted "Down with the Tories" and, as Ridley's men answered with three cheers for the Tories, the liberals attacked the small Tory band with their sticks. They rushed the voters, striking them, destroying flags, and dispersing them before they could vote. One man testified he was struck across the back of the neck, beaten on the head, knocked down and trampled upon. When he came to his senses, he was helped up by a shoemaker and told he should go home or he likely would be murdered, along with all others who supported the blue colours.⁷¹ By one account, as many as 21 people were wounded.⁷² Pack and Power, who had been inside the poll, returned to find the melee and were "greatly dismayed and entreated people to be peaceable."⁷³

The tactics used to influence election results were not unusual. The parades, banners, bands (especially involving fifes and drums), and slogans were standard political fare in Britain, and had become so in British North America. Assuming direct control of the hustings and applying force to an individual candidate were the most logical and efficacious ways for those without power to exercise control over the political process.⁷⁴ When large numbers of people participated in a political event, they preferred to use informal rather than formal means to exert their powers.

There were numerous cries from the authorities about their helplessness and inability to keep the peace in these conditions,⁷⁵ but in this instance they at least

⁶⁸CNS, CO 194 vol. 95, Prescott to Glenelg, 9 December 1836, (encl.).

⁶⁹*Ibid.*; CNS, CO 194 vol. 95, Prescott to Glenelg, 9 December 1836, (encl.); *Public Ledger*, 4 November 1836.

⁷⁰CNS, CO 194 vol. 95, Prescott to Glenelg, 9 December 1836, (encl.).

⁷¹PANL, GN 2/2, Stark to Crowdy, 19 November 1836, (encl.).

⁷²CNS, CO 194 vol. 95, Prescott to Glenelg, 9 December 1836, (encl.).

⁷³PANL, GN 2/2, Court Report on King Vs. Pack, Power, *et al.*, February 1837.

⁷⁴For an example in early New Brunswick history, see Scott See "Election Crowds and Social Violence: The Northumberland County, New Brunswick Campaigns of 1842-43," M.A. thesis, University of Maine, 1980.

⁷⁵PANL, GN 2/2, Stabb to Garrett, 17 November 1836; CNS, CO 194 vol. 95, Prescott to Glenelg, 9 December 1836, (encl.).

were able to identify enough individuals to lay charges against eight people.⁷⁶

The effectiveness of the plebeian society, its organization and independence, are once again made clear through the example of Roger Thomey. Thomey, a cooper employed by Robert Pack, was one of the men charged with riot and assault. A warrant was issued; the sheriff who set off for Carbonear to arrest him found him at Pack's stage. Not wanting to bring the prisoner back through town and risk a disturbance, the two men rowed across to the south side of the bay and disembarked at a wharf. They had only gone about 50 yards when a large mob of men rushed out of the neighbouring lanes, ready to attack with clubs and stones.⁷⁷ The men swore Thomey would not be taken, threw stones, and rescued him from the constables, though Thomey himself called out that he was willing to go. The scale and violence of the gathering increased and the sheriff found it impossible to retake the prisoner, and so returned to Harbour Grace without him. He claimed he had neither the manpower to take Thomey, nor the resources to keep him should a rescue be attempted.⁷⁸

Attempts to save Thomey from prosecution continued. Shortly after his warrant had been issued, a threatening letter was thrown into Ridley's yard.⁷⁹ Ridley was advised to drop the prosecution and was threatened, "you will feel heavily the Maladiction of the people/fit will surely insense the publick against you." The note, written by 'a labourer,' claimed Danson was not acting in the public interest and thus, was not doing his duty as he should. The same charge was directed towards the other magistrates involved, and all were threatened with a public "reward."

The authorities felt powerless with a great proportion of the population of Carbonear being "in open opposition to the authority of the law."⁸⁰ Two men, Simon Levi and Joseph Pippy, had sworn against Thomey and their names appeared in his warrant. On 15 November, a crowd which attacked Levi's house broke several windows and a door. Mr. and Mrs. Levi were not home, but a servant girl was knocked unconscious by a stone, and a minister felt he must rush in to protect the children.⁸¹ The following night, about 100 men with blackened faces surrounded the house of Joseph Pippy in Mosquito.⁸² They broke the windows and doors and then entered the house. They dragged Pippy's wife from her bed, threatened his brother with a blunderbuss, and demanded to see Joseph. He was discovered hiding under the stairs, beaten and made to promise to drop prosecution

⁷⁶The men charged were Robert Pack, James Power, Roger Thomey, William Harding, William Saunders, Edward Haydon, John Meaney, and Andrew Quirk.

⁷⁷PANL, GN 2/2, Sheriff's report, 14 November 1836.

⁷⁸PANL, GN 2/2, Stabb to Garrett, 17 November 1836; *Ibid.*

⁷⁹CSN, CO 194 vol. 95, Prescott to Glenelg, 14 December 1836, (encl.). For complete text of the note see appendix B.

⁸⁰CSN, CO 194 vol. 95, Prescott to Glenelg, 14 December 1836, (encl.). For complete text of the note see appendix B.

⁸¹CNS, CO 194 vol. 95, Prescott to Glenelg, 9 December 1836, (encl.).

⁸²CNS, CO 194 vol. 95, Prescott to Glenelg, 9 December 1836, (encl.).

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against Thomey. The men even required that Pippy obtain a statement from the magistrate to this effect, and produce it the following night when they returned.⁸³ Magistrate Stark reluctantly complied with Pippy's request for a retraction, but sent a constable to the Pippy's to get a complaint about the outrage. Pippy had been completely intimidated and would not visit the magistrate again, nor did he want to be seen with a constable.⁸⁴

Peter Edwards, who had also signed Thomey's warrant, likewise backed away from his statement. He was so frightened that he would be murdered along the road on his trip to St. John's that he begged the local priest to announce from the altar that he had given evidence against his will.⁸⁵

These retractions were followed closely by a similar statement by Thomas Gosse, who had accused one Richard Lahey of assaulting him during the violence at the polls. Gosse made a second statement before the magistrates claiming that Lahey had never hit him but had, in fact, prevented an unknown assailant from continuing the attack.⁸⁶ The authorities were appalled at the situation in Harbour Grace and Carbonear, which they saw as a "reign of terror."⁸⁷ The law was no longer in their hands, but had been replaced by a system of rough justice dictated and executed by that ominous and amorphous entity, "the Mob."

Trials proceedings against the St. John's and Conception Bay election rioters were held in St. John's before a special jury.⁸⁸ Of the eight men charged with a variety of crimes, only Thomey and two other rioters, William Saunders and William Harding, were punished. All three received twelve-month sentences for rioting, and Thomey also was fined £25 for assault.⁸⁹ When the personal petitions of the prisoners had no effect on altering these harsh sentences, a prominent liberal leader from St. John's petitioned on their behalf.⁹⁰ The Colonial Office was convinced that the sentences were excessively severe and the men were released.⁹¹

The trials illustrate the strength of the officially-constituted institutions of law, but also the strength of the informal plebeian methods of control in Newfoundland society. In the end it must be recognized that the law courts triumphed, and three rioters were sent to prison. On the other hand, there is evidence of a strong plebeian force. Through collective action with a combination of threat and violence, the rioters attempted to prevent the arrest and trial of a journeyman cooper who had acted violently in a crowd to ensure that a liberal candidate was returned at the

⁸³CNS, CO 194 vol. 95, Prescott to Glenelg, 9 December 1836, (encl.).

⁸⁴CNS, CO 194 vol. 95, Prescott to Glenelg, 9 December 1836, (encl.).

⁸⁵Peter J. Roberts, "The Harbour Grace Elections 1832-61," unpublished M.A. thesis, University of New Brunswick, 1969, 42.

⁸⁶CNS, CO 194 vol. 95, Prescott to Glenelg, 9 December 1836, (encl.).

⁸⁷CNS, CO 194 vol. 95, Prescott to Glenelg, 14 December 1836, (encl.); *Ibid*; *Carbonear Star*, 16 November 1836.

⁸⁸Simultaneous elections in St. John's also were accompanied by riots and similar disturbances.

⁸⁹*Royal Gazette*, 10 January 1837; CNS, CO 194 vol. 104, Prescott to Glenelg (draft), 8 October 1837.

⁹⁰Roberts, "Harbour Grace Elections," 44.

⁹¹CNS, CO 194 vol. 97, Glenelg to Prescott, 31 May 1837.

polls. Colonial Office interference in sentencing indicates there was a feeling that moderation, if not tolerance, should be shown when dealing with popular disturbances.

In winter 1840, a by-election was held in Conception Bay to fill the seat of a deceased representative. Many of the tactics of 1836 recurred. This time the battle was between two dealers, Edward Hanrahan and James Prendergast. Both men were Catholics but sources vary on the differences between them. Some saw Hanrahan as a priests' candidate under the thumb of the church, and Prendergast as an independent Catholic.⁹² Local priests were active in the election, joining in parades and preaching political sermons in support of Hanrahan.⁹³ The Tory press reported that the priests were the prime instigators in inciting the lowest and most ignorant portion of the population to violence in order to ensure Catholic hegemony.⁹⁴

Throughout the election, there were parades and violence to prevent people from casting their votes. On the day of the largest riot, Carbonear polls opened as usual at ten o'clock, but around two o'clock, one side (it is not clear which) ran out of voters. When a boatload of voters arrived at the beach, a riot began in an attempt to prevent them from casting their ballots. A Hanrahan supporter was shot in the hand, men were beaten with pickets, and stones were thrown in the general melée.⁹⁵ While trying to contain the violence, Magistrate Ridley received a severe beating.⁹⁶ When the disturbance was reported, the returning officer closed the polls with Prendergast ahead. The election ultimately was declared invalid and the seat remained empty until the next election in 1842.

Once the brawl was over people continued to parade the streets of the town, intimidating opponents and breaking windows.⁹⁷ That evening, an angry mob burnt to the ground a Carbonear house owned by a Carbonear planter named Ash.⁹⁸ Although Ash was a cousin to Hanrahan's wife he had voted for Prendergast. Not only had Ash voted for the wrong side, but he had betrayed his own people.⁹⁹ A second arson partially burnt the house of a poor man who voted for Prendergast, and then implicated many Hanrahan supporters concerned with the hustings riots.¹⁰⁰

⁹²Roberts, "Harbour Grace Elections," 60.

⁹³*Patriot*, 12 December 1840.

⁹⁴*Public Ledger*, 15 November, 1 December, 8 December, 19 December, 29 December 1840.

⁹⁵CNS, CO 194 vol. 109, Prescott to Russell, 10 December 1840, (encl.); CNS, CO 194 vol. 109, Prescott to Russell, 11 December 1841, (encl.); *Sentinel*, 31 December 1840; *Public Ledger*, 11 December 1840; *Public Ledger*, 15 December 1840; *Patriot*, 12 December 1840; *Times*, 16 December 1840; *Vindicator*, 16 January and 19 January 1841.

⁹⁶There was a suggestion that the magistrate was more concerned with repressing the Hanrahan supporters than suppressing the riot in general. *Vindicator*, 9 January 1841.

⁹⁷PANL, GN 2/2, Power, Pack, and Pack to Crowdy, 9 December 1840; *Carbonear Star*, 12 December 1840.

⁹⁸*Star*, 12 December 1840; *Star*, 13 February 1841.

⁹⁹*Star*, 13 February 1841; *Star*, 12 December 1840.

¹⁰⁰PANL, GN 2/2, Harbour Grace Magistrates to Crowdy, 14 December 1840; PANL, GN 2/2, Emerson to Crowdy, 17 December 1840.

Night visits were used as a means of retribution against those who had withheld support from Hanrahan. A young schoolmaster named Talbot was dragged from his bed at midnight by three men who beat him with pickets and left him unconscious. Another individual took advantage of the growing reputation of Saddle Hill as a place of plebeian strength to threaten a magistrate's son, when late in December, a man rushed out of the woods there and brandished a stick above the head of Dr. Stirling's boy as an act of defiance against the law.¹⁰¹

Such actions had their echo in reports of district cattle-maiming. Three men of the Taylor family, important merchants in Carbonear, were approached by friends of several arrested men to become sureties for their appearance in court. Each man refused to stand up for the rioters and as a result had an animal maimed.¹⁰² In January, John Taylor's horse was lamed by a hatchet wound below its fore knee. In mid-February, Joseph Taylor's horse suffered a large hatchet slash across the back and Richard Taylor's cow received a deep wound on the rump. The planter, Henry Watts, also reported that his cow had been hacked in the thigh later that month.¹⁰³ The magistrates promised to make inquiries, but were not surprised by the events and expected more to follow, "owing to the state of the community" in Carbonear.¹⁰⁴

By mid-February 1841, the magistrates had heard rumours that a blacksmith from the North Shore was making and distributing pikeheads.¹⁰⁵ Although the rumour was not substantiated, it was significant in that it demonstrated the continuing fear of popular revolt among the respectable classes and the continuing tradition of Irish rebellion methods.¹⁰⁶ The pike was a weapon synonymous with Irish violence, having become a symbol of the Irish rebellion of 1798. The manufacturing of pikes subsequently was outlawed in Britain.

The magistrates were appalled both by the disorder and their inability to control the situation. They requested troops and were persistent enough to get them. Once the 100 troops arrived at Carbonear and Harbour Grace, the disturbances ended and the magistrates began to search for the ringleaders. Many warrants were issued for those believed to have been involved in the election disturbances. While some were arrested, the pursuit continued for many more. Resistance to prosecution for election offenses continued quietly and the authorities saw law and order being undermined at every turn. The magistrates reported:

we are thoroughly convinced that threats, intimidation, and other unlawful devices will be resorted to by the friends of the guilty to prevent Witnesses and Jurors honestly and independently doing their duty...¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ PANL, GN 2/2, Harbour Grace Magistrates to Crowdy, 2 January 1841.

¹⁰² PANL, GN 2/2, Danson and Stark to Crowdy, 18 March 1841, (encl.).

¹⁰³ Note 102.

¹⁰⁴ PANL, GN 2/2, Danson and Stark to Crowdy, 18 March 1841.

¹⁰⁵ PANL, GN 2/2, Danson and Stark to Crowdy, 20 February 1841.

¹⁰⁶ PANL, GN 2/2, Danson and Stark to Crowdy, 18 March 1841.

¹⁰⁷ PANL, GN 2/2, Danson and Stark to Crowdy, 22 March 1841.

The silence of potential witnesses, some broken windows, and a threatening note were among the evidence which supported the magistrates' suspicions.¹⁰⁸ A 14 year-old boy had been slated to testify against a suspected rioter, but changed his mind after receiving an anonymous note promising, "ye Protestant buggars ... will not escape much longer."¹⁰⁹

The election disturbances of 1836 and 1840 are both important in their political ramifications, namely the development of the liberal party and the direction of the government of the island. This is not their primary importance, however, for the purposes of this paper. The elections provided a framework and an opportunity for increased plebeian input into the workings of the society. The plebeians displayed cohesion among sectors of the working class population, continuity of the traditions of plebeian protest, and suggested some lines of allegiance which existed in the communities.

As in the other instances of collective action, the people demonstrated that groups within the society could recognize common goals, communicate them to others, and work effectively towards those goals. The methods they used were well established in the British plebeian tradition and their symbols were easily recognizable. They were quite, although not totally, effective in enforcing a conspiracy of silence aimed at incapacitating the law courts. Although a few men were convicted in connection with incidents during both elections, plebeian efforts to enforce the popular will through informal channels were extensive and impressive.

III

IN 1832, THE FISHERMEN of Carbonear and Harbour Grace staged a strike to protest the manner in which the seal fishery operated. The strike was noteworthy for the large numbers of people involved, and the cohesion displayed by the sealers. Whereas political, religious, and local divisions were stressed in the collective actions examined above, the strike demonstrates that these social divisions could be overcome. It is in 1832 that we see the strongest evidence of the class loyalties which existed in Harbour Grace and Carbonear in the 1830s.

The seal fishery was a growing industry at the beginning of the decade. Despite the short, six-week season, a fisherman could expect to make one third of his yearly income from a good sealing voyage. The merchant's role in the seal fishery was similar to the part he played in the cod fishery, in that he outfitted men in return for the product. Economically, however, there was an important structural difference. Cash, rather than credit notes, historically had been used for at least partial wage payment in the seal fishery. Because the seal fishery held out this promise of potential cash, truck payment and tied sales were a grievance which could be easily identified and articulated. The seal fishery operated on a relatively short-term,

¹⁰⁸PANL, GN 2/2, Harbour Grace Magistrates to Crowdy, 9 May 1841; CNS, CO 194 vol. 112, Law to Russell, 10 June 1841, (encl.).

¹⁰⁹PANL, GN 2/2, Harbour Grace Magistrates to Crowdy, 9 May 1841, (encl.). For full text of the note, see appendix C.

high-pressure, and high-profit basis in comparison to the cod fishery. The fishermen were in a stronger position because of the greater demand for their labour, and the higher value of their product.

The seal fishery held a unique position in the social and economic fabric of Conception Bay. Socially, the seal fishery helped expose a more rigid and definite class structure than was evident at any other time of the year. While the complex social structure of the communities persisted, work relationships for the three months of the seal fishery were comparatively straightforward. Each sealing vessel required a supplier, a master, and a crew of sealers. Labour and management were distinct. Whereas in the cod fishery men could hold a variety of positions in relation to their merchants and their means of production, these same men were all in the same "class" in the seal fishery. In addition, men from settlements all over Conception Bay gathered in Brigus, Harbour Grace, and Carbonear to sign onto their ships. They were brought together geographically during sealing to a much greater extent than in the cod fishery.

The sealers' strike began peacefully when, on 5 January 1832, a notice was posted in the towns of Carbonear and Harbour Grace announcing that a meeting of the fishermen and sharmen of Carbonear would be held on 9 January "... fore the purpose of taking into consideration the best and most effectual method of getting clear of truck."¹¹⁰ The fishermen of Harbour Grace were requested to join the struggle to "shake off the yoke they have so long and unjustly (tho' patiently) borne."¹¹¹ The notices were written in neat, legible hand, and clear, fairly elaborate sentences. No threats, challenges, or insults were included, but rather the notice had a very official air. The meeting was to take place on Saddle Hill, which was half way between Carbonear and Harbour Grace. On the morning of the ninth, 2,000 to 3,000 men marched with fife and drums to the hill where they discussed the issue, and parted peacefully. The hill was christened "Liberty Hill" in honour of the occasion.¹¹² "Liberty" was a familiar watchword applied to many major democratic movements in Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries. All agreed they should receive cash rather than goods in payment for seals, and that half the amount due was to be paid on the delivery of the seals and the other half given in cash on 10 November.¹¹³

On 4 February a second notice was posted around the two towns calling for another Saddle Hill meeting on 9 February.¹¹⁴ This notice addressed not only fishermen, but sealing masters too, who were called to produce the agreements they

¹¹⁰PANL,GN 2/2, Harbour Grace Magistrates to Crowdy, 21 January 1832, (encl.). Notice #1 is reprinted in appendix D.

¹¹¹PANL,GN 2/2, Harbour Grace Magistrates to Crowdy, 21 January 1832, (encl.). Notice #1 is reprinted in appendix D.

¹¹²Cochrane Papers, reel II, Stark to Cochrane, 24 February 1832.

¹¹³PANL, GN 2/2, Harbour Grace Magistrates to Crowdy, 28 February 1832. Statement of Thomas Dunford (encl.).

¹¹⁴PANL, GN 2/2, Harbour Grace Magistrates to Crowdy, 18 February 1832 (encl.). Notice #2 is reprinted in appendix D.

held with their crews. The second notice was equally well-written, but the content was less conciliatory. Masters were summoned by name to appear. Any who did not attend were to be "delt with according to a resolution that will be entered into at that meeting and will afterwards undoubtedly be acted upon."¹¹⁵

On the appointed day, the men and some of the masters met on the hill. The meeting was systematic and orderly. Masters were called by name to present their agreements or the agreements of their merchant. The agreement was either accepted by the cheering crowd, or if unacceptable, torn up.¹¹⁶

Many, but not all, mercantile firms were represented at the meeting. The merchants either accepted or ignored fishermen's demands as they saw fit. It was only after an open attack on the property of Thomas Ridley, an important merchant of Harbour Grace, that the fishermen attracted the interest of the merchant and governing classes and the press. In the early hours of the morning of 18 February, more than 200 men armed with saws and hatchets boarded Ridley's vessel, *Perseverance*, which was lying at the wharf. They cut the masts, rigging, yards, and gaffs, causing damage estimated at £120. The ship's mate was forced back below deck and threatened by several men with guns when he tried to interfere.¹¹⁷

Reaction to the fishermen's attack was swift and strongly worded on the part of the magistrates and merchants. The magistrates immediately notified the governor, stating that life and property might be in danger.¹¹⁸ They feared the systematic organization which had resulted in "notices and threats against lives and property of those not complying with their views respecting the abolition of the barter system."¹¹⁹ The governor issued a proclamation against the sealers, declaring the Saddle Hill meetings illegal; a reward of £100 was offered to anyone who would give information about the destruction of Ridley's ship, with pardon offered to informers.¹²⁰

Constables were sent from St. John's to post the governor's proclamations in prominent places at various mercantile establishments. Within two hours all the proclamations had been torn down. Even the copy on a board by the Harbour Grace court house was broken to pieces.¹²¹ The notices were replaced, in some cases, by another placard from the Carbonear fishermen, similar to its predecessors in style and form but cockier in tone. The uncooperative were advised to be more compliant lest they receive "what will not be agreeable from the Carbonear Men."¹²²

¹¹⁵Note 114.

¹¹⁶PANL, GN 2/2, Harbour Grace Magistrates to Crowdy, 28 February 1832. Statement of Thomas Dunford (encl.).

¹¹⁷PANL, GN 2/2, Harbour Grace Magistrates to Crowdy, 18 February 1832. Statement of William Ewan (encl.).

¹¹⁸PANL, GN 2/2, Harbour Grace Magistrates to Crowdy, 18 February 1832.

¹¹⁹PANL, GN 2/2, Harbour Grace Magistrates to Crowdy, 18 February 1832.

¹²⁰Governor's Proclamation, 22 February 1832. (See *Royal Gazette*, 28 February 1832.)

¹²¹PANL, GN 2/2, Harbour Grace Magistrates to Crowdy, 4 March 1832.

¹²²PANL, GN 2/2, Harbour Grace Magistrates to Crowdy, 28 February 1832 (encl.). Notice #3 is reprinted in appendix D.

The sealers' notice itself was removed by the authorities, and replaced by the governor's proclamations, which was immediately torn down again in turn. This defiance of governmental authority among the fishermen produced great tension in the towns. The magistrates' letters to St. John's began to take on a desperate air. One letter claimed that the merchants, "aware of their defenseless situation, felt themselves under the necessity of complying with [the sealers'] requisitions."¹²³

The fishermen were careful in selecting their targets. They attacked only those who they felt were interfering with their progress. A planter named Nichole was met by three men with a pistol, a large stick, and a scythe but was released when they discovered he was not the man they were after. Seven men with blackened faces visited the home of a ship's master where a member of the household was suspected of being untrue to the cause. Amidst a great commotion the traitor was dragged from his bed and beaten.¹²⁴ A man living near Saddle Hill who claimed to know some of the ringleaders was visited during the night by more than 100 armed men and was only saved from shooting by his wife's pleading.¹²⁵ Another man, who had intended to identify the vandals on Ridley's ship, suddenly withdrew his offer of information and claimed to know nothing about the incident.¹²⁶

On 1 March a fourth and final notice from the men was posted, designating 3 March as the deadline for settling the agreements and "all masters of vessels (were) requested to have two sides to their agreements one part to be held by the Crew and the other themselves."¹²⁷

The magistrates prepared for the 3 March meeting by mustering more than 100 special constables in each town.¹²⁸ Guards were positioned in both Carbonear and Harbour Grace, and by Saddle Hill to inform the magistrates of any assemblage. When men began to gather at the Harbour Grace wharf, the magistrates, deputy sheriff, police, and eight specials went to town and found 500-600 men at William Innot's pier.¹²⁹ When magistrates' orders to disperse had no effect, the Chief Magistrate read the Riot Act. This had only a momentary effect as the men departed to rally again at Thomas Ridley's wharf. The magistrates and their entourage arrived at this gathering as one man was tearing up an agreement and another was being called upon to read a second agreement. The magistrate demanded the reader hand the agreement over to him, which the fisherman did despite "repeated calls and threats from those about him as well as the risk of personal violence."¹³⁰ Once

¹²³PANL, GN 2/2, Harbour Grace Magistrates to Crowdy, 23 February 1832.

¹²⁴*Public Ledger*, 13 March 1832.

¹²⁵*Public Ledger*, 13 March 1832.

¹²⁶PANL, GN 2/2, Harbour Grace Magistrates to Crowdy, 27 February 1832. Statement of John Stevenson (encl.). Statement of Stephen Smallcomb (encl.).

¹²⁷PANL, GN 2/2, Harbour Grace Magistrates to Crowdy, 4 March 1832 (encl.).

¹²⁸The magistrates did not appear to have had great difficulty recruiting constables, although they promised to send the governor the names of two or three who contemptuously refused oaths. (These names do not appear in later records.) A number of merchants from both towns voluntarily stepped forward to serve. PANL, GN 2/2, Harbour Grace Magistrates to Crowdy, 4 March 1832.

¹²⁹PANL, GN 2/2, Magistrates to Crowdy, 4 March 1832.

¹³⁰PANL, GN 2/2, Magistrates to Crowdy, 4 March 1832.

the magistrate had the agreement he was quite at a loss as to what he should do with it, and finding himself the center of attention in what seemed to him a hostile crowd, he gave up the paper and claimed to the governor that "the noise, uproar, and numbers made any attempt to stop them after this futile."¹³¹ The men paraded through the streets stopping opposite each merchant house in turn to read their agreements, and on finding each one satisfactory, cheered and moved on. The men continued peacefully until they had visited all the merchants, whereupon they dispersed.

Three days later, the sealers repeated the parade procedure in Carbonear. This time the magistrates knew better than to interfere. The procession went smoothly with the exception of a disturbance at the quay of Best & Waterman. Waterman's agreement was not satisfactory, but despite this, sealers had signed on and boarded two of his vessels. Approximately 200 strikers went to the schooners and commanded these men to go ashore. All complied except three or four on the *Morning Star*. These men were dragged off the vessel and one man, Thomas Scalon (or Scanlon) was severely beaten with sticks and sealing gaffs. When John Snook, the master of the vessel, arrived and objected to the violence he was threatened with similar treatment. At Waterman's premises a crowd of more than 1000 demanded a new agreement from him, and threatened to cut the masts of the *Morning Star* if he did not comply. Out of fear he drafted and posted a new agreement which was found to be acceptable.¹³²

In the final parades, the sealers managed to settle with all the merchants and they now prepared to leave for the ice. By 14 March all but three sealing vessels had sailed and peace was restored.

In 1832 Conception Bay conditions were right for a strike. Sealing was an expanding industry; the demand for labour was high, and the markets for seal oil expanding. The industry was generating extra cash in the economy and the sealers were in a sufficiently strong position to demand some of that cash. The nature of the seal fishery as an intense, high-pressure, short-term, high-profit pursuit made it conducive to such a protest. The simple class organization of sealers, masters, and merchants, and the close physical proximity of those involved, encouraged the development of class cohesion and facilitated collective action among the plebeians. The relative poverty and precarious existence of most Newfoundland fishermen and the lure of cash profits clarified the sealers' real grievances. In this industry a simpler opposition of capital and labour occurred, unlike the cod fishery, in which personal ties, a divided work force, and varying individual circumstances complicated the picture.

The people of Harbour Grace and Carbonear were able to conduct a powerful strike because they had developed both the requisite social cohesion and the sophistication to understand their interests and advantages. The understanding of

¹³¹PANL, GN 2/2, Magistrates to Crowdy, 4 March 1832.

¹³²PANL, GN 2/2, Harbour Grace Magistrates to Crowdy, 7 March 1832. Statement of William Waterman (encl.).

the plebeian population can be seen through their mass participation, the methods used, and the general level of consciousness displayed. Attendance at the Saddle Hill meetings was very high. Estimates of participation vary from more than 1000 to 4000 persons, but it is obvious that most fishermen were involved, as the combined number of men in Carbonear and Harbour Grace between the ages of 16 and 60 was approximately 1800 in 1836.¹³³ Even the lowest attendance estimates of 1000 to 2000 indicate that a large percentage of the active fishermen were present from the two major towns, and possibly from surrounding settlements.

The methods of protest used were those common to plebeian disturbances in England and Ireland. The sealers posted anonymous notes and used violence selectively and collectively, playing on their strengths and avoiding the more middle-class modes of protest such as petitions or litigation.

Probably the most important feature of any grassroots movement is the level of consciousness demonstrated by the protesters. The sealers' strike illustrated extensive popular awareness. The solidarity of the sealers is the most obvious and impressive display of their community cohesiveness. The sealers' strongest weapons were their numbers and their anonymity; two factors reliant on strong solidarity. No one was brought to trial in connection with any incident arising out of the sealers' strike, as none could be apprehended. Enquiries disclosed few clues as to who the ringleaders, or even the participants, were. Harbour Grace and Carbonear each had populations near 4000, and sealing brought in men from neighbouring settlements, so it is certainly plausible that a participating sealer would have seen many people whose names he did not know. On the other hand, it hardly was possible for anyone at the meetings to know no one present. Yet, the enquiries of the magistrates and the constables yielded very little. It is particularly strange that no one who attended the Saddle Hill meetings could (or would) identify any of the men who read out agreements. Although the data are somewhat tenuous, estimates of even the most basic literacy skills run around 25 per cent for that time.¹³⁴ Surely the few fishermen competent enough to read aloud sealing agreements would have been easily identified by the fishing population. If the constables made any reasonable effort to find those involved, there was a strong conspiracy of silence among the sealers. When the governor had the proclamation posted, he offered a reward of £100 and pardon to anyone who would point out a leader, but no one came forward to claim the reward. In order to maintain solidarity, the sealers required each merchant to present his agreement before the entire crowd of men, rather than attempt to make individual contracts. Breaches of the law were committed in gangs, whose members thus used their numbers and anonymity to the best advantage.

While the men could not have been successful unless their solidarity was for

¹³³Census, 1836.

¹³⁴David Alexander, "Literacy and Economic Development in Nineteenth Century Newfoundland," in David Alexander, *Atlantic Canada in Confederation*, Eric Sager, Lewis Fischer, and Stuart Pierson, eds., (Toronto 1983), 118.

the most part voluntary, there is also the suggestion that compliance was forced in some cases. The reports of the night visits illustrate this. A fisherman was attacked for being suspected of being untrue to the cause. Another man received a visit when he threatened to report the names of those who instigated the Saddle Hill meetings. The witness to the vandalism on Ridley's ship suddenly reversed his position and would not name names. A planter accosted on the road would not point out his assailant to the magistrates. Probably the best example of forced solidarity was the incident at the Best & Waterman wharf. The men who had boarded their ship while there were outstanding agreements to be ratified were chased away, and those who resisted were attacked. The extensive solidarity (both spontaneous and forced) demonstrated during the strike testifies to the strong cohesion among the plebeian population and to a fairly elevated level of consciousness.

The strike was highly organized and had very successful communication lines despite a divided community. The message put forward by organizers was obviously one readily understood, agreed upon, and passed on by the sealers. The local, ethnic, religious, educational, and social divisions did not interfere with the goals and actions of the conflict. Besides pointing out the efficiency of informal communication networks, the apparent mass agreement of the grievances and desired ends illustrate a fairly homogeneous understanding and a basic level of class consciousness. The sealers focused their antagonism on merchants and planters. They understood who was working in their interest and who was on the other side. While some merchants and planters were conciliatory and the sealers did not treat all merchants with hostility, they were firm in their demands with all. While all sealers did not necessarily recognize their position in relation to their superiors as inimical or necessarily conflictual, they did recognize their own interests and were prepared to force the merchant to make concessions.

The sealers' strike was a progressive movement in the sense that the sealers were demanding concessions rather than resisting encroachments on previously existing benefits. Sealing only recently had become an important industry in Newfoundland, and so customs regarding the operation of the industry had yet to be established. The strike was one event in the ongoing struggle to establish customary rights which would protect the interests of the plebeians. This protest demonstrates that the plebeian population was an active force, not simply reacting to stimuli presented by the ruling class, but working to forge a decent place for themselves in society. In the dynamic economic environment in Conception Bay the plebeians strove to influence their own positions.

Because of the uncommon success of this protest, it is easy to overstate the level of the consciousness of the sealers. It must be remembered that this was an isolated incident in the routine of labour. The protest was not repeated regularly or expanded. Most importantly, only the seal fishery was affected; the cod fishery was run entirely on the truck system and no concerted effort was made to oppose these abuses. The cod fishery was mentioned in the first sealers' notice, but never after that. The sealers were successful, but this success was never used to improve the

conditions of the fisherman on a large scale. The cohesion attained in the seal fishery was not sufficient to be expanded to the working class in general, but only to operate within the specific, particularly-conducive circumstances of sealing.

Although the strike was primarily a plebeian movement, it received some support from the higher levels in society and this may have contributed to its success. Some merchants and members of the middle class appear to have given tacit support to the sealers. Although it is not impossible that the four anonymous notes were composed and written by a sealer, the low literacy rate and the fine composition and penmanship of the notes would suggest otherwise. The sealers received local support in editorial letters to the *Conception Bay Mercury*. James Prendergast, a dealer, refused to have a governor's proclamation posted on his store, and his campaign as a liberal candidate in 1840 suggests some sympathy with the fishermen. Clerks, publicans, and especially sealing captains, could have identified individual strikers to the constables but no one did. Of course, lack of opposition does not necessarily imply support or even sympathy. There is a question of the practicality of active opposition in such a movement. There was little chance of military support as the governor was reluctant to spare even six St. John's constables to help out.¹³⁵ The lockup in Harbour Grace was incapable of holding any sizeable number of people, and there was the real threat of violent, open retaliation against anyone who interfered with the strikers.

Although some masters and merchants complied with the sealers because they had no choice, it appears that some supported the cause. The merchants were in a difficult position in Carbonear and Harbour Grace in that there was a degree of competition among them. The cod fishery was the most important economic pursuit and thus it was most important that merchants kept control over their own fishermen. With the great surge in the prosperity of the seal fishery at the beginning of the 1830s, the fishermen demanded fairer remuneration. If all the merchants could agree not to give anything extra to the sealers, then the united front would be successful. If, however, one merchant was willing to make concessions, the others stood to lose not only their sealers, but also their cod fishermen who were, after all, the same people. A merchant who gave in to the sealers stood to gain in popularity as well as in the security of his workforce. A merchant could be seen to be supporting the industrious fisherman in his fight for justice, and by paying cash, he could encourage him to save and to strive to get ahead. The demands of the sealers were restricted enough not to undermine the real power of the merchants or threaten the *status quo* in any significant way. Merchant Robert Pack of the major firm Fryer, Gosse & Pack gave in to the sealers' demands immediately and gladly, and he was followed promptly by a number of other merchants. Once the sealers' demands were accepted by some, others had little choice but to follow suit. Ultimately all merchants gave in, although some, like Thomas Ridley and William Waterman, did so under duress.

¹³⁵PANL, GN 2/1/41, *Crowdy to Harbour Grace Magistrates, 22 February 1832.*

It is difficult to ascertain the extent of middle- and merchant-class support, as opposition also existed and appears much more prominent and vocal. The two magistrates who wrote most of the correspondence to the governor, Danson and Buckingham, greatly feared the mass of sealers. They were afraid of anarchy, mob violence, and riot. The panic-stricken reports of these two individuals provide the most prominent source of information about the unfolding events. The surviving newspaper data also favour the reactionary position, stressing the lawlessness of the populace and the atrocities committed.

Sealing was a profitable industry in Conception Bay in the first half of the 19th century, and one which offered an environment conducive to collective action by the workers. The class structure, in terms of work relationships, was simpler in the seal fishery than in the cod fishery as men of varying positions fell into the three classifications of sealer, master, or merchant. The strike was a success, primarily due to the cohesion and dedication of the sealers of Carbonear and Harbour Grace, and perhaps to the support they received from the liberal-minded members of the middle class. Opposition to the men was disunited and relatively weak. The 1832 strike is a rare opportunity to view the people of 19th-century Conception Bay acting in class ways. The sealers were able to overcome social and cultural divisions to further their collective interests. They attempted to deal with the ships' masters whenever possible, asking them to present agreements and using them as targets for intimidation and threats. In this way they minimized their contact with the merchants whom they preferred to keep distant. Through a mixture of traditional methods and more progressive demands and ideas, the sealers succeeded in increasing their control of the limited cash flow within the local economy.

The extent of collective action during the decade is testimony to the organization which existed among the plebeian population. Lines of organization, communication, and mobilization were well developed, with ethno-religious, local, and class loyalties being the basis of plebeian action. The people had similar conceptions of what was just in society, what was to be considered acceptable and what was not. Plebeian standards were dynamic rather than static, which meant that the population could be mobilized to achieve rights which had not existed previously in Newfoundland, to increase plebeian input, to establish customs, and to create traditions.

People variously mobilized to defend their identity as in the case of Winton's maiming, their religious pride as in the burial and disinterment of Moxley's body, their common sensibilities as in the rescuing of the gibbeted corpse, and their class as in the sealers' strike. Different situations brought different loyalties to the fore. The ethno-religious divisions in Conception Bay society were great, but the loyalties which formed along the lines of these divisions could and did aid community organization. The sealers' strike demonstrated that, when called upon, the plebeian population was able to overcome the deep divisions in society and act together in their class interest.

When acting in concert, the plebeian population was successful in influencing

the workings of their society. They used the symbols, rituals, and methods of plebeian resistance from Europe, transplanting the whole tradition to Newfoundland. The fishermen of Harbour Grace and Carbonear were not the silent, pliable workforce which often has been portrayed. The plebeian population was vibrant and active, attempting to influence their environment to their advantage through their own actions, by their own means, and according to their own standards.

Appendix A

Three anonymous notes sent to Nuttall:

South end, Harbour Grace, May 1, 1834

Sir —

I mearily advise you and request you will *take it* for your own good and drop the persicution of Michael Kief he is long a nuf deprived from assisting a starving *family* Crying for Bread You should of taken the advise of the partner of your bosom and let him out You may i dare Say find use a nuf for the Six (pence a day)? that you are throwing away Recollect you have a family of your own which i hope will never feel the same misfortunes or the want of common nourishment as they do i tell you the Publick Voice is against you crying *Shame* i hope you will consider over this as it is my wish for your own good or _____

i am yours truly _____ a Friend

Nuttall

You Persicuting in *solvent* Scouderell let the Poor Man oute of Prison to relive his family that is starving _____ or we will level your wifes property _____ this will be done before Saturday Night, we put up with you to long _____ and you shant consume us a gain to get £2500___ in Surance _____ We are watching your movements _____ we No well what you got this amount _____ in Surd for _____ take this as a Warning if Not we will Make You Suffer For it

Guirls beware and take care / for this night we mane to take your masters life / so disappare / The family need not fear / Mr. Chancy come from Carbonear / and take his sister home, / for she is not no longer Nuttall's Wife i own / Margaret Chandler and Elen Shay / be ware and take care / for this night We Mane to take your Masters life / so disappare

Appendix B

Note sent to Thomas Ridley

Thomas Ridley Esq^r

Understanding that you are taking steps to the persecution of some few individuals. in the event of any process so as to lead to the conviction of any person or persons as a friend I advise you to discontinue those proceedings, otherwise you will feel heavily the Maladiction of the people it will surely insense the publick against you

they waited on you and you treated them with contempt they took you by the hand and you dispised them know then if you do not take an advise from a friend then you will certainly Rue the Day on which you appeared on the hustings. You may charge all your disappointments to a few of your Bosom friends namely Stark Mayne and a few others so I beg you will desist I fear these two persons will be amply Rewarded

a Labourer

Appendix C

Note Sent to a Potential Court Witness

Notice

Mrs. Jackman

If you allows your Son to swear against Kily mark
 the consequence ye Protestant Buggars
 depend on it it shall be a damnd sore swear for him
 for his life we will depend the young scoundrell
 and you as bad as him to allow it he will not escape much longer

Appendix D

Three Notices Posted by the Striking Sealers

Notice

A Meeting of the fishermen and sharemen of Carbonear will take place on Saddle Hill next Monday the ninth day of January at half past eleven o'clock in the forenoon fore the purpose of taking into consideration the best and most effectual method of getting clear of truck the ensuing spring the fishermen of Harbour Grace are earnestly requested to co-operate with their Carbonear Brethern in this truly worthy and momentous affair — and shew by their compliance that they are both willing and able to shake off the yoke they have so long and unjustly (tho' patiently) borne
 Carbonear January the fifth 1832

Notice

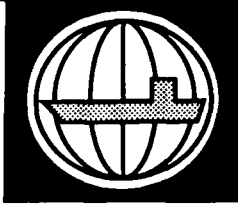
Is hereby given that the fishermen of Carbonear and Harbour Grace are requested to meet on *Saddle Hill* on thursday next the ninth day of February at 11 o'clock. All *Masters* of vessels bound on a sealing voyage are hereby required to be in attendance and to produce their several agreements with their crews to the Meeting Any person or persons who do not comply with this Requisition Shall be dealt with according to a Resolution that will be entered into at that meeting and will afterwards Undoubtably be acted upon

Harbour Grace 4th february 1832

Since we last advertised we find that our instructions were adhered to tho we have been told unwillingly by the Willy Scot and his cunning colleague they it seems doubted its authenticity and we hope they do not request practical proofs - we have also had a peep at the St. John's newspaper and are very much obliged to the agents of the Express packet for the praise he so very liberally bestows upon us - it is not unknown to us how secretly they dispatched the Express to St. John's and the intended combination about to be entered into to reduce the price of seals we trust the understrapping in a certain Mercantile Establishment will find other employment than traducing us and shewing how finely they can write a newspaper of quality

Otherwise they shall have what
 will not be agreeable from

the Carbonear Men



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